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Are They Truly Divine? A Grounded Theory of the Influences of Black Greek-Lettered Organizations on the Persistence of African Americans at Predominantly White Institutions

Donald Mitchell, Jr., *University of Minnesota - Twin Cities*

ARE THEY TRULY DIVINE?

A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE INFLUENCES OF BLACK GREEK-LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS ON THE PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my Black brothers

who started this journey

and did not finish

because of struggles,

sacrifices, or being called home…

I stand on your shoulders and…

I share this moment with you.

Abstract

This study explored the influences of Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). To investigate the relationships, emphasis was placed on social capital that may be gained through BGLO involvement. Nan Lin's (1999) network theory of social capital was used as the theoretical framework for the study. The theory highlights the idea that social capital is embedded in resources gained though social networks.

Grounded theory – a qualitative research approach – was used in the study. Focus groups were conducted with four BGLOs, and a series of twenty-four one-on-one interviews were conducted with eight interview participants at a PWI in the Northeast. The study revealed that (1) relationships/connections, (2) increased social lives, (3) gaining community and administrative experiences, (4) academic monitoring, and (5) leadership development, which were all framed as "returns," influenced persistence in different ways. Additionally, women found gender to be important in establishing social networks in BGLOs, whereas men de-emphasized the role of gender in their experiences. The study closes with discussion of the findings and implications for research and practice.

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Chapter I - Introduction

The participation and graduation rates of African Americans in U.S. higher education are major concerns for African American communities, as well as those interested in the economic and social well-being of the United States, as higher education leads to achieving higher incomes, status advancement, and upward social mobility (Baker, 2005). In 2007, 33% of African Americans ages 18 to 24 were enrolled in colleges and universities as compared to 43% of Whites (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Additionally, in the 2007-08 academic year, African Americans received approximately 10% of all bachelor's degrees (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) while constituting approximately 14% of United States citizens in 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, recent degree completion statistics indicated that 42% of all African American students who enrolled in a four-year college as first-time students in the 2000-01 academic school year had completed a bachelor's degree by 2007 as compared to 60% of White students (Planty et al., 2009).

One reason for this achievement gap between the persistence towards degree completion of White and African American students is the common unwelcoming experience many African Americans face at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Cuyjet, 2006; Davis et al., 2004; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Love, 2008; Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting, 2005). For decades, research has documented that PWIs are not fully meeting the needs of their African American students as students have reported social isolation and discrimination (i.e. Allen, 1992; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Britts, 1975; Davis et al., 2004; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984;

Love, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sedlacek. 1987). Additionally, African American students have reported lower grade point averages (GPAs), persistence rates, and graduation rates than their White counterparts at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Feagin et al., 1996; Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003; Cuyjet, 2006; Planty et al., 2007; Ramani et al., 2007; Rovai et al., 2005; Wilson, 2007).

The achievement gap between African American students and White students is problematic because students who attend college garner an array of financial and social benefits, such as increased incomes and a greater life expectancy (Baum & Ma, 2007). Additionally, many of today's jobs require some form of postsecondary education. Ultimately, the lower persistence and graduation rates of African Americans lead to higher unemployment rates, lower incomes (Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003), and an increased dependence on governmental support for the population (Ungerleider, 2000). Furthermore, a society benefits from having an educated citizenry as citizens are less likely to depend on governmental support and offer more governmental tax revenues as their yearly earnings increase (Baum & Ma, 2007). Consequentially, low persistence and graduation rates are not just problematic for African Americans; the lower rates could potentially impede economic growth and stability of the United States (Ungerleider, 2000).

Need for Research

While the higher education achievement gap between African American students and White students and the negative experiences of African Americans at PWIs have been well documented, research on best practices to retain and graduate African American students at PWIs is needed. One particular area where research is emerging is

on Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) as recent studies have documented the effects of these organizations on African American students' experiences at PWIs (Harper, 2008a, 2008b; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998), particularly in the areas of social support (Harper, 2000; McClure, 2006; Ross, 2000) and leadership development (Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). In this study, I examined students' social experiences in BGLOs to better understand whether and how those experiences affect persistence. I defined persistence similar to Reason (2009) – a student's progress toward goal attainment. In this case, I defined graduation[1] as a student's goal.

Purpose of Study

The influences of fraternities and sororities on persistence have not been made clear (Reason, 2009). However, BGLOs have the potential to serve as an important form of support and social networking for African American students (Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995). Scholars have asserted affiliation in BGLOs increases classroom engagement, extra-curricular participation, and leadership development (Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). As a result, African American students become more involved in college via their affiliation in BGLOs and, therefore, may be more likely to graduate given the positive correlation of college involvement with persistence and graduation (Davis, 1991; Fisher, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Mallinckrodt, 1988; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Padilla, Trevino, &

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1. While I defined persistence as a student's goal to graduate, Reason (2009) posits that persistence is a student's individual goal, and a student may successfully persist with or without graduating. While I agree, prior to beginning the study I made it clear to the participants how I was defining persistence. Based on my findings I am confident the participants' definitions of persistence included his or her goal to graduate.

Gonzalez, 1997; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Researchers have also documented that social capital could be presumed to be gained through the social networks established in minority student organizations and BGLOs (Harper, 2008a; McClure, 2006) and social capital appears to be positively linked to academic achievement (Dika & Singh, 2002).

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to explore the possible relationships between BGLOs and the persistence of African Americans at PWIs. To investigate these possible relationships, I placed emphasis on the social capital that may be gained through the social networks established in BGLOs. Ultimately, I investigated how social capital gained through BGLO involvement mediates the persistence of African Americans at PWIs.

Research Questions

To investigate the effects of BGLOs on the persistence of African Americans at PWIs the following research questions shaped this study:

1) In what ways, if any, is social capital gained through African American students' participation in BGLOs?

2) In what ways, if any, does social capital influence the persistence of African American students at PWIs?

3) In what ways, if any, does gender influence the ways in which social capital is gained via the social networks of BGLOs?

4) In what ways, if any, does gender influence how social capital influences the persistence of African American students at PWIs?

Research Approach

  To conduct this study, I used a qualitative methods approach known as grounded theory. Grounded theory is a methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 to build theory from collected data. Additionally, grounded theory allows the theory to come from the research as participants describe their engagement with, and interpretation of, a given lived experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data were collected through a series of interviews and focus groups with the participants. The research questions sought to understand how African American students involved in BGLOs at PWIs conceptualized the ways in which social networks within BGLOs influence their persistence at PWIs. Ultimately, since I am interested in a particular group of students, their specific experiences, and data rich information, I decided to use interviews, focus groups, and a grounded theory approach.

Chapter II – Literature Review

This review of literature concentrates on a possible relationship between Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) and the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The first section highlights African American college experiences at PWIs. Within this section of the literature review, I focus primarily on three significant studies as they articulate the experiences of African Americans at PWIs over the past three decades. The second section highlights on the importance of student engagement and African American student engagement on grades and persistence. The third section discusses BGLOs, highlighting the histories of BGLOs and the effects of BGLOs on African American college students. Finally, the fourth section explores the sociological concept of social capital and considers empirical research that illustrates how social capital affects academic outcomes and, as related to this study, how social capital may be gained by African American students via their involvement in BGLOs. Ultimately, this literature review outlines how social capital may be gained through BGLO involvement and in what ways, if any, social capital influences the persistence of African Americans at PWIs.

African American Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

The environments of PWIs have oftentimes affected African American students' experiences in negative ways if African American students' academic and social needs are left unmet (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 2006; Feagin et al., 1996; Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003; Planty et al., 2007; Ramani et al., 2007; Rovai et al., 2005; Wilson, 2007). For example, Allen and Hannif (1991) stated African American students have less satisfactory relationships with faculty and report more dissatisfaction and alienation at

PWIs. Additionally, African American students sometimes feel left out of curricula, excluded from campus activities, and like they have inadequate social lives on campus (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; McClure, 2006; Wilson, 2007). Moreover, racial microaggressions, which are "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 60) also permeate predominantly White campuses and affect students' feelings of belonging. In contrast, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) African American students oftentimes feel they are satisfied, engaged, and well-adjusted (Allen & Hannif, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, 2009; Williams & Ashley, 2007).

In the 1980s, *Blacks in College* was published by Jacqueline Fleming (1984). In the study, which is a foundational empirical inquiry of African American experiences in college, Fleming investigated the effects of attending HBCUs or PWIs on African American students' college experiences. The study consisted of 3,000 African American students and 500 White students at 15 colleges and universities (8 PWIs and 7 HBCUs) in four geographical locations (Texas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Ohio). Fleming used a cross-sectional design to measure adjustment to academic life, academic performance, vocational interests, educational and vocational aspirations, sex-role orientation, social adjustment, self-concept, psychophysical stress, personality, and motivation. She analyzed the results using ANOVA and then ANCOVA to account for background differences (i.e. socio-economic status, institutional type, classification, scholastic aptitude scores). Limitations in the study included the cross-sectional design and geographical limitations. Specifically, the cross-sectional design used different subjects at

different points (i.e. freshman year, senior year) in college to represent a longitudinal design; therefore, two groups of students, rather than one, were used to represent changes in students over time. Additionally, the findings within the geographical locations may not have been generalizable to the total population of all African American students in colleges across the nation.

In her findings, Fleming noted that there were greater gains in intellectual development for African Americans at HBCUs than at PWIs. She wrote, "Students in White schools become increasingly dissatisfied with the formal and institutional aspects of the college years and point to lack of institutional support, negative interactions with instructors, and feelings of abandonment" (p. 167). For example, in a comparison between Clark College (now Clark-Atlanta University, an HBCU) and "Traditional University" (a PWI), African American students at Clark College were more academically-oriented and displayed better academic performances. In comparison, Fleming noted that the aspirations and desires for future education trended upward for Blacks at PWIs. She also found that because of Black students' psychological struggles at PWIs they gained life skills such as coping, survival skills, self-assertiveness, and leadership skills; however, these skills were detrimental to intellectual functioning. These results were confirmed through repeated analyses in the three other geographical locations used in the study. Fleming also reported gendered findings. She found that while the experiences of African American students at White colleges were grim, the experiences of African American males were the most grim. She discussed how African American men at White colleges had "diminishing feelings of intellectual ability, declining social adjustment, and losses in perceived energy level suggestive of emotional

strain" (p. 169) and turned their attention to extracurricular activities for tension relief. Most African American females experienced academic stress, institutional abandonment, and aroused feelings of failure by their senior years. However, Black women were "able to redirect their energies from frustrated social lives into academics" (p. 169). Furthermore, in a comparison of African American students and White students at PWIs, White students overall showed substantially greater gains in all aspects, especially in the intellectual domain. As such, Fleming noted, the "college gains shown by White students in White schools look much like those shown by black students in black schools" (p. 186).

In her conclusion Fleming stated that for African American students, "black colleges produce greater gains in the cognitive domain" (p. 187). Fleming's results were consistent with many other studies at the time (i.e. Davis & Borders-Patterson, 1973; Epps, 1975; Willie & McCord, 1972, as cited in Fleming, 1984). Ultimately, Fleming's research indicated there were differences between the campus environments of PWIs and HBCUs for African American students and those differences had effects on the academic achievement and engagement of African American students.

In the 1990s, through *The Agony of Education,* scholars and practitioners gained more insight on the negative experiences faced by African Americans at PWIs. Feagin et al. (1996) explored the racial barriers experienced by African American students at PWIs and how those experiences made academic persistence difficult for the students. Their qualitative study consisted of focus group interviews with thirty-six randomly selected African American juniors and seniors at a PWI. The study also included interviews with

forty-one African American parents of a nearby metropolitan area where parents often sent their children to the local PWI.

In their findings, Feagin et al. (1996) discussed the harsh realities of being an African American college student at a PWI. Parents were asked to articulate their perceptions of State University (SU) and SU's reputation in the African American community. One parent noted that his/her child may graduate from the local PWI academically prepared; however, he/she did not expect that the social experiences during college would be as beneficial. The parent stated:

> Very often, blacks will feel that [at] State University…they can get a good academic background. However, for blacks, they feel that there's a lot more negative kinds of feelings, emotions, considerations going on there. In fact, even with their black programs here that they have – the student programs – there's not enough knowledge of the cultural differences, not enough allowances for expressing the cultural differences. So the students – while they may be academically sound, you're talking about a total person, and especially in the undergrad level – are not able to develop into a full-fledged whole person who feels good about himself or herself. (p. 30)

Another parent stated that while rigorous academic programs are important, African American students who attend the local PWI need social support. The parent stated:

> I think if I was going to encourage someone to go there – because, for instance, they want to go to the school of [names a SU program] because it's one of the best in the country…it would have to be someone who is very highly motivated. And…there has to be some kind of support system there for them" (p. 46).

Students also felt that support services were important in their academic matriculation at PWIs. Lastly, many students felt there were no noticeable efforts to retain African American students at the local PWI. One student stated, "If they do anything, it's encourage you to leave" (p. 143).

In their conclusion, Feagin et al. stated, "Historically, the commitments of many White university officials to recruitment and retention programs for students of color

have been reluctant or modest" (p. 154). They added that recruitment and retention efforts of African Americans have to be shaped to suit African Americans and diverge from White thinking. Feagin et al. characterized White thinking as policies and practices that are associated with the dominant cultural practices of White people. They called for policies, practices, and programs that foster multicultural experiences rather than a one-way assimilation. Feagin et al.'s research indicated that while many PWIs may offer rigorous academic programs, the common hostile environments and negative experiences make it difficult for African American students to persist to graduation.

In 2000, Solórzano and his colleagues also analyzed the experiences of African American students through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework and the concept of racial microagressions. Their research reinforced previous research articulating that the negative experiences faced by African Americans at PWIs transcend decades and continue to exist. Solórzano et al. examined the effects of racial microagressions on the college racial climate for African American students at PWIs. The authors conducted ten focus group sessions, consisting of thirty-four participants, to shape the grounded theory study. The authors grounded their work in Critical Race Theory stating, "CRT offers insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that guide our efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (p. 63). Ultimately, they used CRT to place race and racism at the forefront of their study focusing on African Americans. They added that using CRT represented a paradigm shift in the literature as they challenged traditional methods, texts, and discourses used to explore studies concerning race, and included in their analysis how "race and racism, in their micro-level

forms, affect the structures, processes, and discourses of the collegiate environment" (p. 63). Lastly, they examined the linkages between racial stereotypes, cumulative racial microagressions, campus racial climates, and academic outcomes.

In their findings, Solórzano et al. reported that students described very tense racial climates inside and outside of their classrooms and in social spaces. For example, a female student described her experience as being "invisible," and stated, "I think that when the professors see that there's fewer of you, they're less likely to address your concerns" (p. 65). The students also felt that faculty had low expectations for them. A student said:

> I was doing really well in the class, like math is one of my strong suits….We took a first quiz…and I got like a 95…he [the professor] was like, "Come into my office. We need to talk," and I was like, "Okay." I just really knew I was going to be [told], "great job," but he [said], "We think you've cheated…We just don't know, so we think we're gonna make you [take the exam] again."…And [then] I took it with just the GSI [graduate student instructor] in the room, and just myself, and I got a 98 on the exam. (p. 66)

Outside of the classroom, the students felt they were not comfortable and there were racial tensions. A student stated:

> I decided to go see a counselor because I wanted to make sure I was on the right track…. [The counselor] was very discouraging…not supportive at all. She finally said, "Well, I don't think that you should take all of those classes. You're not gonna be able to do that."…I personally thought [she discouraged me] because I was African American. (p. 68)

In the authors' conclusion, they noted, "The experiences of these students demonstrates [*sic*] that even at high levels of accomplishment (i.e., at elite undergraduate universities), where educational conditions might on the surface appear to be equal, inequality and discrimination still exist – albeit in more subtle and hidden forms" (p. 71).

Decades of research have documented the difficulties of African Americans, even high-achievers, studying at PWIs. In response, institutional practices must be adopted to engage African American students at those institutions. Engagement plays an essential part in reducing the persistence achievement gap between African American and White students. For example, Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) noted, "Despite incidents of racial and cultural insensitivity at many predominantly White institutions, Black students are surviving socially and are involved within multicultural and traditional campus organizations" (p. 36). They articulate the importance American students being engaged at PWIs.

African American Student Engagement

Scholars have written about student departure, student persistence, and student engagement for several decades (i.e. Astin, 1985, 1993; Bean, 1980, 1985; Berger & Milem, 1999; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that "the level of student involvement and integration in any of the components of an institution's academic and social systems can be a critical factor in students' persistence decisions" (p. 426). Indeed, Tinto (1975) theorized that academic and social integration, defined as "the extent to which individuals share the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides [*sic*] by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in subgroups of it" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54), predispose students to remain in college. In his interactionalist theory of student departure, Tinto explained that students enter college with a variety of pre-entry attributes (i.e. family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling). They also enter with varying levels of

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commitments to the institution and the goal to graduate. Next, students' academic systems (i.e. grades, faculty interactions) and social systems (i.e. involvement in extracurricular activities, peer interactions) influence their social and academic integration. Based on the degree of integration, students' goals and commitments shift and they either persist or decide to drop out of college. Similarly, Astin (1985, 1993) has suggested that student involvement is integral to persistence. In Astin's I-E-O model and theory of involvement he explained that college outcomes are viewed as a function of three distinct elements: inputs, environment, and outputs. Inputs are demographic characteristics (i.e. family background, academic and social experiences students bring to college); the environment deals with the people, programs, policies, cultures, and experiences that students encounter in college; and, the outcomes are the students' characteristics, knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors that exist after college. Additionally, he suggested there are five postulates to involvement: 1) involvement requires the investment of psychological and physical energy; 2) involvement is a continuous concept; 3) involvement is quantitative and qualitative; 4) the amount of learning development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement; and, 5) the educational effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to its capacity to induce student involvement (1993, p. 135-6).

Tinto's and Astin's theories have been both influential and important in student attrition, involvement, and persistence conversations as many of their claims are consistent with the experiences of many college students. However, researchers have argued there are limitations to the aforementioned theories, models, and recommendations. Fisher (2007) noted, "These models of student attrition and

involvement, however, are based primarily on the experiences of 'typical' college student who is likely White and middle to upper class" (p. 130). To address this limitation in knowledge about student engagement, several scholars have focused on minority and, more specifically, African American student engagement (Davis, 1991; Fisher, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003; Hausmann et al., 2007; Mallinckrodt, 1988; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Padilla, Trevino, & Gonzalez, 1997; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Throughout this examination, I have chosen to make comparisons between African American students and White students. While this dichotomous comparison can be considered a limitation of my review, I have chosen this approach because many studies make similar comparisons. Additionally, White students make up the largest percentage of college students overall, and students studying at PWIs.

Researchers have indicated that African American students actively search for out-of-classroom experiences (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) and gain just as much, if not more, than White students involved in similar activities (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). More specifically, Sutton and Kimbrough argued how important social integration through extracurricular involvement is for African Americans attending PWIs. Additionally, out-of-classroom experiences have positive effects on African American students' learning and intrapersonal development (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996). Furthermore, in a comparison of African American and White students, Mallinckrodt (1988) found that effective methods for retaining each student group differed. He found that for White students, family support was more important for retention; however, for African American students, campus support was more important for increased retention. Similarly, Fisher (2007) found that formal on-campus ties had significant positive effects

on GPA and college satisfaction for African American students. Additionally, she found that increased formal on-campus ties and informal on-campus ties significantly reduced college departure for African American students. Involvement also increases the sense of belonging to an institution. Hausmann et al. (2007) found that African American students (and White students) who reported more peer-group interactions and peer support reported a greater sense of belonging. More specifically, research shows it is within minority student organizations where African American students actively search to get involved (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

Nagasawa and Wong (1999) have suggested minority social networks are essential for minority students at PWIs. The networks provide students support academically and socially, and integrate them into the campus community. Reason (2009) suggested that subcultures were important for underrepresented groups as they help students negotiate the differences between their cultures and dominant cultures and potentially hostile environments. Support for this idea can be seen in work by Guiffrida (2003) who found that African American student organizations were safe spaces for students to learn about and connect with their cultures. With regards to academics, David (1991) found that participation in minority student organizations had a significant positive correlation on GPA and campus satisfaction for African Americans at PWIs. Additionally, others have emphasized the relationship of minority students – or specifically African American students – being engaged through formal social integration (i.e. organizational participation) and the positive effects on GPA and persistence (i.e. Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995). However, Guiffrida (2004) suggests that while participation in African American student organizations is helpful for students, over-

involvement is harmful to academic achievement. Writing about the experiences of African Americans at PWIs and how to improve those experiences, Davis (1991) stated:

> Too often, our best and brightest students are denied educational experiences that provides [*sic*] the academic and social successes that build positive self-images for the best education possible….If we are to improve the situation of Black students in U.S. higher education – whether they attend Black colleges and universities or White ones – we must focus our attention on social-support systems that buffer and/or solve academic difficulties and increase satisfaction with campus life. (p. 157)

In tune with Davis, Fisher (2007) has called for future research to focus on whether specific types of activities matter more for students in improving outcomes. One specific activity, Black Greek-lettered organization involvement, has been an area where several scholars (i.e. Harper, 2008a, 2008b; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998) have initiated research or called for additional research.

Black Greek-lettered Organizations (BGLOs)

Myriad scholars have researched the impact of Greek-lettered organizations (GLOs) on students generally (i.e. Kuh, Pascarella, & Wechsler, 1996; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 1996; Pascarella et al., 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2000) and, in some cases, the negative effects of GLOs (i.e. Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1978; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1986). However, research on the impact of GLOs on academic outcomes is limited. Kuh et al. (1996) wrote, "Because many fraternities are indifferent to academic values and seem to short-change the education of many members, we need a careful examination of the educational benefits that fraternities provide" (p. A68). While the research on GLOs and academic outcomes is narrow, a few studies are often cited.

Pascarella et al. (1996) found that GLOs had a negative effect on some areas of cognitive development; however, the authors mentioned there was a slightly positive effect of GLO involvement on the cognitive development of men of color. Additionally, Pascarella et al. (1999) found that GLOs had negative effects on cognitive development during a student's first year; however, in a review of Pascarella et al.'s study, Harper et al. (2005) pointed out that most BGLOs do not allow students to join during their first year. As such, their experiences may be different than those students in GLOs. Ultimately, while the research on GLOs and academic outcomes is limited, research on the direct relationship between BGLOs and academic outcomes is nearly non-existent (Harper et al., 2005) as research on GLOs has overlooked the differences between predominantly White GLOs and BGLOs (McClure, 2006). Consequently, there is a need for further research on BGLOs (Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995; 2003; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; McClure, 2006). The following section is a review and critical analysis of the existing research on BGLOs. While this section is not intended to thoroughly highlight the historical and cultural aspects of BGLOs, it is important to give a brief historical overview of BGLOs given the importance of these organizations in this paper before moving to the existing empirical research on BGLOs.

On December 5, 1776 Phi Beta Kappa was established as the first Greek-lettered organization. Today there are over 200 of these social organizations across the United States. Many assume fraternities and sororities are all very similar, in reality they differ in membership and mission. For example, some of the organizations have been classified by race, ethnicity, and field of study. While many college fraternities and sororities

flourished between 1776 and 1905, they often excluded students based on race and ethnicity. Ultimately, BGLOs emerged (Torbenson, 2005).

The first recognized BGLO established was Sigma Pi Phi. Henry M. Minton sought to create a fraternal organization for African American men; organizations he saw benefiting White men. In 1904, Minton met with Dr. E. C. Howard, Dr. A. B. Jackson and Dr. R. J. Warrick to discuss the birth of the fraternity. The organization was established as a graduate fraternity and was for the African American elite as five of the six founders were physicians and the sixth was a dentist (Kimbrough, 2003). Later throughout the 20th century, nine other college BGLOs were founded.

The founders of the first eight collegiate BGLOs were a little more than a generation removed from slaves (the ninth collegiate BGLO was founded during the Civil Rights era). At four colleges (Cornell University, Howard University, Indiana University at Bloomington, and Butler University), students founded these organizations amidst a recent *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision upholding "separate but equal" and Jim Crow segregation. As such, they became advocates for their race and realized that the collective efforts within their organizations were powerful and important. They also found it important to include service as a core element in their organizations – a difference that distinguished BGLOs from traditional or White GLOs (Dickinson, 2005).

Today these nine college BGLOs are referred to as the *Divine Nine* (Ross, 2001) and service continues to be a core element of their existence (Torbenson, 2005). These nine BGLOs are housed under an umbrella organization called the National Pan-Hellenic Council. The National Pan-Hellenic Council is a coalition of the nine college BGLOs and currently represents approximately 1.5 million members of the organizations worldwide

(National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2009). The National Pan-Hellenic Council was organized on May 10, 1930 on the campus of Howard University, a historically Black university located in Washington, D.C. The member organizations of the National Pan-Hellenic Council are: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2009; Ross, 2000). The following is a brief introduction to each of the BGLOs.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. was founded on December 4, 1906 on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. is recognized as the first African American college BGLO and was the first to be established on a predominantly White campus. Because the six African American students who started their education in 1904-05 did not return the following year, Henry Arthur Callis found it important to start Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity to deal with the racially hostile environments on campus. The fraternity's motto is *First of All, Servants of All, We Shall Transcend All* and the colors of the fraternity are black and old gold. Famous members include Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. and Cornell West (Alpha Phi Alpha, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. was founded January 15, 1908 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. Alpha Kappa Alpha was the first African American sorority and first BGLO established on a historically Black college campus. The organization was established to recognize the importance of being college-trained African American women, one generation removed from slavery. The sorority's motto is

By Culture and By Merit and the colors of the sorority are salmon pink and apple green. Famous members include Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks (Alpha Kappa Alpha, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. was founded January 5, 1911 on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. The organization was founded by ten men to deal with the hostile racial environments of the Indiana University campus and the broader community, the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan. However, the organization prides itself for never limiting membership based on race, origin or creed. The fraternity's motto is *Achievement in Every Field of Human Endeavor* and the colors of the fraternity are crimson and crème. Famous members include Arthur Ashe and Rev. Ralph Abernathy (Kappa Alpha Psi, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc was founded November 17, 1911 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. became the first African American fraternity to be founded on a historically Black campus. The fraternity's motto is *Friendship is Essential to the Soul* and the colors are royal purple and gold. Famous members include Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. and William "Bill" Cosby (Omega Psi Phi, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was founded January 13, 1913 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. The sorority was organized to recognize academic excellence and provide assistance to African American women. The sorority's motto is *Intelligence in the Torch of Wisdom* and the colors are crimson and crème. Famous members include Shirley Chisholm and Aretha Franklin (Delta Sigma Theta, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc was founded January 9, 1914 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc was founded to establish a fraternity that exuded brotherhood, scholarship and service. The fraternity's motto is *Culture for Service and Service for Humanity* and the colors are pure white and royal blue. Famous members include George Washington Carver and Emmitt Smith (Phi Beta Sigma, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. was founded January 16, 1920 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. Zeta Phi Beta was founded to combat sorority elitism in the midst of racial hostility and during an economic recession. The sorority's motto is *Scholarship, Sisterly Love, Service, Finer Womanhood* and the colors are pure white and royal blue. Famous members include Zora Neale Hurston and Dionne Warrick (Ross, 2000; Zeta Phi Beta, 2009).

Sigma Gamma Rho was founded November 12, 1922 on the campus of Butler University in Indianapolis, IN. Within the state of Indiana, home of the Ku Klux Klan and hostile racial environments, Sigma Gamma Rho was founded and became the first African American sorority founded on a predominantly White campus. The sorority's motto is *Greater Service, Greater Progress* and the colors are royal blue and antique gold. A famous member is actress Hattie McDaniel from *Gone With the Wind* (Ross, 2000; Sigma Gamma Rho, 2009).

Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. was founded September 19, 1963 on the campus of Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD. The fraternity was founded in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and established to uphold the principles of scholarship, leadership, citizenship, fidelity and brotherhood amongst men. The fraternity's motto is

Building a Tradition, Not Resting Upon One! The colors are charcoal brown and gilded gold. A famous member is former NBA star Elvin Hayes (Iota Phi Theta, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Today these nine BGLOs have undergraduate chapters on campuses of PWIs within the United States. Additionally, due to their historic principles and social structures, these organizations continue to offer social support for African American students studying at PWIs, oftentimes enhancing the students' educational experiences (Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005). The following studies highlight the effects of BGLOs on African Americans while in college.

Kimbrough (1995) examined students' college engagement and leadership skills by comparing the self-assessments of African American students in BGLOs to those of non-Greek students. He hypothesized that similarities would exist in the self-assessment of leadership skills between the two groups; BGLO members would hold more positions in organizations (i.e. residential advisors, student government, BGLO offices) than non-Greek students; and, BGLO students and non-Greek students would both find value in BGLOs. The sample consisted of sixty-one African American students attending a PWI in the Midwest. The author developed an original two-part questionnaire to complete the study. The first part of the questionnaire elicited nonparametric responses and the author used MANOVA to test the significant differences of the second part of the questionnaire. Limitations of the study were a small sample size, a significant amount of non-Greek students were first-year students, and the disproportionately female composition of the non-Greek group (80%). These were limitations because a small sample size reduces the generalizability of a study; since the non-Greek students were first-year students and the

BGLO students were upperclassmen, one would expect the BGLO students to be more involved; and, the overrepresentation of females added an unintentional gendered effect.

In the analysis, Kimbrough reported that 74.1% of the students involved in BGLOs participated in two or more student organizations (including involvement in a BGLO) and held at least one leadership position as compared to 44.2% of the non-Greek students. Additionally, 54.8% of the non-Greek students believed membership in a BGLO would improve their leadership skills and 82% had considered joining a BGLO. Sixty-three percent of students involved in BGLOs believed they developed leadership skills as a result of fraternity or sorority involvement.

In the discussion, Kimbrough stated that his four hypotheses were confirmed and concluded that BGLOs appear to be a source of leadership development opportunities for students. He then called for research exploring gender differences that may be salient among students involved in BGLOs. Lastly, he called for further exploration about the perceptions of leadership and BGLOs held by African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Following his initial work, Kimbrough collaborated with Hutcheson to further explore the effects of BGLO involvement on college student engagement. Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) investigated the influence of BGLO involvement on African American students' involvement in campus activities and their leadership development skills. The authors targeted a sample of 1,400 African American students in seven Southeastern states. Their target sample consisted of fifty African American students involved in BGLOs and fifty non-Greek students at one predominantly White institution and one public historically Black institution in each of the seven states – a total of 1,400

students. The authors administered three surveys and yielded a response rate of 989 (82%), of which 405 (41%) were completed and 389 (96%) of the returned surveys could be used. The surveys administered were: 1) the *Student Involvement and Leadership Scale (SILS)* which assessed levels of involvement and students' perceptions of their leadership ability relative to peers, 2) the *Competing Values Managerial Skills Instrument (CVMSI)* which assesses leadership potential, and 3) the *Leadership Assessment Scale (LAS)* assessed the students' perceptions of the ability of different student organizations and student leadership positions to offer opportunities to develop leadership skills. The authors analyzed the data using chi-square analyses and MANOVA. Limitations of the study were that the authors did not report holding institutional type and institutional size constant, the survey information was self-reported which potentially could skew the data, and the surveys were disseminated in different ways. These are limitations because institutional size and type effects student involvement due to the number of organizations available and the student population; self-reported information relies on honesty and accuracy of the participant completing the survey; and, inconsistent dissemination of surveys could alter results.

During the analysis, the authors found strong evidence that even after controlling for high school involvement, a higher percentage of students involved in BGLOs were in student government, academic honor societies, residential hall assistant groups, residential hall governments, Black student groups, and student ambassador groups. Additionally, students involved in BGLOs held more elected leadership positions than non-Greeks at a significant level. Lastly, students involved in BGLOs self-reported higher leadership potential, as indicated by the CVMSI. The authors suggested that future

research is needed on the impact BGLOs have on student involvement and leadership development and that future research should also consider possible gender differences.

While the previous research highlights how BGLOs influence African Americans' educational experiences through leadership development and increased collegiate involvement, it does not examine the effects of BGLOs on persistence towards graduation. The only research that explicitly examined the relationships between BGLOs and academic outcomes was conducted by Shaun Harper. According to Harper (2000), after examining the academic standings reports for Greek-lettered organizations (GLOs) from twenty-four colleges and universities with enrollments ranging from 2,300 to 44,000, nearly 92% of the BGLO chapters had lower GPA averages than the overall GPA average of all students involved in GLOs at each institution in the study. Harper explained that the results of his investigation could be attributed to academic distractions which include: excessive programming and chapter commitments, hazing, step shows, involvement in other organizations, lack of resources, and poor advising. However, his study did not report controlling for other variables that may hinder African American students' GPAs at PWIs, such as the college environment, parental income, high school GPA, and high school achievement test scores.

Later, Harper (2008) investigated the effects of BGLO membership on classroom engagement in predominantly White classrooms. The study consisted of 131 participants with whom Harper conducted interviews and focus groups at a large, public research university in the Midwest. Harper found that the factors that influenced classroom engagement positively were: underrepresentation (small number of African Americans in the classroom), voluntary race representation (speaking for African Americans),

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collective responsibility (a sense of responsibility to represent African Americans and their fraternity or sorority), and teaching styles (engaging and interactive pedagogy). The factors that negatively affected participation were: forced representation (questions posed to students about the "African American" experience as if the student could speak for the entire race) and teaching styles (pedagogy that fails to engage students). While the existing empirical research on BGLOs is positive, the media oftentimes reports the negative aspects of BGLOs, particularly focusing on hazing.

Parks and Brown (2005) stated, "Despite their long history of civic involvement, community service, and philanthropy, what most people know about black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) is limited to two areas: stepping and pledging, particularly those mentally and physically violent aspects of the latter known as hazing" (p. 437). Pledging is deeply rooted in the history of BGLOs and has both African and European roots. As early as the 1910s pledge clubs emerged for BGLOs. Pledges were required to participate in activities such as shaving their heads, eating the same meals, dressing alike, and walking in lines; however, the objectives and goals of the processes differed by organization, chapter, location, and as time progressed (Parks & Brown, 2005).

While pledging and hazing have been opposed since the early years of BGLOs, they were not officially banned by the nine college BGLOs until 1990 after Joel Harris, a pledge of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., was killed on the campus of Morehouse College in October 1989. However, since the official ban, hazing has actually increased amongst BGLO chapters (Parks & Brown, 2005). Some of the most recent hazing incidents receiving national exposure included Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. In January 2010, six members of Sigma Gamma Rho

Sorority, Inc. were arrested for hazing allegations on the campus of Rutgers University. They were each released on a $1,500 bond (Cable News Network, 2010). Earlier, in October 2009, a Prairie View A & M University student by the name of Donnie Wade, II died while performing calisthenics; he was pledging to become a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. His parents filed a 97 million dollar lawsuit against the fraternity, Prairie View A & M University, and the members who were involved in the incident (News One, 2010). Eventually, Prairie View A & M was cleared and the parents of Donnie settled with Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. While BGLOs have individually and collectively distanced themselves from pledging and hazing, individual members, pledges, and some nonmembers continue the practice. Some members continue to haze because it was done to them; others do it for belonging, brotherhood, sisterhood, self-esteem or tradition. Additionally, some members argue it creates an institutional continuity amongst members nationwide as they share pledge stories (Parks & Brown, 2005).

In sum, the effects of BGLOs on student experiences are mixed. While hazing appears to be a negative aspect of joining some BGLO chapters, there have also been many documented benefits such as leadership development and classroom engagement. Ultimately, there is a need to increase scholarship on BGLOs generally and, more specifically, BGLOs and their influence on persistence towards graduation (Harper et al., 2005). In Harper's (2008) analysis of existing research in this area, he observed that most studies have focused on topics other than academics and noted, "Consequently, those who attempt to justify the continued existence of undergraduate BGLO chapters must rely on anecdotal accounts and literature that focuses primarily on non-academic

outcomes and experiences" (p. 95). He also noted that student affairs literature has depended on the existing BGLO or GLO research, which is quite limited in its scope. Given the documented benefits of BGLOs on student engagement, future research should examine how the social aspects of being involved in BGLOs influence persistence. McClure (2006) has suggested, "As it relates specifically to connecting members to the university, the fraternity can clearly be considered a mechanism of social integration" (p. 1039). Similarly, I would add that students involved in BGLOs at PWIs may gain what sociologists have coined "social capital" as a result of their involvement. Ultimately, I argue social capital may be gained through the social networks established in BGLOs.

Social Capital

While sociologists and philosophers (i.e., Hanifan, Dewey, and Bellamy) have generally discussed the ideas and concepts of social capital since the early 20th century (Dika & Singh, 2002; Farr, 2004), the term social capital was not coined and popularized until the late 1980s by American sociologist James Coleman and French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Dika & Singh, 2002; Farr, 2004; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; Harper, 2008a; Lin, 1999b, 2000; Portes, 2000). The theory stems from Karl Marx's concepts of capitalism and socialism; subsequently, the term social capital was derived (Lin, 1999b) and is now recognized as a fundamental concept in sociology and political science (Borgatti, Jones, & Everett, 1998).

Social capital can be generally defined as "networks, norms and trust" (Farr, 2004, p. 8). Another general definition is an "investment and use of embedded resources in social relations for expected returns" (Lin, 2000, p. 786). Similarly, Nayaran (1999) has defined it as "the norms and social relations embedded in the social structures of

society that enable people to co-ordinate action and achieve desired goals" (p. 6). Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1999) noted, "social capital represents resources that reside in function-specific social relationships in which individuals are embedded" (p. 1344). Portes (2000) has added social capital is "1) a source of social control, 2) a source of family-mediated benefits, and 3) a source of resources mediated by nonfamily networks" (p. 2).

Clearly, social capital is defined in a myriad of contextual and specific ways. For example, Larsen et al. (2004), Narayan (1999), and Woolcock and Narayan (2000) have suggested there are two forms of social capital referred to as "bonding" social capital and "bridging" social capital. "Bonding" social capital refers to social capital within certain groups (Larsen et al., 2004; Narayan, 1999) that is beneficial to members (Narayan, 1999) and the community (Larsen et al, 2004). "Bridging" social capital, also called "cross-cutting ties" (Narayan, 1999; Paxton, 1999), occurs when one group of members connect with another group of members (Larsen et al., 2004). Lastly, another specific concept of social capital explains network closure or strong ties (Coleman, 1988; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; James, 2000) and structural holes or weak ties (Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; James, 2000). Strong ties are close bonds with individuals of similar backgrounds filled with trust and cooperation; weak ties are acquaintance relationships or relationships with fewer emotional connections (Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; James, 2000).

Given that social capital has been defined in a diversity of ways, obtaining a single measure of social capital may not be plausible (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) and the wide-range usage of the term has led to a great deal of confusion (Portes, 2000).

While this confusion may exist, there are two salient ways social capital is characterized within sociology – benefits gained by a community and benefits gained by an individual (Borgatti et al., 1998; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; Lin, 2000; Portes, 1998, 2000).

James Coleman popularized social capital at the macro or group level (Coleman, 1988; Farr, 2004; Harper, 2008a; Lin, 2000; Portes, 1998, 2000). Coleman (1988) noted:

> Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common; they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structures. (p. 98)

Ultimately, Coleman emphasized that social capital is fostered through social structures, or communities, for the benefit of that community. His views are apparent in the way many scholars have formulated their own definition of social capital. For example, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) wrote that social capital is "the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively" (p. 226) and emphasizes a collective or communal benefit. Larsen et al. (2004) added that social capital stems from the idea that "relationships can be viewed as a resource, and therefore, may contribute to 'production' just as physical or human capital may contribute to 'production" (p. 65).

In contrast, Bourdieu's analysis of social capital places emphasis on the benefits accrued by an individual (also referred to as standard ego-networks by Borgatti et al., 1998) (Bourdieu, 1986; Harper, 2008a; Lin, 1999b; Nayaran, 1999; Portes, 1998) or at the micro level (Lin, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) has explained that social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). So while Bourdieu recognizes the importance of groups in acquiring social capital, he places emphasis on the benefits accrued by the individual

rather than the community (Portes, 1998). As such, scholars have also defined social capital using this emphasis on individual gains. Lin (1999) suggested that individually focused social capital describes how individuals "access and use resources embedded in social networks to gain returns in instrumental actions" (p. 31). Narayan (1999) asserted that to obtain social capital, an individual must be related to others; ultimately, it is the relationship with others that is to the advantage of the individual. From this point on, Bourdieu's construct of social capital – benefits acquired by an individual – will be used throughout this study. Specifically, I rely on Lin's (1999) definition of social capital that focused on individual benefits gained by leveraging relationships within social networks.

In summary, social capital can be possessed by any group, provides benefits for individuals and groups through the relationships established, and can be more or less beneficial depending on the social context. As such, social capital may be gained through the social networks established in BGLOs and could logically be presumed to affect the persistence of African Americans at PWIs, an influence that may differ in other college contexts (i.e. HBCUs). Given my interests in the persistence of African Americans at PWIs and BGLOs, there are three studies I would like to call attention to as they individually highlight the relationship between academic outcomes and social capital, minority student organizations and social capital, and BGLOs and social capital. These articles inform my research by highlighting the connection between social capital and academic outcomes and establishing the need for further research concerning BGLOs and academic outcomes.

In a synthesis of social capital within educational literature, Dika and Singh (2002) found that several scholars (i.e. Carbonaro, 1998; Isrl et al., 2001; McNeal, 1999;

Pong, 1998; Sun, 1998, 1999) have linked social capital with K-12 educational achievements as measured by achievement test scores, grade point averages (GPAs), and graduation rates. The sources for their synthesis included journal articles, book chapters, conference papers and electronic publications published between 1986 and 2001. The authors chose this timeframe because social capital did not emerge in the sociology literature until 1986 when Pierre Bourdieu published *The Forms of Capital*.

As part of their review, the authors analyzed fourteen studies that examined the possible link between educational or academic achievement and social capital. Overall, the relationships between social capital and education-related factors were significant and in the anticipated directions. For example, the authors shared that in the studies reviewed, grades, achievement test scores, graduation rates and educational aspirations are negatively related to nontraditional family structures, family size, and moving; further, grades are positively related to parent-teen discussion, parents' expectations, parent monitoring, and parent-school involvement. Lastly, the authors noted the current body of research does not provide a substantial amount of theoretical and empirical support about the relationship between social capital and academic outcomes. As such, they called for additional empirical research in the area of social capital and its connection to academic outcomes (e.g. grades, achievement test scores, graduation rates).

Dika and Singh focused their analysis on the relationship of social capital to academic outcomes at the K-12 level. Presumably, their call for additional research is focused in that domain. I would extend that call to include studies investigating the connection between social capital and academic outcomes at the postsecondary level. Several scholars have begun to respond to that call.

In the following studies, Harper and McClure both examined the influences of social capital on African American men's college experiences. In 2008, Harper investigated how high-achieving African American male undergraduate student leaders acquire and use social capital at PWIs. In his study, Harper defined high-achieving as African American male students with GPAs above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale who had the admiration of their peers, were involved in student organizations, and developed relationships with high-ranking campus administrators. He defined social capital as I have defined it - individual benefits gained by leveraging relationships within social networks. Additionally, he added that African American men at PWIs facilitate their own unique social capital as they offer each other a social network within the larger college community. The phenomenological study was conducted at six large, public, research universities in the Midwest. Harper collected data by holding interviews and at least two follow-up interviews via telephone.

In Harper's findings he noted that African American males accessed social capital through leadership in student organizations and engagement in campus activities. Furthermore, he stated that leadership in predominantly Black and minority-centric organizations created pathways of access to social networks and resources, ultimately providing social capital. For example, a student named David was aware that the social networks established through his involvement in numerous Black student organizations, which included Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (a BGLO), provided him access to resources and opportunities (social capital). Harper concluded that social capital gained through social networks is important for African American men at PWIs as they are a small population within the college community and they use those networks to navigate

the larger community. He also added that the social networks established through involvement in student organizations, specifically in minority student organizations, appear to be very important.

Additionally, Harper recommended that colleges need to openly advocate and voice the importance of the involvement of African American men in out-of class engagement, especially involvement within Black student organizations, as the social capital gained from these specific organizations appears to be salient in fostering meaningful relationships within the college community, encouraging student development, and facilitating consideration of graduate education. He added that colleges must actively support these organizations, financially and otherwise, as they are important in leadership development. Lastly, he stated that social capital scholarship has placed too much emphasis on inequalities and not enough emphasis on the educational advantages of social capital possessed by different groups.

Ultimately, Harper suggested that further research is needed on how social capital can be used for educational advantages. An example of such scholarship is McClure's (2006) study on how particular groups, specifically BGLOs, offer African American men a social network at PWIs. McClure used a social constructionist framework to examine the effects BGLOs had on African American men's college experiences. She interviewed twenty African American men at a large, predominantly White research I institution in the Southeast. Her social constructionist framework focused on the meaning-making process an individual is involved in and the way social processes shape perceptions. She also highlighted that BGLOs are voluntary associations, and defined a voluntary

association as "a formally organized and named group whose members are not financially compensated for their participation" (p. 1040).

In her findings, McClure found that BGLOs increased connections to Black history, the campus, and society. The fraternal history provided members an important connection to Black history. Members felt a need to live up to the legacy of Black history since historical figures, who were also members of the fraternity and personal heroes, helped shape Black history. For example, a student shared, "Before there was the NAACP, before there was the SCLC, before there was an Urban League, before there were any of these other organizations that have helped black people throughout time, there was [this fraternity]" (p. 1045). Additionally, McClure learned that members were able to connect to the college campus through their fraternity. Students discussed how they received more out of the college experience by being involved in a BGLO. One student stated, "It's great, I done met so many wonderful people I just, you kind of almost, if you really immerse yourself at this institution and [the fraternity] will help you do that" (p. 1048). Lastly, membership in the fraternity created social network ties that were valuable to members. For example, when asked what helped make his decision about joining the fraternity a student said, "I knew that it was going to open a lot of opportunities for me to network with other people in different professions and more specifically the area of work that I'm looking into getting into so, I pretty much made my decision" (p. 1050).

McClure concluded that "membership in a historically Black fraternity serves to integrate members into the wider campus community by providing them with a network of social support from which to negotiate the predominantly White environment" (p.

1051). She added that research on GLOs generally should be reexamined as it has primarily focused on White students and overlooks the differences of BGLOs. She also noted that the function of same-race support, in the form of BGLOs, must be understood as unique from the traditional White organizations they were modeled after. She closed with, "Further connections with existing work in this area would be fruitful for both higher education researchers and others participating in conversations regarding social capital and community engagement at the societal level" (p. 1053).

Harper's and McClure's studies support how social capital may be gained from BGLO involvement. However, their studies were limited as they focused on African American men. Additionally, other studies on BGLOs have washed over gender differences (i.e. Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Therefore, I wanted to add to the current literature by including both men and women in this study with a particular interest on gender as gendered differences could emerge. Consequently, I suggest that since social capital is linked to academic outcomes, involvement in minority student organizations, specifically BGLOs, may be beneficial for African Africans at PWIs as the social capital may mediate persistence.

In summary, social capital is a unique measure of capital because it is relational. For people to possess social capital, they must be related to others as it is the relationship with others that is the source of the individual's benefit (Narayan, 1999). Additionally, all forms of social capital are not equal and social capital may be differently distributed across different social groups (Larsen et al., 2004; Lin, 2000). While this is true, it is important to note that all societies and all social groups possess social capital (Narayan, 1999). Additionally, social capital is context bound; networks and relationships that are

beneficial in one context are not always transferable to other contexts (Coleman, 1988; Harper, 2008a; Teachman et al., 1997). As such, the relationships established between African American students at PWIs can serve as a form of social capital. Furthermore, relationships or social networks established through BGLO involvement at PWIs may possibly increase access to social capital, yet the social networks or social capital acquired by African American students in a predominantly White educational context may not be transferable, or as relevant, as in other educational context (e.g. HBCUs). Lastly, while social capital offers benefits, there are also costs associated with social capital (Larsen et al., 2004; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Hence, the social capital gained from BGLOs can lead to benefits (e.g. leadership development) and costs (e.g. hazing).

Social capital and academic outcomes are likely related. Additionally, educational involvement is linked to social capital and academic outcomes (Dika & Singh, 2002). More specifically, social capital could presumably be gained from BGLO involvement in a predominantly White institutional context (Harper, 2008a; McClure, 2006). Figure I posits the relationships between social capital, educational involvement and academic outcomes, while showing the need for additional research on the relationship between BGLO involvement and persistence as facilitated through social capital.

Educational Involvement

Social Capital

Academic Outcomes - Persistence

?

BGLOs at PWIs
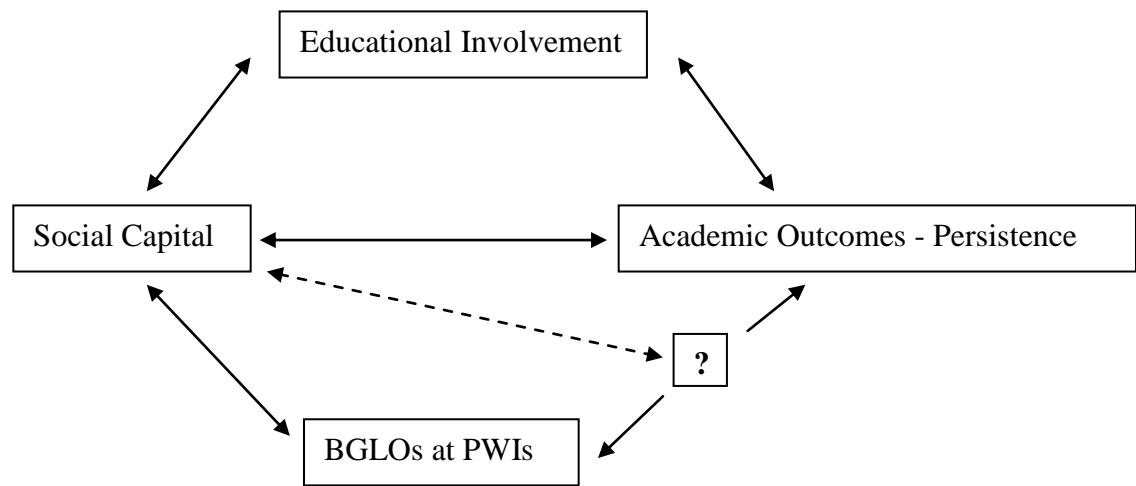
Figure I. Conceptual map

Theoretical Framework – Network Theory of Social Capital

This study builds on Lin's (1999a) network theory of social capital and uses social capital as the theoretical framework to investigate the possible relationship between BGLOs and the persistence of African Americans at PWIs. This framework highlights the idea that social capital is embedded in resources in social networks. I posit that African American students at PWIs might gain some form of social capital when they join BGLOs. In turn, I suggest the social capital gained via BGLO involvement may influence persistence towards graduation.

Lin generally defined social capital as an "investment in social relations with expected return" (p. 30). Lin explained that there are three explanatory factors that suggest why embedded resources in social networks will enhance the return on investment. The three factors are: information, influence, and social credentials. Information is shared that otherwise was not available without the social network; the social network has an influence on the individual; and, social credentials are accessed through the networks established between the individual and the organization. He then defined social capital more specifically as an "investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions" (p. 39). This definition of social capital is comprised of three key parts: resources embedded in a social structure; accessibility of resources by individuals; and, the use of the social resources by individuals in purposeful actions. The following figure (Figure II) depicts how Lin finally modeled the network theory of social capital.

Collective Assets
(trust, norms, etc.)

Returns

Instrumental

Wealth

Accessibility
(Network Locations and Resources)

Power

Reputation

Structural and Positional
Variations

Expressive

Physical

Mental Health

Mobilization (Use of Contacts
and Contact Resources)

Health

Life Satisfaction

| **Inequality** | **Capitalization** | **Effects** |
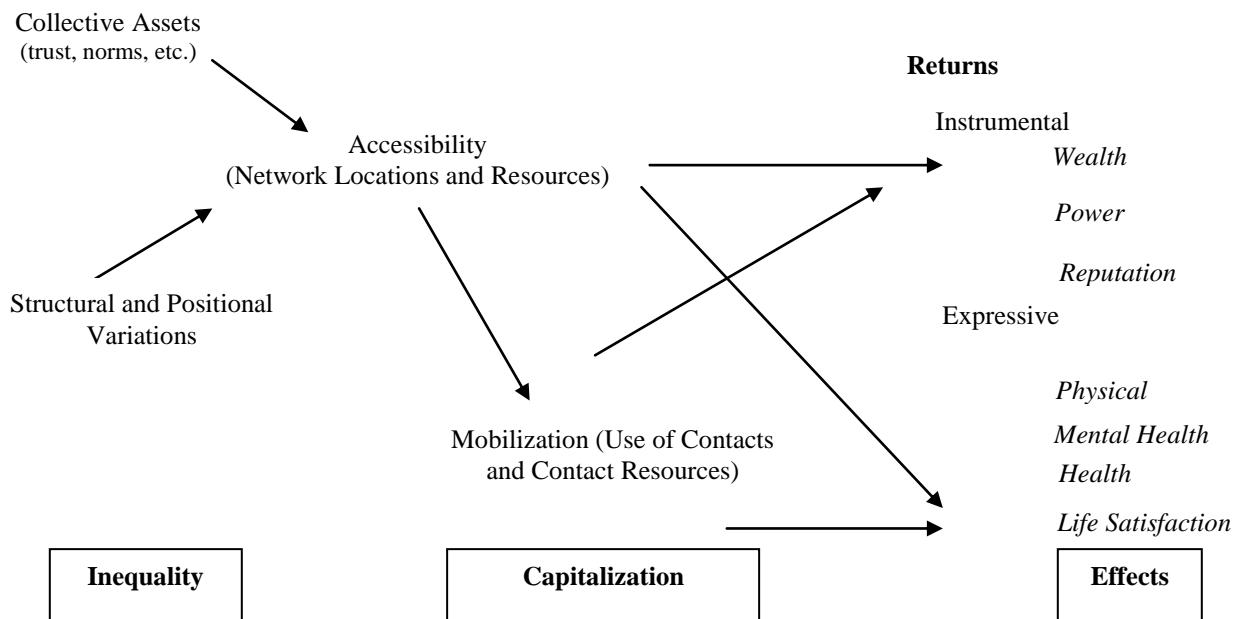
Figure II. Modeling a theory of social capital. From "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital," by N. Lin 1999, *Connections, 22 (1),* p. 42. Copyright 1999 by the INSCA. Reprinted with permission.

Lin's network theory of social capital is explained using three key elements: 1) inequalities, 2) capitalization, and 3) effects. First, individuals do not possess the same amount of social capital; therefore, there are inequalities in the social capital possessed. Second, individuals "capitalize" or access and mobilize social capital. Third, the effects are the returns or the benefits associated with the social capital gained. The returns can be broken down into two outcomes: 1) returns of instrumental action, and 2) returns of expressive action. Returns of instrumental action are gained resources not originally possessed by the individual and returns of expressive action are maintaining resources that are already possessed by the individual. I used Lin's network theory of social capital to explain an investment in a college group (in this case BGLOs) that may offer students (in this case African American students at PWIs) instrumental (i.e. study groups, campus social support) returns, maintain expressive (i.e. educational abilities, work ethic) returns, offer negative returns, or offer no returns.

Lin's network theory of social capital was used in several ways during this study. First, it was used in the formation of the interview and focus group questions as I focused on inequalities, capitalization, and returns. As such, the questions represent a continuum from inequalities to returns. Additionally, the questions highlighted social networks built within the students' respective fraternity or sorority. Second, the framework was used in my analysis as I grouped themes and sub-themes by inequalities, capitalization, and returns. Lastly, Lin's network theory of social capital was used in my conclusions and implications section as I made recommendations that were informed by the students accessing and mobilizing social capital through BGLO involvement regardless of their various backgrounds.

Chapter III – Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) influence the persistence of African American students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). I used grounded theory – a qualitative research methodology – to explore the research questions. Social capital, particularly Lin's (1999) network theory of social capital, was used to bring focus to the social benefits of BGLOs, and how those social benefits or social networks may mediate the connection between BGLO involvement and persistence. Within this chapter I explain my rationale for the use of grounded theory. That is followed by a description of my interest in BGLOs within higher education and my worldview as the researcher. Next, I introduce the targeted population, describe my data collection and analysis, and explain how I ensured trustworthiness. I close by acknowledging the methodological limitations to my research approach.

Rationale for Using Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was introduced as a research methodology by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory "seeks not just to understand, but also to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest" (p. 23). As in other qualitative methodologies (e.g. case studies, phenomenology, ethnography), the researcher is "the primary instrument of data collection and analysis assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data" (p. 29). As such, the theory is grounded in and emerges from the data; hence, the methodology was named grounded theory (Merriam, 2009). While the researcher is heavily involved, grounded theory is a structured

methodology as the development of grounded theories consists of systematic, rigorous, and orderly processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Grounded theory allows researchers to fully explore topics and new phenomena. For example, Brown, Stevens, Troiano, and Schneider (2002) have stated, "Because many aspects of the college experience do not divide neatly into discrete variables, qualitative methods of inquiry are the best suited for understanding the complex phenomena that come together to form the college experience" (p. 173) and "Qualitative methodology is useful in exploring and describing the experiences of college students, especially when little is known about the phenomenon under study" (p. 173). Similarly, Reason (2009) has stated, "A thorough study of persistence requires a complicated research design that can explicate not only the direct relationships of each constellation of variables on persistence, but also how the interactions between the constellations affect persistence" (p. 676). In this study, I wanted to empirically and holistically explore the relationships between social capital, BGLOs, and persistence, allowing for thoughts and feelings to be included. I also wanted the data to be information-rich as I was undertaking a study where a phenomenon has not been fully explored (Brown et al., 2002). For these reasons, I decided that grounded theory was appropriate for exploring the research questions.

In qualitative research and grounded theory, the researcher is the instrument through which the participants' experiences are analyzed and understood. Consequently, it is important for the researcher to disclose potential biases while conducting the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the next section, I share my interest in BGLOs in higher

education, my worldview as a researcher, and how those beliefs and biases could have influenced this study.

My Introduction to BGLOs and Worldview

"What is your purpose?" asked my professor in Professional Ethics at Shaw University. Although I was a Chemistry major and on an educational path to apply to medical school, I had never asked myself this common question and it took my professor's question to bring it to my attention. After surveying the experiences that felt meaningful during my undergraduate experience, I realized that removing educational barriers and the success of students, particularly African American students, were true passions. So, I chose to pursue a new career path – higher education. Ultimately, my personal and professional goals include facilitating the success of African Americans' persistence in college. As such, my research, professional, and personal interests include diversity issues in higher education and BGLOs. I am particularly interested in research on BGLOs because I believe they offer African Americans myriad benefits during and after college. For this reason, I decided to become a member of the St. Paul-Minneapolis (MN) Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Fraternity, Inc. on November 8, 2008. I approached this study as a supporter of BGLOs. I found it important to make readers aware of this as I am both empathetically understanding of the population being studied (Brown et al., 2002), and my views could have possibly affected the outcomes of the study.

As a researcher, my worldviews are shaped by the intersectionalities of my identity. I am an African American male who was raised in a low-middle class Christian household in Portsmouth, VA; my political views align with the Democratic Party; and, I

was 25 years old as I began study (27 at the conclusion). When I consider the description of myself, the only dominant characteristics, as defined by society, of my identity are I am a male a Christian. However, when I intersect being an African American with my maleness, I am mindful of the stereotypes the media oftentimes portrays of African American men. Ultimately, I would characterize my collective identity as one that is oftentimes marginalized.

Because of this marginalization, I find it important to research diversity issues in higher education as there are students who do not "fit" within the mainstream or dominant identities. Because of this marginalization, I find interest in racial and ethnic diversity issues within higher education, especially dealing with African American students. Lastly, because of this marginalization, I am compelled by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and qualitative methods. CRT challenges Whiteness as the norm, brings race to the forefront of research, and also challenges dominant texts and research methodologies (Solórzano et al., 2000). For many of these same reasons I am attracted to qualitative methods, particularly grounded theory, as a researcher. Qualitative methods allow researchers to explore research questions from myriad angles. They also allow research participants to have their voices included in the research findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) – voices that are oftentimes overlooked or silenced by quantitative methods. Additionally, and more specifically, grounded theory allows researchers to guide the formation of a theory using participants' lived experiences.

While I explained that many facets of my collective identity are oftentimes pushed towards the margins, I *do* appreciate my identities. It is who I am; it is who I will always be. In a similar fashion, I find it important as a researcher to try to help others

realize or appreciate the diversity of subgroups within higher education. For this reason, as a researcher I am compelled by the use of social capital as a theoretical framework. Some sociologists have written that any group in different contexts can possess social capital and offer that capital to individuals. I agree. I believe a social capital theoretical framework coupled with grounded theory allows researchers to fully explore outcomes associated with an individual being a member of a collective group.

Population

The participants in the study were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a non-random selection of a small sample of cases (Merriam, 2009). This sampling technique yields insight, not generalization, and the cases are information rich (Patton, 2002). More specifically, criterion sampling was employed. Criterion sampling is choosing cases that meet certain criteria (Merriam, 2009). In this study the participants had to: a) self-identify as African American, b) be a member of a BGLO, preferably for a full academic year, and c) attend a PWI.

Prior to recruiting the participants, I emailed the Greek advisor at the institution where I was interested in conducting the study. I then scheduled a phone interview with the adviser of the selected institution to find out more about the institution generally, Greek affairs, and BGLOs in particular. To recruit the focus group participants, I contacted BGLO chapter leaders through email (see Appendix A) to see if their organization would be interested in participating in the study. Second, an informed consent document (see Appendix B) explaining the study in detail was given to the potential focus group participants. Lastly, focus groups were scheduled with the BGLOs and students willing to participate in the study. Eight of the nine BGLOs were active on

this campus when I initiated the study; five of the organizations agreed to participate in the study, while three of the organizations declined. However, one organization was suspended the week before our initial focus group; ultimately, a total of four BGLOs participated as groups in this study. The groups that participated included two fraternities and two sororities giving me a gender balance amongst the focus groups. Following the focus groups, I contacted particular students (see Appendix E) to see if they were interested in exploring their particular experiences in further detail through one-on-one interviews. An informed consent document (see Appendix F) explaining their involvement was given to each interview participant. Lastly, interviews were scheduled with the students willing to explore their individual experiences through one-on-one interviews.

A total of twelve students participated in the study. They were students at a large, public, predominantly White research-intensive university located in the Northeast region of the United States. The university enrolls approximately 35,000 students with approximately 11% of the students identifying as African American and 51% as men. Students participated in one of four BGLO focus groups as Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest starting with three to four focus groups as a rule of thumb. Each focus group was comprised of members from one BGLO (e.g. a focus group with the members of Alpha Phi Alpha, Fraternity, Inc., a focus group with the members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., etc.). While scholars (i.e. Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007) suggest, and I initially intended to have, focus groups ranging from of five to twelve participants, my focus groups ranged from two to four participants. During the initial focus groups, I found that the number of Black students

who participate in BGLOs at the PWI I chose is relatively low. Additionally, I preferred to speak with students who were involved in BGLOs for a full-academic year as they would be more likely to express and reflect on their college experiences before and after joining a BGLO. Ultimately, I found that smaller focus groups were appropriate for this study. Additionally, I further explored the experiences of eight of the students through one-on-one interview sessions. In sum, the focus groups included five men and seven women, and the one-on-one interviews included four men and four women. I want to acknowledge that these individuals were not selected to represent their entire BGLO or the experiences of all BGLO members who attended PWIs. My intent was only to understand the complexities and different perspectives of their personal BGLO experiences. Each BGLO has a different history, set of values, and potentially offers different sets of experiences. In attempting to understand the range of BGLO experiences, I found it important to have as many BGLOs as possible represented in both the interviews and the focus groups to allow for different organizational values and themes to emerge and shape the grounded theory. I chose to conduct the study at one PWI attempting to control for institutional variability (e.g. enrollment, institutional type). Reason (2009) argues, "To fully and effectively address student persistence, any intervention must consider the local organizational context and the local student peer environment" (p. 678). I decided to conduct this study at a large, predominantly White, research intensive institution because research has indicated social isolation and discrimination of African Americans are both prevalent at these types of institutions.

Population Demographics

A total of 7 women and 5 men participated in the study. The participants came from diverse family backgrounds. Seven of the participants were from two-parent households. All of the participants that were from single-parent households were raised by their mothers. Family households ranged from 2 to 8 members. Two participants reported household incomes below $25,000 (one participant identified himself as self-supported), two participants reported household incomes of $100,000 or greater, and the remaining participants reported household incomes that ranged from $25,000-$99,999. Two participants identified as first-generation college students.

Most of the participants came from predominantly Black or diverse high schools and only one participant came from a predominantly White high school. Three of the participants attended private high schools and 1 participant attended a performing arts high school. Their high school GPAs ranged from 3.3 to 4.2 on a 4.0 scale.

Their college GPAs were self-reported and ranged from 2.4 to 3.7 on a 4.0 scale at the start of the study. Eleven participants were seniors and one of the participants was a junior at the start of the study. The participants held majors in many disciplines, with a majority of the participants majoring in the social sciences and humanities. A majority of the participants had aspirations to attend graduate or professional school, with law school being the most common post-baccalaureate goal. Additionally, three participants mentioned they wanted to start their own businesses after graduation.

Data Collection

The purpose of this section is to explain the data collection process that was used to investigate the research questions: 1) In what ways, if any, is social capital gained

through African American students' participation in BGLOs? 2) In what ways, if any, does social capital influence the persistence of African American students at PWIs? 3) In what ways, if any, does gender influence the ways in which social capital is gained via the social networks of BGLOs? 4) In what ways, if any, does gender influence how social capital influences the persistence of African American students at PWIs? Before beginning data collection, I submitted documentation to the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities Institutional Review Board (IRB) for exemption from full IRB approval and received full approval. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Using semi-structured interviews "allows for the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90) by using the questions flexibly. Focus groups are interviews with a group of people who have knowledge of a topic. Since the data is "socially constructed within the interaction of the group, a constructivist perspective underlies this data collection procedure" (Merriam, 2009, p. 93-94). Additionally, a qualitative research interview seeks to gather factual information along with the feelings and meanings associated with certain events (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). As such, I chose these data collection methods because I wanted to holistically explore the phenomenon by allowing the students to shape the grounded theory developed through their experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Ultimately, the research questions were answered as data were collected and analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and the grounded theory emerged.

During the focus groups I asked each group fourteen questions related to their college and BGLO experiences (see Appendix D). For the initial interviews I developed

six broad questions that focused on the participants' experiences at a PWI and within their respective BGLO (see Appendix G). Prior to data collection, the focus group questions and interview questions were piloted in questionnaire form with alumni who were involved in BGLOs at PWIs. The piloting allowed me to determine if the questions were asking what I intended them to ask, if the questions made sense, and to receive feedback from the pilot participants. In finalizing the questions, I learned that some of the questions needed to be rephrased and that I wanted to add questions about the participants' backgrounds. Additionally, I learned that perceived inequalities continue to exist on white campuses, gender in BGLOs was not as important for men as it was for women, and there are possibly a wide range of influences of BGLO involvement on persistence. From this information, revisions were made to the questions. The questions included in this study represent the revised questions used in my focus groups and initial round of one-on-one interviews.

In grounded theory data collection and data analysis are done somewhat simultaneously; this process is referred to as theoretical sampling. In theoretical sampling, the researcher uses themes that emerge from previous interviews to develop questions for the next round of interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used this process to develop subsequent interview questions based on my overarching research questions and what I learned from the participants during the interviews, and this was done until the data was information rich or no new themes emerged (see Appendices H & I for round two and three questions).

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. This data analysis method was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Like its name suggests, it is a constant comparison of the data as the researcher is collecting and analyzing the data, and continues until the researcher can formulate a theory. Ultimately, themes or concepts emerge from the data to formulate a grounded theory (Merriam, 2009).

Data analysis was based on the interviews and focus groups conducted. To analyze the data from the interviews and focus groups, the transcripts, audiotapes, and the researcher's journal were reviewed. The researcher's journal consisted of my notes throughout the study. The notes in my journal were broken down into three categories: pre-thoughts, notes during the interview, and post-analyses. Before each interview or focus groups I recorded any thoughts and biases. This included any thoughts about a particular fraternity or sorority, any thoughts about a participant as our relationship changed over the academic year and any thoughts about what I expected to hear. During the interviews I recorded any supplemental data I thought were important. This included important points and noticeable themes. After each interview I included a post-analysis. This allowed me to see concepts, sub-concepts, properties, and dimensions emerge more clearly. My journal also served me well in the implications section. Transcripts were created from the audiotapes of the interviews and focus group sessions and then matched with the audiotapes for accuracy. The transcripts were then reviewed to see what concepts emerged and to develop the next round of interview questions. The emergence of the concepts was a result of using processes of open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Open coding is an analysis that identifies any emerging concepts from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process is very expansive, primarily conducted after the first round of interviews, and helps develop the next round of interview questions (Merriam, 2009). Axial coding creates sub-concepts, properties, and dimensions to fully explain concepts and to show connections between concepts. Sub-concepts are based on their properties and dimensions. Properties describe concepts; dimensions are continua of properties. Selective coding is developing a story or creating a grounded theory by integrating the concepts and connections that were proposed during axial coding. Lastly, I created a conditional matrix to give a visual picture of how the concepts are related to each other and represented in the data; this depicts the grounded theory that emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is established by making sure that the research is well designed, implemented, and analyzed. To ensure trustworthiness in this study, I used the criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 2009).

Generally, credibility deals with how well the research findings match with reality (Merriam, 2009). Ultimately, in this study, credibility is how well the developed grounded theory matches the experiences of the participants. Several techniques can be used to increase credibility. The techniques I used were prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, review of the literature, and monitoring my biases as the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Prolonged engagement includes building the trust of the participants, learning about the specific population, and recognizing distorted data introduced by the researcher

54

or the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I interviewed the eight participants three times over the course of an academic year, totaling twenty-four one-on-one interviews. Triangulation is using multiple methods or multiple data sources to confirm findings (Merriam, 2009). I triangulated the data by conducting focus groups with four BGLO chapters at the institution. This allowed me to explore how their collective experiences confirmed, enhanced, or rejected the experiences of the interview participants. I also used member checks to confirm or reject concepts, relationships, and the theory that emerged. This was done through a culminating focus group with the interview participants. Next, I went back to the literature to strengthen the grounded theory that emerged by including literature to support themes and sub-themes that emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Lastly, as the researcher I made my biases known. I did that by offering my personal introduction to the topic, my worldview as a researcher, and keeping a researcher's journal; these expressions and documentation articulated my biases and views going into the study and during the study.

Transferability describes how well the theory that emerges is applicable to other settings. The parallel to transferability in quantitative research is generalizability (Merriam, 2009). To achieve transferability, I include in this research detailed information on the participants, the setting, and the procedures used in the study. This information increases the possibility of readers making inferences about similar populations in similar settings.

Dependability and confirmability are the final two criteria I used to establish trustworthiness. Dependability refers how well the study can be replicated and confirmability is how well the findings and conclusions match the lived experiences of

the participants. To increase dependability and confirmability, I used an audit trail. An audit trail is including raw data, analyzed data, and notes by the researcher (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the audit trail included the data from the audiotapes, transcripts, and the researcher's journal.

Methodological Limitations

Limitations of this study include the following. First, the study was limited in its generalizability. The study included 12 participants at one institution. Because of the small sample size, the results of this study are not generalizable to all Black students involved in BGLOs at PWIs. However, given that much is unknown about how BGLOs influence the persistence of African Americans at PWIs, I wanted a rich description of experiences, to explore the topic holistically (Brown et al., 2002), and a high degree of certainty was desired (Seashore, 2008).

Second, as the researcher is involved in the data collection and data analysis, there is a possibility he or she could alter results due to subjectivity or biases. I reduced the possibilities of researcher's bias or subjectivity by acknowledging my biases, using an audit trail, and through member checks.

While these were potential limitations in the study, utilizing the aforementioned research techniques along with the criteria to establish trustworthiness serves as evidence that the study was rigorous and well-designed. Additionally, through member checks I found that the findings were consistent with the lived experiences of the participants. I am confident that the findings add to the field of higher education as the relationships between BGLOs and academic outcomes have been largely unexplored.

Chapter IV – Ralph Abernathy University: Site and Participant Introductions

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce readers to the site and the participants involved in this study. While I briefly described the institution and the demographic characteristics of the participants in Chapter III, here I introduce the participants and their BGLOs more fully. Ultimately, this chapter is an attempt to show how African American students, with very different lived experiences, share experiences within and across Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs). I attempt to recreate a vivid depiction of my initial introductions to each interview participant and each focus group. The institution, BGLOs, and interview participants have all been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Ralph Abernathy University

Ralph Abernathy University (RAU) is a large, public, predominantly White research-intensive university in the Northeast United States. With 14 schools and colleges, RAU enrolls approximately 35,000 students who can choose from over 100 majors and pursue degrees up to the doctoral-level. Approximately 4,000 of RAU's students identify as African American. I selected RAU as the site to conduct my study because the institution is very similar to institutions included in many foundational studies examining the experiences of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (i.e. Fleming, 1984; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Additionally, RAU's department of Greek life is extensive, vibrant, and has a substantial number of Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) available to their undergraduate students.

At RAU the BGLOs are located in the department of Greek life. The department of Greek life is staffed by 8 full-time employees and a host of graduate assistants.

Together they manage the day-to-day operations for 4 Greek councils representing over 60 Greek-lettered organizations and 3,000 students. Their robust website covers the mission of the office, introduces staff members, introduces the councils, posts current events, posts semester grade reports, and highlights departmental awards given to fraternities and sororities each year. When I initially contacted the director of Greek life in the summer of 2010, he was very excited about my research. He informed me that all 9 BGLOs have chapter charters at RAU; however, only 8 of the 9 BGLOs were active at the start of the study. He then connected me with the assistant director, who connected me with the president of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), which is the council that represents the Black Greek-lettered organizations at RAU. The NPHC president invited me to campus to present the purpose of my study to the council. I accepted the invitation and first visited RAU in October 2010; it was then I initiated the recruitment stage of my process.

After my presentation, I sent each of the BGLO leaders an email asking if their organization and some of them individually would be willing to participate in the study. Five groups accepted my invitation to participate in the study and were forwarded consent forms (see Appendix B) for the focus group portion of the study while three of the groups elected not to participate. Additionally, four of the council leaders indicated that they were interested in exploring their BGLO experiences through one-on-one interview sessions and they were forwarded the consent document (see Appendix D) for the interview portion of my study. From there, snowball sampling was used to recruit the remaining interview participants. Snowball sampling is using initial participants, or contacts, to refer other potential participants who meet the criteria to participate in the

study (Merriam, 2009). In November, I returned to RAU to conduct my initial focus groups and interviews and was informed by one group's president that they were no longer able to participate in the study because their chapter had become inactive. As a result, four groups participated in the study – two fraternities and two sororities. A total of twelve students participated in the focus groups and eight of them explored their individual experiences through a series of one-on-one interviews (see Table I). During the presentation I introduced myself and the study by going over the consent documents, answering any questions students had about the study, and collecting the contact information for each of the leaders for each BGLO. During the focus groups and interview sessions I learned that the students were oftentimes frustrated with the department of Greek life. The participants explained that the office did not understand the differences between BGLOs and traditional or White Greek-lettered organizations and required them to meet demands that oftentimes did not fit the culture of BGLOs.

The following is a brief introduction of each BGLO that participated in the focus groups followed by an introduction of each one-on-one interview participant from each BGLO.

Harriet Tubman Fraternity

This was the first focus group I conducted and they made it easy for me even though I was nervous about collecting my initial data. The group made me feel comfortable throughout our discussion; they were very open, answering all of the questions I asked of them without hesitation, and full of laughs and jokes. The three men who participated in the group had very different personalities but I could tell they were very close; I soon found out they were line brothers (they became members of their

fraternity at the same time). From their point of view, they were an organization made up of members who are very approachable, throw the best parties, and oftentimes feel like "celebrities" because of their fraternity affiliations. They were very articulate about how they used their "celebrity" status or social networks to connect with peers, faculty and staff.

(1) **Malcolm**, 21, was a graduating senior from the Northeast. Malcolm was my first one-on-one interview. He had a very confident demeanor about himself. He was raised by his mother in a single-parent, middle-income household and had aspirations to become a lawyer. While he knows his father, they did not have much of a relationship. He expected to succeed at RAU and sometimes expressed he did not feel like his fraternity influenced his persistence. In our conversation he oftentimes expressed how important it was for him to be "man." Being a "man" included graduating, taking care of his future family, starting to pay off his student loans, and providing for his mother and grandmother post-graduation. During his freshman year he was faced with many conflicts and was kicked off campus twice for fights with his roommates. He stated that his roommates would use racial slurs, play instruments while he was studying and not bathe, which led to the fights. However, he states that when joining his fraternity he quickly humbled himself. Malcolm served as president and academic chair of Harriet Tubman Fraternity.

(2) **Sean**, 20, was a junior from the Northeast. He was the only junior to participate in the interview portion of the study. He had aspirations to work

for an engineering firm and become an entrepreneur, opening his own night club. He was raised in a two-parent, middle-income household. Sean identified himself as a first-generation African American because his parents were born in Jamaica; he was also a first-generation college student. He appeared to be quite confident and he was a comedian. For example, in our initial conversation he defined the word "gump" for me as a "male who lacks swagger and confidence." I laughed because the way he articulated the definition was so "official" for the slang word. He was popular in high school, so he expected to be popular at RAU. Because of his demeanor, I felt that Sean was comfortable speaking with me as an African American male, even though we had not had a conversation before. Sean was very in tune with how he uses his social networks gained through BGLO participation to navigate campus. For example, he stated he feels like a "celebrity" on campus and loves how his membership in Harriet Tubman Fraternity gains him access to parties and helps him establish relationships with faculty and staff. He has been a member of his fraternity since his freshman year.

Michelle Obama Sorority

It amazed me how these three women could finish each other's sentences correctly. I had to pause the focus group at one point to ask them stop speaking over each other; however, my plea was only successful for a few minutes. Luckily, the tape recorder was able to pick up the entire conversation. The group consisted of three women from very different geographical locations who found their way to RAU and soon became line sisters because of their shared interests in Michelle Obama Sorority. This

group clearly articulated the impact of the gendered social networks established within their organization as something they cherish.

(3) **Oprah**, 21, was a graduating senior from the Northeast majoring in English and mass communications. She planned to become a lawyer. She was raised in a two-parent household until the age of 14 when her parents divorced. So, she stated she feels like she was raised in a single-parent, low-middle income family. Oprah was outspoken and very reflective. For example, in a summary of her thoughts she quickly pointed out to me that she did not mean it in that way I recapped it. She decided to join Michelle Obama Sorority after doing extensive research on all of the Black sororities. She stated that the work she does for Michelle Obama Sorority is very intense but important for her chapter. She believed her involvement in her sorority is developing her as a well-rounded person and articulated that she would not give up her sorority involvement for higher grades. However, she stated she would be upset if she thought the sacrifices she made for her organization kept her from achieving her professional goals. She chose RAU because of its rank and name recognition.

(4) **Madam**, 21, was a senior from the West. She was raised in a two-parent, upper-middle income household. She planned to attend medical school and practice dermatology. Madam was the only participant to attend a predominantly White high school and stated that most of her high school friends were White. She was very excited about attending RAU because she expected to have more of a diverse friend base because it was located in the

Northeast; however, after joining Michelle Obama Sorority her friend base became predominantly Black which was much different than her childhood. She knew of Michelle Obama Sorority because many of her relatives are members of BGLOs and she found that the members of the organization shared her interests.

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Family Background	Income-level	High School	First Generation College	GPA	Classification	Legacy
Malcolm	21	Male	Single-parent	Middle	Private, predominantly Black	No	3.5	Senior	No
Amiri	21	Male	Single-parent	Low	Public, predominantly Black	Yes	3.7	Senior	No
Oprah	21	Female	Single-parent	Lower-middle	Public, predominantly Black	No	3.1	Senior	No
Madam	21	Female	Two-parent	Upper-middle	Public, predominantly White	No	3.1	Senior	No
Robin	21	Female	Single-parent	Middle	Private, diverse	No	3.4	Senior	Yes
Sean	20	Male	Two-parent	Middle	Public, diverse	Yes	2.4	Junior	No
Debbie	21	Female	Two-parent	Upper-middle	Public, diverse	No	3.3	Senior	No
Huey	22	Male	Two-parent	Low	Public, diverse	No	2.9	Senior	No

Table I. Interview participants (N = 8)

Barack Obama Fraternity

This was a quiet, yet thoughtful group. I had to pull information out of these participants unlike the other groups. They articulated how maintaining identity was important for them when joining a BGLO and that is why they both joined Barack Obama Fraternity. They saw their fraternity as an organization where they did not have to conform to Black fraternity stereotypes or identities they saw in other groups. The two men in this group were academically focused. For example, they both planned to obtain graduate degrees. They both joined their fraternity partly because of what they saw their organization was doing on campus and how their organization connected them to Black history and culture.

> *(5)* **Amiri**, 21, was a senior from the Northeast. He was raised in a single-parent, low-income household with 6 siblings and was a first-generation college student. He considered himself self-supported and low-income. He maintained the highest GPA of all of the participants. He planned to pursue a PhD and become a professor. Amiri had a quiet, yet thoughtful demeanor. During our conversations he expressed concerns with prescribed identities for both Black men and fraternities. Because authentic identity development was important to him he joined Barack Obama Fraternity. He found that within the fraternity he could maintain his identity and the fraternity connected him with the Black history. I wanted his pseudonym to be Ralph but he declined and chose the name Amiri; he was the only one to reject the pseudonym chosen for him. For me, this reinforced his strong belief against prescribed identities and his value in his fraternity. He served as president of Barack Obama Fraternity.

(6) **Huey**, 22, was a graduate student from Africa and currently lives the Northeast. At the start of the study he was a graduating senior and the following semester he enrolled in a graduate program at RAU. Huey was from a two-parent, low-income household. He moved to the United States from an African country at the age of 15 and became a U.S. citizen at the age of 17. While he was raised in Africa he considered himself an African American because he attended high school and college in America. Because of his African background, he initially could not understand the concept of racism but stated that he began to understand race and racism after joining a BGLO and comparing his experiences with his African Americans peers. Because of his interest in African American history, he found interest in Barack Obama Fraternity. His family and African roots were very important in his educational aspirations. He stated that many of his family members living in his home country are not afforded the opportunities he has in America and he does not take his education for granted.

Billie Holiday Sorority

As I sat in the cafeteria waiting for this group, I was met by four women from very different walks of life. This was my longest focus group as they were very thoughtful about answers. At some points of the focus group it felt like they had prepared statements for the conversation because they were so engaged, giving vivid descriptions of their experiences and eloquent answers about their beliefs. This group quite often referenced Black fraternities as important organizations for Black men on predominantly White campuses and was the only group to articulate the benefits and shortcomings of

BGLO participation for peers of the opposite sex. Additionally, they noted that BGLOs have changed and some organizations and their chapters should reexamine the reasons they exist. They expressed that BGLOs should go back to the foundational purposes of their existence. They were the most interested in my dissertation process and had numerous questions after the completion of our conversation.

(7) **Robin**, 21, was a graduating senior from the Northeast. She grew up in a two-parent, middle-income household until her parents separated. However, she stated that her father, who is upper-income, is just a phone call away. She had aspirations to become an athletic director. She stated she has grown so much as a person because her younger brother has a learning disability. She was a legacy member (a member of her family is also a member) of Billie Holiday Sorority. Initially, she did not want to join her sorority but her grandmother suggested that she rethink her decision and after researching the organization she felt the ideals and history of the organization fit her as a person. Robin was very articulate about the struggles of Black women in America and believed that education is very important to their upward social mobility. She expressed that the role models and peers within her organization have been instrumental in helping her become a better person. Additionally, she was adamant about BGLOs having a "call to purpose" and reexamining their historical purposes and their roles in Black communities.

(8) **Debbie**, 21, was a graduating senior from the Northeast majoring in dance and mass communications. She had a joyful personality. She grew-up in a two-parent, upper-middle income household and was the only participant to attend

an arts high school. She wanted to become a dancer and journalist. She stated that she lives in a "dream world" because she does not see race and has never experienced overt racism. She chose RAU because she wanted to attend a top-ranked and challenging institution. It was pleasant surprise for her when she found out that RAU had BGLOs on campus as she did not expect a PWI to have a BGLO community. Growing up, she admired members of Billie Holiday Sorority and was excited to find that membership is lifelong unlike some historically White Greek sororities. She stated that her relationships with her sorors were instrumental and the community service her organization does is very important for her. She expected all members of her sorority to be academically focused because of the organizations ideals and principles.

The purpose of this chapter was to give readers vivid descriptions of the research site, participants, and how I went about selecting site and participants. I found it important to dedicate a chapter to these introductions to ensure trustworthiness, and to describe participants' salient identities and contexts – characteristics that are oftentimes excluded from research. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the study.

Chapter V - Findings

This study explored the influences of Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Within this chapter, I present the findings of the study. As noted, Nan Lin's (1999) network theory of social capital shaped this study theoretically; Lin's theory posits social capital is embedded in the resources gained in social networks. Lin models his theory using three broad themes – inequalities, capitalization, and effects/returns – to explain gaining social capital through social networks. As such, I used those themes to frame the experiences of the participants and to introduce the findings. As inequalities experienced by African Americans on predominately White campuses have been well documented in the literature, I did not include inequalities in my results. During my conversations with the participants, I found that their experiences at RAU were consistent with the experiences of the African American students highlighted in Fleming's (1984), Feagin, Vera, and Imani's (1996), and Solozarno, Ceja, and Yosso's (2000) studies. The students talked about being one of the only students of color in classrooms, racial microagressions that permeated the campus, and how their college experiences were different than other students as African Americans and how they coped with those differences. Additionally, I decided not to highlight inequalities in my findings because the experiences of African Americans at PWIs do not directly address my research questions. First, I introduce the ways in which the participants capitalized on and mobilized his or her BGLO membership. Second, I introduce the returns of being involved in a BGLO at a PWI. Lastly, I present the ways in which gender was important in the social networks established in fraternities and sororities.

Capitalization

The participants accessed and mobilized social capital by deciding to join a BGLO. The themes that are presented in this section are "Why I Joined," which introduces the ways in which the participants decided to join a BGLO, and "Linking with Other People," which introduces how the participants mobilized the social capital gained through the social networks within BGLOs.

"Why I joined": Joining a BGLO. While the participants were from different lived experiences, they all decided to join or capitalize on BGLO membership at RAU, arriving at their decisions in different ways. Those reasons included family, the histories associated with each BGLO, and the influences of members of his or her organizations who served as role models. The participants appeared to find value in the social networks established in BGLOs, whether they found that value in BGLOs growing up, or once they arrived on the campus of RAU. In either case, they realized there were resources associated with BGLO networks; theoretically speaking, they realized BGLOs were a source of social capital.

Family. Some of the participants were exposed to BGLO membership because they had family members who were members of BGLOs. When the participants had family members who were members of BGLOs, they typically joined the same organization, which is referred to as legacy membership. During our first interview session, Robin shared that her grandmother suggested that she may want to consider transferring after Robin told her grandmother that she was not interested in Billie Holiday Sorority at RAU:

> [E]very member in my family is a member of the organization that I'm in and I completely wanted to be the rebel and go against that. I didn't want to be a part

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of the organization in the beginning to be honest with you. It was so bad, my grandmother wanted me to transfer schools to see if I would seek to be [a member of Billie Holiday Sorority] somewhere else. And she told me before I made any "harsh and rash decisions" that I should do some research on the organization and just find out why so many people in my family chose it. After I did my own research and I found the background information, I truly believe that there's no better fit for me.

While Robin did not initially find value in BGLOs, her grandmother had knowledge of the resources offered through BGLO membership. For a relative to suggest transferring schools solely because they want another relative to become a member of a Greek organization appears to be antithetical to the purpose of college; colleges and universities were established for the purpose of training and educating students rather than for students to join organizations. However, I suspect Robin's grandmother knew the values of Billie Holiday Sorority; she knew the social networks Robin would gain during and after school. During the focus group with Billie Holiday Sorority, another member said she joined because her sister, who she considered her role model, is a member:

> [M]y older sister became a member [when she went to college]. I used to visit her in college and I would see the social networking going on [between her and her sorority sisters] and from that point on [I knew I wanted to join Billie Holiday Sorority]. I adopted all of her viewpoints on any other [Black Greek-lettered] organization and she has strong viewpoints on those organizations. I took [those views] from her and made [them] my own. The state of the chapter on this campus really did not mean anything to me. I already knew [Billie Holiday Sorority] was what I was going to do. I had no other option in my mind [or any interests] to do anything else from 10 years old.

In her explanation, the member of Billie Holiday Sorority used the term social networks to refer to her sister being connected to other people. Unlike Robin, she knew exactly what organization she wanted to join and had evidence of the resources gained through BGLO membership by watching her sister interact with members of her sorority. During

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the focus group, a member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity stated that growing up around members of his fraternity helped him decide:

> I became a [member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity] because I feel like this organization fits me, as far as stereotypes. And just the image that they hold [appealed to me]. [The] other reason why is because my father's legacy. I grew up around [members of Harriet Tubman Fraternity]. I felt the funk when I was 3 years old. It was just something I knew I wanted to be [a part of] my entire life.

This member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity also knew of BGLOs well before he stepped foot on a college campus because his father was a member of his fraternity. He stated, "I knew I wanted to be [a member] my entire life," which articulates the significant role the fraternity played in his life. These participants all had family members who were in BGLOs. Because their family members found value in their organizations, the participants also found value in their organizations. In many cases, they sought the social networks they were introduced to by family members.

History. The history of BGLOs also influenced why some of the participants decided to join their organization. Huey's mom, who was from an African country, loved U.S. African American history and because of her love for African American history, he became interested. During our initial conversation he shared how the history of Barack Obama Fraternity was important in him joining:

> A lot of [BGLOs] were born during or before the Civil Rights Movement, which I [have been] real interested in since I was born. Even though it wasn't my country, my mom used to study this kind of stuff. She used to tell about the Civil Rights Movement, [and] the Black Panthers, so that was something I grew up admiring.

Here, Huey linked BGLOs with African American history and because he considered his organization as part of that history, he decided to join. Doing research on BGLOs and learning about the histories of the organizations helped Oprah decide to join Michelle Obama Sorority as well. In our initial interview she stated:

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At first I wasn't too sure if I wanted to be Greek at all, but I did research and it seemed like it was a good thing to do, a good move to make. Then I did my research on the organizations, all four [African American sororities], and picked what organization I wanted to be a part of. The historical background was pretty much all I needed to [know about to] be [interested] in the organization.

Oprah joined her organization because of its historic roots. Like Robin, she was not sure if she wanted to be Greek at all, but after reading about her organization, it was something she wanted to participate in.

Members. Members were also influential in the participants' decision to join their BGLOs. When we first talked, Debbie shared she had always admired the members of Billie Holiday Sorority and said that influenced her decision to join:

I think a lot of my reasons [for joining] have to do with how I [viewed] the women of this organization before I came [to RAU]. Growing up as a child, any time I saw women with their paraphernalia on, they always held themselves in a very distinguished way. I always wanted to be part of a group of very well-educated African American women and the people that I had met through, or at least up in my life up until college, I was just very impressed by. So I knew that this was the organization that I wanted to join and I wanted to be a part of their network.

When I initially met with Amiri, he said the members on campus were influential in his decision to become a member of Barack Obama Fraternity. He felt that the brotherhood he saw was something he had been lacking and wanted to be a part of:

I got a sense of the support and the brotherhood from the [members] on the campus. That was one of the things I was looking for that I didn't necessarily find it in some of the groups I was in. I mean I like some of the other activities and groups I did outside of school, but I always felt like it was missing something, which was brotherhood.…I liked the [members] who are on the campus. I liked what they were doing. Even before I joined my fraternity, I was active in the community and I saw that the [members] here on the campus were also active in the community.

While the participants joined their organizations for different reasons, they ultimately thought that being involved in BGLOs and other extracurricular activities was important

in their college experiences and their persistence. In our final conversation, Oprah shared

that she believed that all of the extracurricular activities she is involved in pushed her to

persist:

> All of the extracurricular activities that I've been involved in are all about pushing people forward and pushing towards success. It goes in line with me wanting to graduate and me wanting the persistence in school. None of them are about being stagnant or being okay with mediocrity. Everything is about excellence and moving forward and doing big things. So because of that, it works with my persistence.

In the third interview with Debbie, she added to Oprah's point by stressing the

importance of capitalizing on extracurricular activities as support systems for African

Americans at PWIs:

> I know here on our campus there are a lot of extracurricular activities that are devoted just to African American students. Just so you know that there is a strong African American community [here] because sometimes being on a predominantly White campus you can start to feel yourself get[ting] swallowed in because you see only White students all the time and you're like, "Where are all the Black people?" So having things like [the] Black student union, [the] Black business association, Black engineering majors, all those types of things can only help the African American community grow together, prosper together, stay connected, and feel better about what they're doing.

Debbie articulated why BGLOs and African American extracurricular activities are

important for African American students on predominantly White campuses. She

articulated that these particular organizations or cultural centers help students progress

and feel good about what they are doing on campus.

The participants joined BGLOs because of the values they saw in the

organizations. These values were introduced to them through family, history, and

members involved in the organization before they joined. The participants decided to

capitalize on membership because of the social networks or the resources they believed

were embedded in the social networks. Additionally, the social networks established in

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BGLOs appeared to be inextricably linked to African American culture and history. For example, Robin's grandmother was a member of Robin's sorority and found the social network strong enough to ask Robin to consider transferring schools. In Huey's case, he explained that he believed his organization was a corner stone to African American history. In the next section, I present how the participants mobilized the social networks they gained as a result of becoming members of BGLOs.

"Linking with other people": BGLOs as social networks. Once the participants joined his or her organizations, they mobilized their capital through the networks established with their peers, faculty, and staff. During the focus group with Harriet Tubman Fraternity, a member talked about how he recognized the social capital gained with his peers when he joined his organization and identified it as "power:"

> I wanted to join a BGLO because one I am Black, and two, the Black Greeks are like giving us power on campus. It's like we have special, I'm not sure, but [I think] we do have special privileges. I can roll up to a party and just walk in as compared to someone who wasn't Greek, who [may have] to sit there and wait in line or need to know somebody. You do get that sense of power over someone who isn't a Greek. To me, honestly you just get popular, you get hip, [and] everyone wants to know you….It's a powerful feeling.

This participant identified the benefits of his organization; his social network provided him what he called "power" and "special privileges" on campus. Within the University he received a form of social capital that he believed other students lacked. During the same conversation, Sean added that being a member of a BGLO also allowed Black Greeks opportunities to provide entertainment and programming for Black students at RAU, and made it easier to navigate the campus:

> Being in a Black Greek-letter organization allows you to throw huge parties for the Black community. We also throw weekly programs. [Sometimes it feels] like it's a Black campus [because of the number of events we put on]. The Black community on campus looks to us to provide them with different opportunities.

They look to us as leaders in different [organizations], and I feel like if I wasn't in a Black Greek-letter organization it would be a lot harder for me to establish myself as such a power, as such an influence or a leader on campus.

Here Sean expands on the previous point of special privileges placing emphasis on programming opportunities he was afforded by being a member of a BGLO. He also used the word "power" to explain what I would identify as social capital being assessed and mobilized.

The participants were also connected with faculty and staff when they became members of BGLOs and mobilized those relationships. During his first interview, Malcolm discussed that when he joined his organization that he learned that there were so many members of Harriet Tubman Fraternity on campus and the relationships established through his fraternity membership were helpful:

[My fraternity brothers], they opened a lot of doors for me. They [are] always there for me. A lot of brothers on this campus, I didn't even know are [members of Harriet Tubman Fraternity]. And they're like, "Oh, I got you." One of the football coaches is a [member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity]. And, just knowing that I can always go to him [is important]. Let's say I wanted to have a program, and you want to have the football players come in. That attracts a larger audience cause [students at RAU] are like, "Oh the sports team." So if the sport people are [at our events], then [other students might think] maybe [sports players] want to become Greek as well. So then people want to [join my organization].

Here Malcolm articulates the resources embedded in the social networks gained by joining a BGLO by explaining relationships established with faculty and staff. When we first met, Sean also expressed his beliefs that being in a BGLO was a commonality that fostered relationships with faculty and staff:

[W]ell first of all there are a lot of faculty and staff that are Greek, whether it be Black Greeks or White Greeks, and having that connection with them brings us a lot closer. It's a common topic. We can relate to [each other]. So it gives [us] a better relationship. So I think being in my organization has helped in that sense.

Lastly, the participants mobilized their social networks to find internships and other opportunities. During the focus group, a member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity explained that his fraternity brother helped him secure an internship:

> Well my frat [brother] actually, this past summer, helped me get an internship with a recording studio….So as far as networking, that exemplified it to the utmost. And one of my chapter brothers, he also talks to me and some of my line brothers about trying to find other internships that are in our field of study. So I mean people are always trying to help you [who] are older than you.

In our first conversation, Debbie stated the social networks were great in linking BGLO members with other people and explained how she was booked for dance gigs because of the social networks provided by her sorority:

> [Social networks established through BGLO involvement] by far is probably one of the greatest aspects of being in the sorority because of all the many people that can link you with other people. Sometimes people know that I dance. Every once in a while we [may] have this event here, [and someone might ask] is it possible that [I] can perform. And then I end up saying, "Okay, I'll perform." I end up performing and then I end up meeting somebody who then wants me to perform for them. It's like a snowball or ripple effect of job opportunities. So I would say that that's definitely the networking system [that] is probably one of the best aspects of being in a sorority because you pretty much can always look to find somebody in some field anywhere in the world because our organization is an international organization.

These experiences appeared to be common for participants; because of their social networks in their organizations, they were connected to opportunities. As they explained, these opportunities might not have been accessible without BGLO membership. Within this section I presented data that appears to support that social networks established in BGLOs offered the participants various types of resources or returns – the participants were accessing a form of social capital. In the next section, I introduce the different types of returns the participants received.

Returns

In this section, I introduce the returns participants received by being involved in BGLOs at a PWI and share the ways in which gaining these returns influenced the participants' persistence in different ways at RAU. At the start of the study, many of the participants articulated that they would have persisted at RAU regardless of joining their organization. They had not recognized the relationships between academics and BGLO involvement during their college experiences. However, during the study they began to make the connection between BGLO involvement and persistence as they reflected on their experiences through conversations with their peers, and with me individually.

The returns presented in this chapter are "Deeper Bonds," which were the relationships and connections established because of being involved in a BGLO; "Overnight Celebrity," which explains the increased social lives of the participants once they became members of BGLOs; "The Pledging Starts Once You're a Member," which explains the administrative and community service experiences BGLO membership provided the participants; "Implementing Academic Plans," which explains the ways in which the participants' academic progress was monitored and supported; and, "I'm a Role Model," which explains how the participants developed leaderships skills on campus.

"Deeper bonds": Relationships and connections. The relationships and connections established through BGLO membership were the most salient returns for the participants. The relationships established were different than any other relationships established in other student groups on campus. The participants attributed these deeper bonds to intake or pledge processes, and to the amount of time they had to spend together

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to sustain the chapter. Debbie stated that she and her sorority sisters are very close

because she had the opportunity to learn so much about them:

> I would just say that the people in my social network now just have had a closer
> impact on me because I've gotten to know them so well. So I guess that's why
> they've influenced me. These past two years I've been influenced by them more
> because I've been around them so much…. I've met their families, I've met
> boyfriends, [and] I've met anybody else that's close to them. So I would say that
> these past two years, or the difference [since joining my sorority] is that I've just
> really grown and built a strong connection with the people in my social network.

In his first interview, Sean informed me that his fraternity is his family and he knows he

could ask anything of them:

> My frat brothers, especially my line brothers, we have a real deep connection.
> They're just like family. So I rely on them a lot actually during my day; just for
> support, help, funds, especially on a White campus where sometimes it may be
> hard to find friends here in classes, or it might be hard to find someone to study
> with, or just even to hang out with. There's always someone there, no matter
> what. I feel like sometimes a strong social network is a great benefit being
> African American on a White campus.

The participants found value in the bonds established in their organizations. Sean even

referred to his fraternity brothers as family. These social networks appear to definitely be

a form of social integration for the participants as they explained the importance of these

networks on a predominantly White campus.

Oprah and Amiri explained their relationships and connections with their

organizational members as "after 5" interactions. In our initial conversation, Oprah

explained while most classes are done by 5PM, Black extracurricular activities,

particularly BGLO communities are never done:

> So it's kind of like we have our own community thing. But that's after 5[PM]. It's
> like that's when you have your [Black student union] and your [Pan-Hellenic
> Council]. They're like two separate worlds because you're not going to class with
> everybody that you're about to go see in your organization. In all the
> organizations you're not going to really have any White people in them because

we're all in Black [organizations]. It's a real heavy emphasis in the Black community, about whatever you're in having Black on it.

Amiri added:

> With non-BGLO [groups] it's like everything turns off after 5'o clock, after business [hours]. You go home or whatever. But in a BGLO you see your brothers even after 5[PM]. You see them on the weekends. You're more involved in any personal issues they may be going through, or they're involved in your personal issues. It just doesn't turn off, it's a continuous thing.

Oprah and Amiri highlighted the impact of BGLO membership in their lives as they explain BGLO membership goes beyond the traditional nature of student organizations; BGLOs became a part of their "whole" selves. This involvement may explain why family members were influential in the participants joining BGLOs and why BGLOs are interconnected with African American history and culture.

The relationships and connections fostered by BGLO membership influenced the participants' persistence in many ways. They were oftentimes supported, motivated and inspired by chapter members, especially those members who served as role models because they had achieved academically and showed the participants that they too could achieve academically. During the focus group, a member of Billie Holiday Sorority shared how her connections with her sorority sisters had a direct influence on her persistence:

> I went through a hardship sophomore year in college….[There] was a death in my family, someone really close. And at that point it was so bad that I could have dropped out of college. It didn't happen because of the people that I was surrounded with including current chapter [members] and older sisters. But so you know, when you build on such a strong foundation, when you stumble, you still have people that will catch you.

Here, a participant directly attributes her persistence to her social network established in her sorority after experiencing a death in her family. This example further illustrates the

familial bonds that the participants continued to articulate. When we first met, Amiri

shared that while he was doing well academically, he had no sense of purpose at RAU.

However, once he joined his fraternity he was socially integrated on campus and he

gained a sense of purpose:

> I guess another thing would be my involvement with my fraternity and how I
> think that affects my persistence. Just me individually it's, I guess more socially
> than academically. I know before I was in my fraternity I would just, I guess the
> direction I was going in, I didn't really care too much about anything. My grades
> were good but I didn't really care about it. It was just a lot I didn't care
> about….But then after I [became a member of my fraternity] I just gained a sense
> of purpose for myself. I just feel that being a part of a group of Black males, just
> having them around and everything, I have support from them [and] they keep me
> going.

Amiri articulates above that he became more socially integrated after joining his

fraternity. This form of social integration at RAU ultimately helped him persist and find

"purpose." In our second conversation, Sean reflected on the history of Harriet Tubman

Fraternity at RAU and shared how his connection with his fraternity's history pushed him

to persist:

> If I wasn't in the [organization] I feel like I wouldn't have as many people behind
> me as I do now. I'm sure I would get some push from some [other] people but not
> as many as I do [now]. I have 40 years of help behind me as compared to just
> being a regular student on campus trying to find my way. I would say it's very
> effective. You know people who already went through [being an African
> American student at RAU], who [did] what you're doing now who are still there
> [helping you] and they can give you their advice and their wisdom. So it's
> definitely effective.

Sean articulates that the number of members who have been a part of his organization

and the legacy of his fraternity pushed him to persist. This reinforces the importance of

histories and members being influential in why the participants joined BGLOs.

The participants also talked about how members of their organization, particularly

their line brothers or sisters (meaning they became members at the same time within the

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same chapter), pushed them during the academic year. Debbie lived with three of her line sisters and they tended to push each other academically. She believed they have been important in her persistence:

> They definitely influence my persistence in a way. [And,] I'm very blessed for the ways that they have influenced my persistence. I'm fortunate enough that we all live together. I live in an apartment, four of us, and there's plenty of times where I wake up and I just think, "Oh today I cannot make it to class." And all three of them or two of them, whoever is here, [they] say to me, "Get up, go to class, you have five weeks left of school."…So I can definitely say that they're always there to basically be my reality check.

Sean also shared that his fraternity brothers pushed him to succeed because they want to see each other doing well:

> Well the relationships with my line brothers greatly affect my persistence because I want to do well and I want to see them do well. So we're constantly pushing each other to achieve the goal of graduating. If we see one of us slipping, we let them know. [We say things like,] "Come on. You got to get back on the grind, you got to focus." And if one of them is doing well, we congratulate them and give them praise. [We] show them what they're doing is a good thing.

This illustrates because of the deeper bonds established in BGLOs, the participants were not only concerned about their individual persistence, they were also invested in the persistence of other members.

The participants also stated that fellow BGLO members served as role models and provided motivation, which influenced their persistence. In the focus group with Billie Holiday Sorority, a member expressed that seeing so many successful women from her sorority achieve was motivation and inspiration to let her know that she too could reach those goals:

> I think specifically in [our organization], you are around so many successful women it really makes you want to [continue your education]. Undergrad is the first step. When you get around all these people on the graduate level and they're like, "[I have a] master's, Ph.D.," own businesses, own companies, [undergrad] is just the first step. So it really drives you and excites you to get to the next level

when you're surrounded by people like that. And also, it's your point of esteem, [your] confidence on campus.

A member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity shared the same sentiments from a fraternal standpoint:

Just seeing that there are other brothers that are very successful within the chapter and then just in the fraternity in itself lets me know that there's a lot of opportunities that I could have….A lot of people join the organization for brotherhood and if I know that somebody could possibly help me out [during school], that's always a plus.

The participants clearly articulated that BGLO membership was unlike any other student organization on campus. Because of the unique membership intake processes associated with BGLOs, the participants created bonds with members of their organization that were very different from relationships with other students. The "after 5" concept that emerged further articulated this deeper bond. The participants shared that BGLO membership, relationships, and responsibilities were not done after the end of business hours like their classes and involvement in other student groups were. Being a member of his or her respective organizations became an inextricable part of their higher education experiences and ultimately their lives. "Deeper bonds" were a return of their social network; "deeper bonds" were a result of social capital.

As it relates to persistence, the deeper bonds established with members of their organization were generally beneficial to their persistence towards graduation. The participants talked about how their organizations helped them find direction, provided role models, helped them get through difficult times, and pushed them to do better academically.

"Overnight celebrity": Increased social life. Once the participants became members of their organizations, their social lives increased dramatically. They had new

sorority sisters or fraternity brothers to hang out with, they practiced for step shows, they were responsible for membership intake, they partied more, and more of their college peers knew them. They became somewhat "instant celebrities" within the Black student community. During the focus group with Harriet Tubman Fraternity, Amiri explained how his college experience changed once he became a member of his fraternity:

> [I]t's almost like an instant celebrity type thing. It's like [people are] looking at you at all times. You have a certain admiration or there's [this] role modeling [feeling]. People are looking up to you.

I was surprised to hear this from Amiri who was conscious about identity and staying true to his identity. As he talked about his experiences in Harriet Tubman Fraternity, he explained how he too made adjustments to "fit" the expectations of being a member of his fraternity. In her second interview, Robin explained how her increased social life and peer recognition had everything to do with the Greek letters that she wore across her chest:

> I think the "celebrity status" comes with the fact that you have letters across your chest. Those people who are interested in [our sorority] have no idea what we really do unless they're trying to join. There's no reason why I can walk into a room and there's a hundred girls that can sit there and tell me my name and I can only name maybe one person. And that to me has nothing to do with leadership; that's just because they're trying to join the organization because of its "celebrity status."

A member of Harriet Tubman Fraternity marveled at the increased social life he gained by joining a BGLO and stated how great he believed his fraternity was on campus:

> If [our] popularity was in stock[s], we would be [doing well] right now. So pretty much we would have [money] because we're just [awesome]. I don't know how [else] to say it. I'm not really trying to sound like a cocky guy but people like us. People want to be like us. They want to join our organization.

In the aforementioned quotes, the participants articulate the return of an increased social life. It appeared that joining BGLOs at RAU pushed the participants into the limelight of

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the Black student community, which came with a "party like a rock star" mentality. With increased social lives also came academic costs.

As the participants' social lives increased, they articulated that it sometimes influenced their academics because participating in social events was an integral part of what they did as members of BGLOs. In our second conversation, Madam talked about how much time the social aspect of Greek life took up and also shared how she sometimes had to remember why she is at RAU:

> Wow, [the social demands of Greek life] definitely take up a lot of time. Especially because you want to make sure your organization is [being recognized]. Especially with parties and step shows. You just want to make sure that your organization is represented and of course that takes up time with practicing. Sometimes your grades will be put to the back burner; and then also with membership intake, that definitely [takes up time]. Especially from my organization [standpoint], they're intense. So we just have a lot of things to do. It literally takes up a good amount of time. So the answer is just making sure [you stay] on top of your school work and remember that you're in school to graduate and get a degree and not necessarily to party and step shows.

When asked about the social demands of fraternities, Huey said:

> Oh, those are major distractions. Because sometimes if you have a step show, I know you're going to have to prepare for it and sometimes practices are going to be after class. So you're going to have to take some time off from your studies. So [social demands] could be, in my opinion, the [biggest] distraction.

Amiri also articulated the strains social demands placed on members of BGLOs as college students; however, he believed it was important to be involved in the social aspects because it's when he had a chance to publicize his fraternity:

> I would say it definitely puts a strain [on us as students]. It does make it a little more difficult because you have to really prioritize. But I think sometimes your priorities change where you have maybe a step show coming up. I think your priorities change even though you know that it's more important to study for an exam. But if you don't do well on the exam, that's more of a private thing, whereas, if you mess up in the step show it's a public display. So you're more likely to [try to avoid] the public humiliation of the social thing. So I feel like [social demands] definitely can be a tricky thing.

He later defined the social demands as politicking, something BGLO members

had to do:

> I guess as far as the social [demands], it's kind of this political thing where you're forced to participate in certain parties and things like that because you have to. The politics of it is that you have to [be visible amongst your peers] a lot of the time. And that can take away from whatever other things you have to do.

During the focus group session, a member of Billie Holiday Sorority reflected on Black

Greeks on campus and shared that they are not putting in as much time into their studies

as they put into the social aspects:

> I see how easy it is for people to get lost in this world of Greekdom….The time that people are putting into these parties, they're not putting into their studies….People go to parties and they won't do their homework, they can't keep up their grades, [and] they can't keep up their GPA. But it's so easy to get lost [like] that. Then it becomes an academic downfall because of social pressure.

When we met the second time, Robin talked about how members of BGLOs can get

engulfed in the social life by explaining how she was graduating in a few weeks;

however, she was more excited about Greek programs coming up than finishing some

academic projects she had not completed:

> Sometimes you forget about why you come to school. Right now is the best example for me. I graduate in May. So right now I'm going through the motions of my classes and I'm so excited about step shows that are coming up so I can see my [new sorority sisters] step. I'm so excited about the program I'm going to tonight for a fraternity. I'm so excited for all these other things and I've yet to pick up a book today, [but I need to] cause I have a project due in two weeks. But I'd rather prepare for that program that's tonight and get excited for that because I get to fellowship with other BGLOs. So that's probably the only time when something negative could happen. You get so distracted and so engulfed with how happy the social life is that you tend to slowly forget [about academics].

Once the participants became members of their organizations, they became very

popular on campus. They attributed their popularity to the three Greek letters they wore

across their chest; however, they welcomed the spotlight as a part of being members of

their organizations. With the spotlight came demands to party, participate in step practices and step shows, and being in the limelight. Ultimately, while BGLO membership socially integrated the participants, the social integration was time consuming and as a result, sometimes became costly academically. While the participants did not articulate that partying, stepping and other social demands associated with BGLO membership influenced their goal to graduate, they did mention the social demands sometimes conflicted with assignments and grades as participants would sometimes put academics on the back burner for BGLO commitments. With enough missed assignments and affected grades, their increased social lives could eventually influence persistence towards graduation. So, while this form of social integration was a return associated with the social networks established in BGLOs, generally, their increased social lives appeared to be a negative return with regards to academics. This return also illustrated both academic costs and social capital can be outcomes of BGLO membership.

However, a member of Billie Holiday Sorority indicated the academic sacrifices they make should not be attributed just to BGLO involvement as the academic sacrifices BGLO members make are no different than the sacrifices other students make during college:

> I agree that it affects your GPA negatively but you also have to look at it in a broader standpoint. That's with anything that you get involved in that you're serious about. So I don't want to just pinpoint [BGLOs]. It's because I'm involved in a BGLO that my grades have gone down. No, it's because that I've taken that initiative to become involved in something other than my academics while I'm here and to actually strive to make a difference, that's why.

Here, a member of Billie Holiday Sorority articulates why BGLOs are no different than any other student organization that causes students to make academic sacrifices. However, based on the deeper bonds and commitments associated with BGLO

membership, I would disagree. BGLOs appear to be more time consuming than other types of student groups as illustrated by the "after 5" theme.

While the social aspects of BGLOs generally appeared to have negative influences on academics, participants did highlight how the social demands positively influenced their persistence. For example, during our second conversation Malcolm explained that he believed the social demands of his fraternity required him use any spare time he had wisely:

> [There was] one thing my father always told me when I was growing up. He said, "Whenever you play baseball in the fall or in the spring that's when [you] did the best in school." He said, "Because you're so busy with baseball and by the time you get home you don't have any other time but to do homework, so you're so tired you just realize [you] got to study, [you] got to knock this out. You don't have enough free time to just mess around." So it's the same thing with stepping. When you're stepping and when it's time to step you're like alright, I have to manage my schedule. I have to plan it out perfectly. I have to go to class. I have to go to work. Step practice may be at 7:00 tonight, am I going to go study before or am I going to go study afterwards. You have to plan everything.

Robin shared that in order for her to participate in the sanctioned social activities of her sorority she had to maintain a certain GPA. Because of those academic rules, she shared they helped her stay motivated academically because she wanted to stay active with her organization:

> In my organization you can't do any of those things unless you have the grades to do them. So I know in order to step and to party, and to even wear my letters in my [organization], that we have to maintain certain grades and we have to be able to finish school, and you have a certain amount of time to be done. As far as my [organization] we have set rules, set grades, set everything. Everything is laid out to you on a piece of paper upon your entry for you to understand what you need to get done before you can do all those other extracurricular activities.

While outliers, these two participants found positive academic outcomes associated with an increased social life as a return of BGLO membership. Malcolm believed BGLO membership and the many social demands made him more time-

conscious and Robin stated it served as motivation to keep up her GPA. I would argue time management skills and maintaining a certain GPA are important to persistence and I recognize that some students may in fact benefit academically as a byproduct of increased social lives.

"The pledging starts once you're a member": Organizational work. Once the participants became members of their organizations, managing chapters, and community service immediately became their responsibilities. Given the small sizes of their chapters, nearly every member had to hold some type of office; when they had an event every member had a significant role. Additionally, community service is an important component of BGLOs, which required the participants to spend even more time working for their organization. During the focus group with Michelle Obama Sorority, Oprah said as soon as she became a member she was immediately put to work and it was a culture shock trying to balance her new life of school, sorority work, and working full-time. Because of the added responsibilities her grades suffered that semester:

> You never had that chance to really adjust. It was like all of a sudden you go from not doing it to doing it all in a few weeks. And you just had no way to adjust it. And then on top of that, you had all of this stuff that you have to do. [When] we came in as [new members], [we were] a [young] chapter. There was nobody else in the chapter but us, so we had to learn the entire chapter almost alone. So on top of trying to save face and try to go everywhere and try to do everything…. And most of us [were] starting [our] junior and senior years. [Our] classes [were] getting harder, it was just a mess. So as soon as you made that transition you look in December at your grades and you were like wow.

Later in the conversation, Oprah talked about the sacrifices she began making for her organization. She held herself personally responsible for her organization even if it meant skipping a class reading or two:

> [My sorority] takes up a lot of time. [It's] a lot of work and sometimes at the end you're making the sacrifice for something that you have to do for the chapter

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versus that reading that you need to do. So it's like that with [Black Greek-lettered] organizations. That's the organization I have to work with. There are other people in the other organizations, but that's my organization. You make the sacrifice thinking that maybe later on you'll be able to pick that reading back up. But maybe that thing that you have to do for [Michelle Obama Sorority], or that thing you have to do for your organization, you need to do it at that moment. I think it's just the time [commitments] to be honest. But as we all know, by the time you get to the end of the semester you're burnt out. So that reading that you skipped in March is not going to get read in May and that's being realistic.

Oprah again articulates the costs associated with the returns from the social networks in BGLOs. A member of Billie Holiday Sorority, who served on the Pan-Hellenic Council (the governing body for BGLOs), stated that she could look at transcripts and could tell exactly when students became members of BGLOs:

> [I]f we're speaking strictly about academics, just because I'm on the executive board of our council, I will say that it does have a negative effect on your GPA and that's just because you have a lot more responsibilities. But not even that, you have to balance so much when you're in this type of organization. And you know obviously when people join. You can see a decline. Just look on their transcript. You can tell exactly when they joined because you can see their GPA fall.

Amiri served as president of his organization and during the study his organization consisted of only two members. During his first interview he explained how the small number of members in BGLOs can become stressful:

> BGLOs are a lot smaller in numbers as opposed to White fraternities and sororities. So [when] we have to run a fraternity with less than five members, then you have a lot more work to do, both in your fraternity and academics. So you have to stay on top of both. Just trying to do that, it [can] be stressful. So, it's a lot more work when you have less members[2].

Amiri articulates the small number of members that BGLO chapters typically had at RAU; this was probably due to the small number of African American students studying at RAU. Ultimately, the BGLOs on campus competed for the smaller amount of African American students who actually wanted to join a Greek organization. A member of Billie Holiday Sorority echoed Amiri's thoughts stating:

> [G]rades are our priority [as students]; but at the same time, [we] only [have] five or six people running the chapter. So clearly that's going to take up more of your time. That's going to hurt your grades, sadly.

Even though BGLOs have fewer members, Amiri stated that the Department of Fraternity and Sorority Life expected BGLOs to produce just as the larger traditional or White Greek-lettered organizations stating, "[Our] particular Greek administration asks us to do a lot and to do the same about of work that organizations with maybe 100 [to] 150 members do." When asked if the amount of work affected his persistence he stated:

> I guess the negative would be just having a lot to handle running a Greek organization. [It's] a lot of added responsibilities and that could sometimes take away from time studying. So, even if it's community service, that's still taking away time.

In my final conversation with Malcolm, I asked if he was ok with the academic sacrifices that he has made after he joined his fraternity. He responded:

> You have to be okay with [making sacrifices] because when you decide to join these organizations you have to know what you're setting yourself up for. It's not like you joined just for the social aspects, [so] that you could [just] have fun. It's hard work. [The older members] tell us the pledging begins once you cross. So it's true. All the hard work really, really began once I crossed. So I had to accept the fact that I may not have all the time to study. But it just makes me a better man because I have to balance everything.

With membership came organizational work. Work included the administrative duties associated with running a student organization, programming, membership intake, and community service. While learning how to run an organization could be viewed as a positive return of social capital, the work was demanding for the participants, particularly because of the small number of members in their chapters. However, the participants took

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2.The small chapters were demanding at RAU because the participants were required to do community service projects, have meetings according to the bylaws, induct new members, host social and academic programs, and meet other University and organization requirements. For example, A BGLO with 2 members was required to complete all the tasks of a traditional Greek organization that may have 75 members.

on organizational work as his or her responsibility and were ok with making academic sacrifices for the benefit of their organization. They talked about grades being affected because of organizational work; however, they did not mention organizational work influencing their goal to graduate. The participants again articulate academic costs that could be associated with the resources embedded in social networks.

"Implementing academic plans": Academic monitoring and support. The participants' academics were monitored once they joined BGLOs. The monitoring came through GPA requirements for BGLO members, structured academic plans developed by the chapter to monitor academic progress, and through informal monitoring by advisors, prophytes (older members), and current chapter members. During the focus group, a member of Billie Holiday Sorority explained, "[O]ur grades are definitely very important in this organization and to the campus as a whole [and] we have rules and regulations as far as our grades are concerned and they are non-negotiable."

Malcolm, who served as president of Harriet Tubman Fraternity, referred to an academic plan that he created to help fraternity brothers keep up with academics:

> So I implemented an academic plan which held every brother accountable. You had to give this piece of paper, which is signed by the chapter president, to your professor saying, "This is your organization, this is the organization's goal for the [chapter's] GPA and if you fall under that, please let [the fraternity] know." Every two weeks, you had progress reports where the professor would say what grades you're on target for based on attendance, or participation, or your homework. That's how we know how everybody is doing.

A member of Billie Holiday Sorority talked about a similar academic plan that her organization implemented. She stated it seemed like elementary school, but she knew exactly what she was going to receive at the end of the semester:

> I know last semester which was a pain, we had this academic plan. And the person who was in charge of our academic plan made us get these papers signed

by our teachers. Each of our teachers had to write a report saying, "Oh yeah, she comes to class." And every month we had to turn that in as a part of our academic plan to the chapter. It was for the whole semester. It was such a hassle and I'm like, I feel like I'm in elementary school. But looking back on it, it's like wow we were really on top of things. A lot of people said, "It kept me on top of my classes, I knew exactly what I was going to get at the end."

During the focus group with Billie Holiday Sorority, Robin talked about a 4.0 club that her chapter advisor implemented and how that motivated her and her sorority sisters academically:

> [S]he had a 4.0 club and I remember this year I said I was going to be a part of the 4.0 club. And last semester I received a 4.0 because I knew that was going to be my goal. And I've now set that goal for myself again this semester. So they help you set goals for yourself.

The participants' academics were also monitored in informal ways. Madam explained that the expectations of past members and advisors were all internal monitors of her and her sorority sisters' academics:

> I know within my chapter we are made up of very successful women. So I know our prophytes are expecting us to graduate and go on and do greater things. I know our advisors are [expecting us to graduate]; we expect great things from each other.

When we first met, Huey explained by simply being a member of his fraternity his academics and persistence were monitored and supported. He believed when he became a member of his organization, he signed on to the ideals and principles of his organization and that he had to "represent" his organization to the best of his ability because his academics were now a representation of his organization:

> [W]hen I was in the process of joining [Barack Obama Fraternity], all the time they [were] telling me, "Keep your grades up cause you know whatever you do is going to affect us." So you're encouraged to study more, [and] to have better grades….[L]ast semester was my best semester. I had the best GPA out of my entire college years. I think it was the fact that I was like if I'm joining this organization I might as well abide by their rules so I'm not going to make myself

look bad. And if I make myself look bad that's going to affect all my chapter brothers and all my national brothers.

Debbie also believed that when she became a member she was representing something larger than herself explaining:

[W]e want the sorority to always be known for good things; known for service, known for always having a good reputation. And one of the top things is that we want to be a group of women who really take their academics seriously.

When the participants joined their organizations, their academics were monitored by people who were interested in their academic achievement. Because of the social networks established through involvement in their organizations, members of their organization, Greek advisers, and organizational advisers all monitored their academics. Rather than persisting on their own, the participants had access to people within their social networks who were concerned about their academics. This monitoring of academics was not something their African American counterparts who were not involved in BGLOs were afforded, and was an outcome of the social networks established in BGLOs.

"I'm a role model": Leadership development. After becoming members of BGLOs, the participants were thrust into the spotlight as campus leaders and leaders of the Black student community. As members of BGLOs, administrators, members of their respective organizations, and their peers looked toward the participants to lead by example. The participants accepted the responsibility of leadership and being role models in many ways. For example, they were oftentimes executive board members of other Black student organizations and were primary sources of programming for Black students on campus. A member of Billie Holiday Sorority explained, "[W]e're held very

accountable. Just from hearing from like the [administrators] of the Greek community

here, they see us as the leaders of the Black community, period."

During our second conversation, Sean shared with me how peers looked at BGLO

members as leaders in the Black community and explained how members of BGLOs held

leadership roles in other Black student organizations:

> [P]eers look up to us as leaders in the community cause we are the ones doing all
> the programs and events and holding leadership positions such as the president of
> [Black student union]. [He] is a member of [a Black fraternity]. The [Black
> student union] is one of the largest organizations on campus. So I can say that we
> have a very strong and positive connection with our peers in the community.

A member of Billie Holiday Sorority self-identified as a leader on campus stating:

> [T]he most important thing is the representation of the Black community on this
> White campus as a whole. [B]ecause we are the leaders of the Black community,
> [we are] representing not just [our individual] organization, not just BGLOs, but
> this Black community.

As the participants accepted these leadership roles and developed as leaders, they

reflected on what that meant for them, and how that influenced their academics and

persistence. The participants articulated that the "leadership" title and being developed as

leaders required them to make sure they were setting good examples, particularly in

reference to academic achievement. Malcolm was adamant about being a leader and

setting examples for other students. In our second conversation, he explained that because

he was in the spotlight and representing his organization, he had to set and maintain

certain standards:

> As a leader I learned in my class you have to model the way. So being a leader
> you have to show that you have to do good in school. I'm still like everybody
> else. I want to do well in school [generally] but, I say you have the spotlight on
> you, [you're] like a celebrity. So it makes me want to work that much harder
> knowing that not only are my fellow peers looking at me more, but the University
> is looking at the [Greek GPA] statistics over the semester. They're saying, "Well
> [Harriet Tubman Fraternity and other BGLOs], their grades are not up to par

compared to the other Greeks on campus or the other cultural or social organizations." So being part of my organization makes me want to work that much harder to prove everybody wrong.

In his second interview, Amiri explained leadership as being the "elite" of the Black community, and that with this identification came certain responsibilities:

> I'd say I know that I'm a role model for a lot of different people and I'm expected to an extent, to be the elite of the Black community. To not only have these leadership position[s], but to actually make some sort of progress with those positions. And as far as academics, [I] would be academically involved in like various academic programs and as well as having a good GPA. [I] know that I have people looking up to me and they have certain expectations and me not wanting to let them down.

By becoming members of BGLOs, the participants were identified as campus leaders, particularly among the African American student community. So with social networks came social capital in the form of campus recognition as campus leaders and being developed as leaders. Being thrust into the spotlight as student leaders, the participants accepted the duty and they realized that going to class, maintain good grades, and leading by example were important characteristics of being student leaders. I suspect these duties positively influenced their persistence towards graduation as participants wanted to lead by example.

The participants of the study all found value in the social networks established in their organizations and articulated how the returns associated with the social networks influence their persistence in myriad ways. As part of this study, I also wanted to explore the influences of gender on the social networks established in fraternities and sororities. The following section highlights the findings and analysis of the gender-focused inquiry.

Gender, Intersectionalities and Social Networks

The importance of gender in the social networks gained when joining a Black Greek-lettered organization (BGLO) was different for the men and women who participated in this study. The research questions that guided my findings with regards to gender were:

1) In what ways, if any, does gender influence the ways in which social capital is gained via the social networks of BGLOs?

2) In what ways, if any, does gender influence how social capital influences the persistence of African American students at PWIs?

Ultimately, I wanted to know how, or if, participants interpreted gender as salient in their BGLOs (e.g. fraternities being an all-male group). While all the participants found value in social networks established in their organizations, men generally did not find gender important in the social networks established in fraternities; however, women did find gender important in the social networks established in sororities. The purpose of this section is to present findings on how the participants viewed gender in the social networks established in his or her fraternity or sorority. The themes that are introduced in this section are "It's No Big Difference," which introduces how men did not find gender as important in the social networks established in fraternities, and "It's Always She, and I Like That," which introduces the role gender played in the social networks established in sororities.

"It's no big difference": Gender in fraternities. While the men in the study found value in the social networks established via their BGLO involvement generally, they did not believe gender was an important component of the social networks

established in their fraternities; they generally overlooked any impact of fraternities being all-men groups. During our second conversation, Sean explained how, as Black men, he and his fraternity brothers share experiences but he then goes on to explain even though they share experiences, the fact that they are involved in all-male groups is not important and they could gain just as much being involved in co-ed organizations. He stated:

> I don't think [gender is] so important; that [we are] all men. I mean we all relate in the same way, [and] cope with the same issues that men do. But as opposed to being in a [female or in a co-education group], I don't think it would be a big difference. Because regardless, we're all in the same [organization], all have the same goals, [and] the same interests. So, I don't think that [being in a co-educational group versus a fraternity] would really matter too much.

A member of the Harriet Tubman Fraternity further explained that there are not major differences in fraternities and sororities, and they gain the same support even though the groups are gender specific:

> I feel like it's no big difference [in fraternities and sororities]. Being a man [rather than a woman] and being affected by social networks [established in fraternities versus sororities]. If we were females in a sorority, I'm sure it would be the same way [as if you were a male in a fraternity]. [They have] the sisterly figure [where we have the brotherly figures] and then the older chapter sisters are like the motherly figure [where we have the fatherly figures]. So I don't think it's different because one is you're male and one is you're female.

Another member of Harriet Tubman added that gender was not important in his college experiences and everyone's experience in college regardless of gender was equal. He stated, "Here, everybody's on the same playing field. Nothing is different because you're a man or woman. Everything is on the same playing field no matter what."

As illustrated by the quotes above, the men who participated in the study generally overlooked gender inequalities and what gender meant in the social networks established in fraternities. While the men articulated racism existed on the campus, they appeared to overlook sexism on campus. I question how their maleness, being a dominant

identity, or their masculinities caused them to overlook the role of gender in the social networks established in fraternities.

While the men generally agreed that gender was not important in the social networks established, Amiri viewed things differently. He was the only man who participated in the study who found the "gendered" social networks established in fraternities as salient. During our first meeting, he shared that he believed that because fraternities are all-men groups, they serve as a special support group for Black men on a White campus. Amiri said:

> The brotherhood, the all [male] gender aspect, just having that support group of Black males which is kind of rare at on a PWI [is important]. I just feel like that [Black male support] helped the most cause I guess I was struggling more with being a Black male on a predominantly White campus more so than with academics.

Amiri also found that the connection with Black men in fraternities was important because the members served as role models for Black men and fellow fraternity members. He believed that these types of role models were more important than celebrities:

> [J]ust the role modeling thing [is important]. Just having examples, visible examples and it's not like people you don't know, its people that you know on a personal level. So you see the good and the bad of everyone [in your fraternity], and you see real people. And, I think that's a better role model than some political figure or some celebrity you don't really know.

Amiri, who articulated the importance of identity throughout the study, did find value in Black fraternities as "gendered" social networks.

"It's always she, and I like that": Gender in sororities. The women in the study found the social networks gained in their sororities as salient with regards to gender. Many of the women joined these groups intentionally because they were joining a

predominantly Black, all-female group and believed that sororities allowed them to operate in safe spaces that were rare on a predominantly White campus and within co-ed organizations. Additionally, the women believed that their shared experiences as Black women amongst sorority sisters, whom they often referred to as role models, were important in the spaces created through sorority involvement.

During the focus group, a member of the Michelle Obama Sorority referred to the focus on women in her sorority as "powerful." Below she talked about how her sorority references just women in language they use in their publications:

> I like, I really actually love, how it's an all-women group. I think it's really empowering that everyone in our organization is a woman. Everything is done by us and when we talk about the national president we say, "She." Everything in our books says, "She." There's no he, and I'm so happy because I hate reading stuff and it's the generic he, or a he/she. It's always she, and I like that.

In our initial conversation Oprah explained how she felt that sororities were empowering as sororities are independent organizations and not extensions of fraternities:

> It's empowering that we have our own thing. The sorority is not just a little auxiliary of the fraternity. You're a part of a Greek-lettered organization that is for women and that's not the same thing as a Black Greek-lettered organization that's for men. It's almost [like the founders] respected [sororities enough] in saying that [they're] not just part of [fraternities].

Shared experiences were also important in the "gendered" social networks established through sorority involvement. Many of the women mentioned how as African American women, they share certain experiences and being involved in a sorority with other women who share those experiences is important. Robin talked about how African American women share experiences and that the "gendered" social network established in her sorority was important for her. She explained how her sorority is different from co-

ed organizations, particularly the Black Student Union, because of the experiences she

shares with her sorority sisters:

> We've all gone through the same things. We can sit down [and] we all have the same exact stories, if not the same a derivative of something similar but we have all been through at least one thing exactly the same, [becoming a member of our sorority]. And the fact that we made it through that together, we should be able to make it thought everything else together. And the [Black Student Union] ain't got nothing on a line sister because they weren't there when the times were hard. They weren't there when I was crying. They weren't there when one of my line sister's grandmother passed away. [The Black student union] wasn't there for that. So it takes a different type of person. I think it takes a sister to actually be that drive and motivation for me.

Later in the conversation, she discussed the differences between being a woman and a

man:

> I think a female goes through things differently than a male does whether it's a co-ed line [or group]. I still think the female experience is completely different than the male experience. I'm going to continue to say that because a female goes through things completely different than males do. So gender is important because [a sorority sister or woman is] coming from a similar background as me. We come from similar hardships. We come from similar heartaches and similar pains.

During her second interview, Debbie reflected on how African American

women's college experiences and the professional goals they set are oftentimes

characterized as atypical because of who they are. So joining a sorority where women

shared those experiences and goals was important for her:

> It's extremely important that we're women, let alone that we're African American women. In the chain of society, African American women are pretty much down at the bottom. So we don't really want anybody to expect anything less of us than the normal stereotypes that are already out there. My mom, and I'm pretty sure this is for a lot of African American female's mothers, always said, "You have to be ready at all times, you have to be three times better than the person that's sitting next to you. [Other people] have opportunities in life, but you as [an] African American female, you don't. You have to be on your ones and twos at every moment." And my roommates, [who are] also my line sisters, we're all in fields where being an African American female can be rough. I have a roommate who's getting ready to go to Harvard University for graduate school. You don't really hear an African American female saying that. I have another roommate

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who wants to go into the medical field. And then I have another roommate who wants to go into the sports management side of things. So these are all fields that are very dominated by males, and us being African American [women], we have to push though that stereotype and be as close to perfection as possible.

Lastly, the women found that being involved in a group of Black women who were educationally and professionally motivated helped them move towards their educational and professional goals. In our final conversation, Madam explained how seeing her sorority sisters achieve was a motivation to persist:

> I guess just having a group of women around you that is interested in the same things, they're on the same path to graduating, and going on to getting their master's degrees, or [attending] law school, [or attending] medical school. So I think it's just good to have that positive influence around you. It's helped me just stay on track with graduating and just knowing that you're around people who are doing the same thing as you.

Madam added how being in a co-ed group could change those dynamics as motivation could become more of a competition:

> I think just being around a lot of like-motivated Black women also helps. And instead of being in like a co-ed group, I guess just seeing women move towards graduation and you just want to be a part of that. You don't want to be left behind. And then with co-eds, it's more competition because males, I guess sometimes you might think that they might get a job before you do, or they might get accepted into law school or med school before you.

As gender was clearly important for the women in the study, a member of the Billie Holiday Sorority even went on to talk about the importance of fraternities for Black men on predominantly White campuses. She believed that Black men on White campuses have it hard because of certain stereotypes. She also explained that fraternities are important in assisting Black men navigate White campuses:

> I think that fraternities are great for Black men. I think they do a lot. Because if you're not an athlete here at this school, I feel like sometimes the Black men on this White campus doesn't always know [their] place and [they] can really get lost. I think it's much worse for them just because they are really at the bottom of the totem pole as far as the way they're looked at just because of what other Black

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men are doing out in the world. So I think that fraternities really give some kind of guiding light to people who don't really have a place yet here.

In sum, gender was salient for the women in the study; the women even articulated a value in Black fraternities for African American men on a predominantly White campus. I posit gender inequalities play a role in the women's emphasis on gender. Additionally, the importance of the intersection between race and gender was evident as the women shared their experiences within sororities. The "gendered" social networks within sororities also appeared to positively influence persistence.

While race, gender, and the intersection of the two are important in the lived experiences of all of the participants, gender and the importance of gender in the social networks established in their organizations differed between the men and women in the study. On one hand, while the men found the social networks established in their fraternities significant in many ways, they did not interpret gender as being significant in those social networks. The men generally thought that the experiences of men in fraternities were similar to the experiences of women in sororities and gender was not an important factor, although Amiri disagreed. I question what role their maleness and masculinities played in their articulation of the importance of gender. On the other hand, women found the social networks established in sororities as significant with regards to gender. The women shared that the organizational structure of their sororities, their lived experiences as women, and role models within their sororities were all valuable with regards to gender and how gender influenced the social networks developed within their organizations. Additionally, when asked if "gendered" social networks were important, many of the women used the phrase "Black women" rather than "women." While I highlighted earlier that one woman participant thought Black men were at the bottom of

social statuses, another noted, Black women are "at the bottom of the totem pole." In sum, participants indicated that while racial and gender inequalities shaped their lives as Black women on a predominantly White campus, Black sororities provided support systems that enabled them to navigate their college experience more successfully.

Conclusion

While all of the participants identified as African American, they were from very different backgrounds and entered Ralph Abernathy University (RAU) with varying levels and forms of social capital. While many of them were not aware of social capital as a sociological construct, most of them articulated the social capital gained via the social networks established in their organization. After joining BGLOs, the participants shared that they received benefits because of their social networks established in BGLOs and the benefits assisted them in navigating a predominantly White campus, which is what I have defined as social capital. While all of the participants found value in the benefits gained via the social networks established via BGLO membership, when asked about the value of gender in the social networks established through BGLO involvement, gender was only salient for women.

When the participants became members of BGLOs they established meaningful relationships and connections, their social lives increased, their academics were monitored, and they were provided leadership, administrative, and community service experiences and development. While some of the returns sometimes had negative influences on academic outcomes such as GPA or completed assignments, the social capital gained influenced their persistence positively.

The conditional matrix (Figure III) illustrates the relationships of the themes that emerged. The participants' experiences at a PWI are framed as *inequalities* and contextualized their college experiences. The participants choosing to join BGLOs and mobilizing those social networks are framed as *capitalization*. Established relationships and connections, increased social lives, academic monitoring, and being provided leadership, administrative, and community service experiences and development are framed as *returns*. While the inequalities sections do not directly address the research questions, I included them in the figure to help readers conceptualize the students' broader experiences at RAU. The *returns* section highlights the outcomes associated with the social networks established via BGLO involvement, what would ultimately be viewed as social capital gained through social networks.
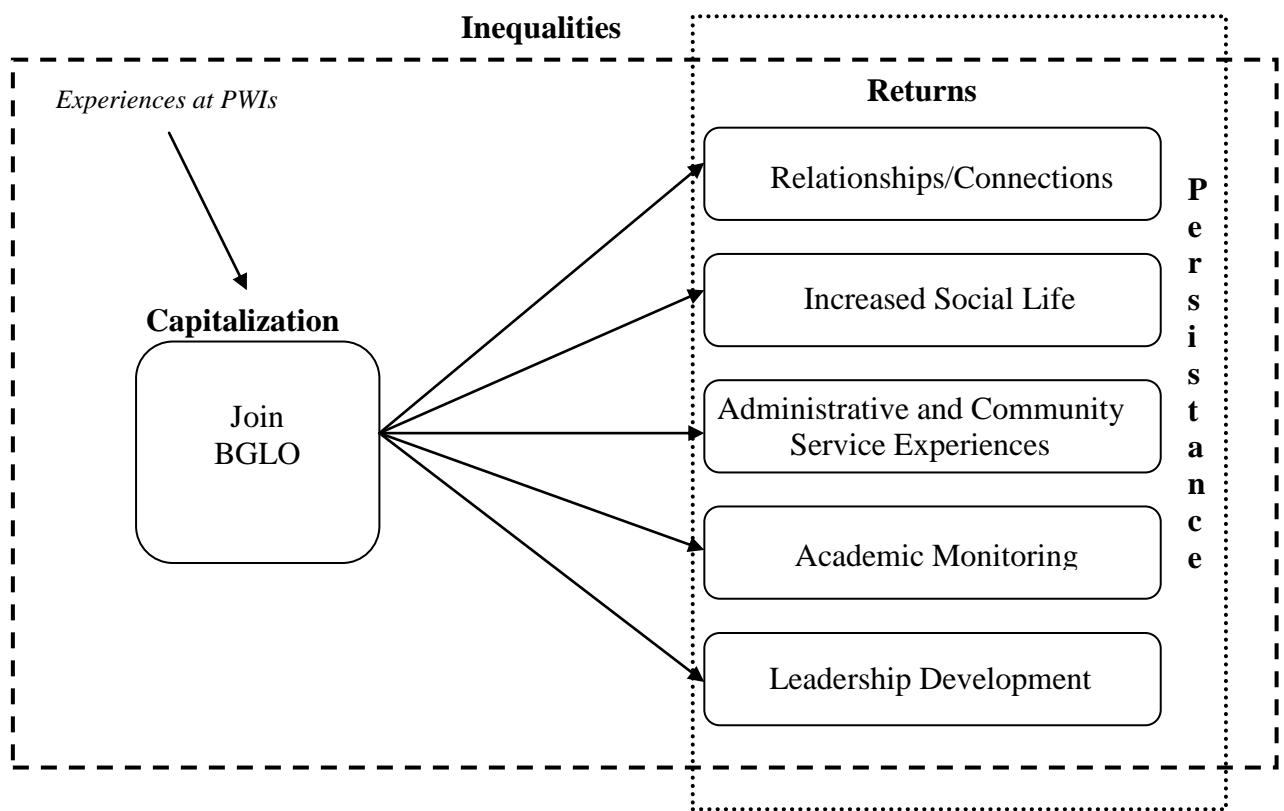
Figure III. Grounded theory of the influences of Black Greek-lettered organizations on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions. Adapted from "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital," by N. Lin 1999, *Connections, 22 (1),* p. 42.

Chapter VI – Discussion of Findings, Implications for Practice, Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored how Black Greek-lettered organization (BGLO) involvement influences persistence as mediated through the social capital gained in BGLOs. To shape this study I used Lin's (1999) network theory of social capital, which posits that social capital is embedded in resources in social networks. As the participants in this study joined their respective BGLOs, they gained social capital through the social networks established in his or her BGLOs. In turn, they received resources, which were presented as "returns" in this study. Returns included: 1) relationships/connections, 2) increased social lives, 3) community service and administrative experiences, 4) academic monitoring, and 5) leadership development. Within this chapter I discuss the findings of the research questions and how the findings interact with existing literature. Next, I suggest implications for practice. Finally, I close with recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

1) In what ways, if any, is social capital gained through African American students' participation in BGLOs? In Harper's (2008) study on high-achieving African American males at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), he noted that African American men accessed social capital through leadership in student organizations and engagement in campus activities. Additionally, he added that minority-focused organizations provided African American men with social networks which generated social capital – capital that they used to navigate a PWI. McClure (2006) added that Black fraternities are important social networks for African American men and provide men social capital as fraternities served as means of social integration and connected

them with the college campus. The findings from both studies were replicated in this study for African American men. Additionally, in this study I found that African American women who joined BGLOs also benefited from the social capital gained in BGLOs.

Furthermore, African American student engagement literature suggests that African American students seek on-campus ties and out-of classroom experiences to socially integrate on predominantly White campuses (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), and that those ties reduce campus departure (Fisher, 2007). These findings are all consistent with the findings in this study as students found their BGLO involvement connected them to the campus and their peers, as well as served as a form of social integration. Ultimately, minority social networks are important in the social integration and persistence of minority students at PWIs. These networks provide students with social support and social networks (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999), which become social capital while minorities navigate PWIs as indicated in this study.

2) In what ways, if any, does social capital influence the persistence of African American students at PWIs? Davis (1991), Fisher (2007), and Mayo, Murguia, and Padilla (1995) found that being engaged on campus through formal social integration activities had positive effects on the GPAs, persistence, and college satisfaction for African American students. While my study did not measure GPA, engagement in BGLOs was supportive of persistence and college satisfaction. However, Guiffrida (2004) found that while involvement in African American student organizations supported academic achievement, over-involvement was sometimes harmful to academic achievement. Within BGLOs, Harper (2000) suggested that potential negative influences

included, but were not limited to, excessive programming and chapter commitments, hazing, and step shows. These findings were supported by my study as participants told me that increased social lives and the demands of community service and administrative experiences within BGLO chapters sometimes hindered academic outcomes such as GPA and completion of assignments. In sum, involvement in BGLOs generally had positive influences on the participants' persistence. However, while the participants persisted toward graduation, sometimes GPAs and assignments were not as stellar as they could have been. Does persistence toward graduation outweigh a 3.0 GPA, or vice versa? If so, who decides which is more important for a student? There are academic tradeoffs associated with BGLO involvement that should be further explored.

3) In what ways, if any, does gender influence the ways in which social capital is gained via the social networks of BGLOs; and, 4) in what ways, if any, does gender influence how social capital influences the persistence of African American students at PWIs? Many studies seeking to investigate the experiences of students in BGLOs focus on men (i.e. Harper, 2008; McClure, 2006). Additionally, BGLO studies that have included both men and women have not explicitly examined gender differences (i.e. Kimbrough, 1995; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). In this study, I intentionally highlighted the gender differences that emerged. While both men and women found value in the social networks established through BGLO involvement in this study, only women found gender to be salient in the social networks established in BGLOs.

When asked about the importance of gender in Black sororities, the women in the study articulated that they found value in being in a Black-female affinity group and

articulated that the "gendered" group affected their persistence. I would posit this was because of the intetersectionalities of their social identities, particularly their experiences as Black women. Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2010) define intersectionalities as "unique perspectives, social institutions and identities [that] are created by the ways in which intersecting identities and related social structures create fluid and complex 'wholeness' in and among individuals and groups" (p. 38). The intersections of race and gender as multiple oppressors were evident for the women in the study; Black sororities served as identity-based social support systems that helped the women participants navigate a PWI where those oppressions were oftentimes reinforced.

The men in the study generally did not find gender to be important; however, they did find race as important in the social networks established in their respective BGLOs. Several scholars have researched African American maleness and masculinity (e.g.. Dancy, Harper, Harris) and how African American men navigate through college as "gendered beings" (Dancy, 2010). Furthermore, scholars have examined the effects of African American faculty and staff (e.g. Cuyjet, 2006) and African American peers (e.g. Harper, 2006) on college outcomes. However, the influences of the interpersonal relationships established between African American men in student groups (e.g. Black fraternities, the Black Men's Collective at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey) and how those peer relationships influence college outcomes are virtually unexplored. In this study the men did not find gender significant in the social networks established in fraternities; however, they found the social networks, generally speaking, beneficial. I question how "social role expectations" or "cool posing," which is African American males acting according to prescribed masculinities (Dancy, 2007; Harris, Palmer, &

Strove, 2011), or, how my maleness influenced their answers. Additionally, Dancy (2007) has suggested that all-male African American programs should look for ways to involve women because the men in his study "received an informed sense of cultural understanding within these diverse cultural spaces" (p. 304). As the men in this study de-emphasized maleness in fraternities, how were the men in this study reinforcing Dancy's recommendation? Ultimately, this finding should be further explored.

Implications for Practice

Predominantly White institutions. This study revealed that minority and African American student organizations continue to be important for African American students. Out-of-classroom experiences and social integration via extracurricular activities can be positive influences for African Americans attending PWIs (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Additionally, minority social networks can be beneficial for minority populations attending PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). In findings that support the literature, the participants found that their BGLOs supported them academically and socially and assisted them in navigating the campus; however, the participants indicated that BGLOs were different from other forms of student organizations. Because of the unique structures of BGLOs, the participants became life-long friends, family, and role models for each other. These "deeper bonds" positively influenced the participants' persistence towards graduation. Ultimately, higher education institutions should invest in, and support minority student organizations – particularly BGLOs. Minority student organizations are ideal starting points for institutions as creating student organizations require little time and money. The organizations would only need institutional support, recognized charters, supportive

advising, and the support of the national organization if there is a national governing body for the student organization. Additionally, the women in the study found gender to be salient in the connections made through their sororities. Ultimately, programming and support specifically for Black or minority women might be useful on college campuses.

  Greek-lettered organization administrators. As suggested by McClure (2006), BGLOs must be understood as different from traditional or White Greek-lettered organizations. Many of the participants shared that their Department of Fraternity and Sorority Life held them to the same standards of traditional Greek-lettered organizations because they did not understand their unique histories and overlooked the fact that African Americans were a small percentage of the student body on campus. Given African American enrollments at PWIs, some BGLO responsibilities should not equal those of traditional Greek-lettered organizations. Suggested readings for Greek-lettered organization administrators are: *Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* by Lawrence Ross, *Black Greek 101: The Customs, Culture, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities* by Walter Kimbrough, and *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision* edited by Tamara Brown, Gregory Parks, and Clarenda Philips. Practical suggestions may include revisiting membership quotas given BGLOs' different intake guidelines and the limited number of African American students on predominantly White campuses across the nation; having Greek advisors specifically for BGLOs; and more holistically, embracing and learning about the histories and purposes of BGLOs beyond the hazing and stepping aspects. As this study illustrated, there are many benefits for BGLO members beyond those topics.

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BGLO members depend on Greek administrators to make important decisions on behalf of their organizations, so Greek administrators should be equipped to meet their needs.

Black Greek-lettered organizations. BGLOs foster leadership development, classroom engagement, social integration (Kimbrough, 2001; Harper, 2008, McClure, 2006) and persistence at PWIs as indicated in this study; therefore, BGLO governing bodies should fully support the petitions for new charters at PWIs. However, BGLOs sometimes hinder academic outcomes because of increased social lives and excessive programming (Guiffrida, 2004; Harper, 2000). As such, BGLOs should closely monitor members' academics once they join. Additionally, BGLO governing bodies should reexamine the number of community service, programs, and parties chapters are required and/or allowed to have per semester. That way, through improved academic monitoring, BGLO membership would not become overbearing for collegiate members. While the "deeper connections" established in BGLOs is a result of the social networks established and benefits persistence, BGLO governing bodies have to closely monitor chapters in order for students to excel academically beyond persistence.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the research approach used in this study and the findings, I make several recommendations for future research on the influences of BGLOs on the persistence or academic achievement of African Americans within college settings. First, as research on the influence of BGLOs on academics is virtually unexplored, I would recommend replicating this study with a larger number of participants across different predominantly White institutions. Within this study I found that relationships/connections, increased social lives, community service and administrative experiences, academic monitoring,

and leadership development were all "returns" after joining a BGLO, and the collection of these "returns" supported persistence in different ways. To gain a broader understanding and further support for these themes, larger qualitative studies should be undertaken.

Second, researchers should use this research as baseline, or pilot data to conduct quantitative studies. Surveys could be developed to quantify the effects the various returns that emerged have on persistence; various statistical analyses could inform researchers of how the quantitative analyses support the qualitative data, are contrary to the qualitative findings, or support some themes but not others. Additionally, from quantitative research, scholars could make broader generalizations. For example, scholars could make comparisons between African American students involved in BGLOs to non-Greek African American students at PWIs comparing academic measures such as GPAs.

Third, similar studies should be done at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs have had success educating African Americans and have provided social college experiences very different from those at PWIs. Studies that examine how BGLOs influence persistence at HBCUs would be beneficial as scholars would learn what is working and what is not working within historically Black institutions. Similar studies at HBCUs would also give researchers data to compare the influences of BGLOs on academics at HBCUs to BGLOs at PWIs, and could inform practitioners and BGLO governing bodies of the different approaches they should use in monitoring students at different types of institutions.

Fourth, similar studies should be done at different types of PWIs. In this study I used a large, public research intensive institution. Studies at different types of PWIs (e.g.

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small, liberal arts, private, different geographical locations) would allow researchers to explore any differences in the influences of BGLOs on persistence or academic achievement at different types of PWIs, and could inform practitioners and BGLO governing bodies of the different approaches they should use in monitoring students specifically at those institutional types.

Fifth, similar studies should be done for Hispanic fraternities and sororities. By doing so, researchers and practitioners would be informed of the similarities and differences that exist between BGLOs and Hispanic Greek-lettered organizations (HGLOs), and practitioners and institutions would be better prepared to serve HGLOs and Hispanic students.

Lastly, studies examining the intersectionalities of identities should be further explored. Many studies examine identity-based support systems through one facet of a student's identity (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation). Within this study, the intersection of gender and race was salient for women; however, the importance of gender in fraternities was not evident for men. Increasing research on the intersectionalities of identities and the psychosocial implications of identities on the experiences of college students would be beneficial as colleges would be better prepared to serve more students rather than trying to serve groups of students with broad brushstrokes.

Conclusion

This study explored how African American students' involvement in BGLOs at a PWI influenced their persistence, as defined by their goal to graduate, placing emphasis on social capital generated through the social networks established in BGLOs. As higher

education institutions become more diverse, it is important to ask these types of questions because it is the responsibility of colleges and universities to graduate the students they admit.

The findings in this study indicate that African American students gain forms of social capital within BGLOs at PWIs and that BGLOs support persistence at PWIs. However, other academic outcomes, such as completed assignments and GPA, can sometimes be hindered by BGLO membership. Additionally, the findings in this study indicate that gender is salient in the social networks established in Black sororities. The women in the study indicated that race and gender shape their lived experiences and their experiences at a predominantly White college and that culturally relevant social support networks gained through BGLO involvement influenced their persistence. This study expanded on the current literature on BGLOs while placing emphasis on persistence as studies on academic achievement and BGLOs have been under-researched.

Within this study, I shared the lived experiences of twelve students through focus groups and a series of one-one-one interview sessions. Their stories were presented to inform scholars, practitioners, members of BGLOs, and students interested in becoming members of BGLOs about the academic outcomes associated with joining BGLOs at PWIs.

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Appendix A

Sample Focus Group Introduction Letter

Date

Dear Name:

I have identified NAME OF INSTITUTION as an institution where I would like to do the primary data collection for my dissertation and this email is a request for the CHAPTER of FRATERNITY/SORORITY to be involved in my dissertation research. The title of my dissertation is: *Are they truly divine? A grounded theory of the influences of Black-Greek lettered organizations (BGLOs) on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions.*

You are being asked to reflect on your experience so that higher education researchers and I may learn more about the relationship between BGLO involvement and the persistence of African Americans at PWIs. I am interested in research on BGLOs because I believe they offer African Americans myriad benefits during and after college. Because of this belief, I decided to become a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

If your organization is willing to participate in the study, I would like to forward you the focus group consent document, explaining your involvement and the study in further detail, to share with your organization (preferably members involved for a full academic year). I would also like to speak with you about scheduling a time when I could meet with the group. You may contact me at mitch530@umn.edu or (585) 281-7244 if you need any additional information. Look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Donald Mitchell, Jr.

Sample Focus Group Consent Form

Project Title: **Are they truly divine? A grounded theory of the influences of BGLOs on the persistence of African Americans at PWIs.**
Principal Investigator: **Donald Mitchell, Jr., PhD Candidate, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, & Development, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to explore the influences of Black Greek-lettered Organization (BGLOs) on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This research is being done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and will be included in my dissertation. I am interested in research on BGLOs because I believe they offer African Americans myriad benefits during and after college. Because of this belief, I decided to become a member of the St. Paul-Minneapolis (MN) Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. on November 8, 2008.You are being asked to reflect on your experience so that higher education researchers and I may learn more about the relationship between BGLO involvement and the persistence of African Americans at PWIs. You are being invited to take part in this study because you are an African American student involved in a BGLO at a PWI.

PURPOSE OF CONSENT FORM
This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. If you choose to participate, I will need verbal consent.

PROCEDURES
I will meet with you one time the next academic school year. I will meet at a location that is convenient for the group and allows for privacy during the focus group. The focus group will last about 60 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY
The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the study include: emotional or psychological discomfort. All of the interviews will be conducted in a way that should not inflict any harm. However, the interview questions do ask for you to be reflective of your experiences and that may be uncomfortable. If you feel like talking about your experience is too much, I will stop the focus group. If at any point you decide that you no longer want to participate in the study, you can leave the study. I believe the risk of emotional or psychological distress is very minimal. I do not know if there are any

benefits from you being in this study. However, I hope that I will learn from your experiences.

COMPENSATION
As a thank you for participating in the study, lunch or dinner will be provided during the focus groups.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY
The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your consent forms, demographic data, and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. Your name will not be on any of the data. All of the data will be locked in my file cabinet. Results will be reported in such a way that you cannot be identified. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

Additionally, one aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of the focus group sessions. This will help me as I go through and analyze the information I receive from all of the participants. After the focus group session I will have the data transcribed, double check the transcription against the audiotape, and then destroy the audiotape. The transcriber and I are the only ones who have access to the tapes. However, the transcriber will not know your identity. I would like the focus groups to be safe spaces to share your thoughts openly; however, I must make you aware that your peers may share things from focus groups. However, anything you say to me, or that I have on record, is between you and me and completely confidential.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY
If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You also have the option of skipping any question that you do not want to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, I may keep information about you and this information may be included in study reports, or you can elect to withdraw your information from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:
Donald Mitchell, Jr., MS   (585) 281-7244   mitch530@umn.edu
Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, PhD   (612) 626-5996   ropers@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Participant Information Sheet

Fraternity/Sorority_____ **Legacy?** _____ Yes _____No

Age_____

College (i.e. College of Education, College of Business) _____

Major_____

Minor _____

Class (i.e. Junior, Senior) _____

High School GPA (Be as accurate as possible) _____

College GPA_____

Future Educational and/or Career Goals_____

_____

_____

High School (check all that apply) ___ Public ___ Private ___Charter ___ Other

(Please explain) _____

___ Predominantly White ___ Predominantly Black ___ Diverse

Family Background (Check one) ___ Two-parent ___ Single-parent _____ Guardian(s)

Household Income (Check one)

___ below $25, 000 _____ $25,000 - $50, 000 ___ $50,001 – $74, 999

___ $75,001-99,999 ___ $100,000 and above

How many people lived in your household growing up? _____

Are you a first generation college student (Check one)**?** (Did your parent(s) or
guardian(s) attend or graduate from college)___ Yes _____ No

Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol

1) Briefly tell me about yourself and the family you come from.

2) How, or why, did you decide to attend a PWI?

3) Tell me about your experiences as African Americans on a predominantly White campus?

4) What are some things from your past that influences your experiences?

5) Why did you decide to join a BGLO?

6) Why did you choose your organization in particular?

7) In what ways, if any, have the social networks within your organization influenced your college experience?

8) In what ways, if any, have the social networks within your organization influenced your persistence towards graduation?

9) In what ways, if any, does gender matter in the social networks facilitated by your fraternity/sorority?
What are the influences of those gendered social networks on persistence?

10) What are some of the academic and/or social outcomes of being involved in a BGLO, both positive and negative?

11) Of course you were you before being in a BGLO. So, what personal characteristics have you maintained during your experience at a PWI while being involved in a BGLO, both positive and negative?

12) Where does intake, pledging, and hazing fit into the social networks established in your fraternity/sorority?

13) Of all of the ideas we discussed, what is the most important?

14) Is there anything else anyone wants to add?

Appendix E

Sample Interview Introduction Letter

Date

Dear Name:

Thank you for participating in my focus group. I am interested in exploring your particular experiences in further detail through one-on-one interviews. Your participation would be critical in gaining a better understanding on BGLOs and their influence on the persistence of African Americans at PWIs.

If you are willing to participate in the study, I would like forward you the interview consent document, explaining the study in further detail. I would also like to speak with you about scheduling a time when we could talk. We would talk about three to four times, either face-to-face or via telephone, over the academic year. You may contact me at mitch530@umn.edu or (585) 281-7244 if you need any additional information. Look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Donald Mitchell, Jr.

Appendix F

Sample Interview Participant Consent Form

Project Title: **Are they truly divine? A grounded theory of the influences of BGLOs on the persistence of African Americans at PWIs.**
Principal Investigator: **Donald Mitchell, Jr., PhD Candidate, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, & Development, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to explore the influences of Black Greek-lettered Organization (BGLOs) on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This research is being done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and will be included in my dissertation. I am interested in research on BGLOs because I believe they offer African Americans myriad benefits during and after college. Because of this belief, I decided to become a member of the St. Paul-Minneapolis (MN) Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. on November 8, 2008.You are being asked to reflect on your experience so that higher education researchers and I may learn more about the relationship between BGLO involvement and the persistence of African Americans at PWIs. You are being invited to take part in this study because you are an African American student involved in a BGLO at a PWI.

PURPOSE OF CONSENT FORM
This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. If you choose to participate, I will need verbal consent.

PROCEDURES
If you participate in this study I will talk with you three to four times over the next academic school year. When we meet face-to-face, we will meet at a location that is convenient for you and allows for privacy during the interview. Each interview will last about 45 to 60 minutes. After all the interviews are done I will ask you to review the analysis in a focus group, which is a discussion with all the interview participants. The focus group is to make sure I have correctly understood your experiences. If you agree to take part in this study as an individual, your involvement will last about six months.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the study include: emotional or psychological discomfort. All of the interviews will be conducted in a way that should not inflict any harm. However, the interview questions do ask for you to be reflective of your experiences and that may be uncomfortable. If you feel like talking about your experience is too much, I will stop the interview. If at any point you decide that you no longer want to participate in the study, you can leave the study. I believe the risk of emotional or psychological distress is very minimal. I do not know if there are any benefits from you being in this study. However, I hope that I will learn from your experiences.

COMPENSATION

As a thank you for participating in the study, you will receive $50.00 gift certificate to a store of your choice.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your consent forms, demographic data, and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. Your name will not be on any of the data. All of the data will be locked in my file cabinet. Results will be reported in such a way that you cannot be identified. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

Additionally, one aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of the interviews. This will help me as I go through and analyze the information I receive from all of the participants. After each interview I will have the data transcribed, double check the transcription against the audiotape, and then destroy the audiotape. The transcriber and I are the only ones who have access to the tapes. However, the transcriber will not know your identity. I would like the focus groups to be safe spaces to share your thoughts openly; however, I must make you aware that your peers may share things from focus groups. However, anything you say to me, or that I have on record, is between you and me and completely confidential.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You also have the option of skipping any question that you do not want to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, I may keep information about you and this information may be included in study reports, or you can elect to withdraw your information from the study.

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<u>CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS</u>
If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:
Donald Mitchell, Jr., MS   (585) 281-7244   mitch530@umn.edu
Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, PhD   (612) 626-5996   ropers@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix G

Initial Interview Protocol

1) Tell me about yourself and the family you come from.

2) What were your academic and social expectations in attending a PWI? What influenced these expectations?

3) How, or why, did you decide to join a BGLO?

4) In what ways, if any, have the social networks within your fraternity/sorority influenced your college experience generally? How is that different from your African American peers who are not involved in BGLOs?

5) In what ways, if any, have the social networks within your fraternity/sorority influenced your college experience as related to your persistence towards graduation?

6) In what ways, if any, does gender matter in the social networks facilitated by your fraternity/sorority? What are the influences of those gendered social networks on persistence?

Appendix H

Round Two Interview Protocol

1) How do you define persistence?

2) In what ways, if any, has membership in a BGLO been beneficial in establishing relationships with administrators, faculty, staff and peers?

3) In what ways, if any, does being a leader of the Black community influence your persistence?

4) In what ways, if any, does your "celebrity"[3] status influence your persistence?

5) In what ways, if any, do the social demands (i.e. stepping, intake, parties) of being involved in a BGLO influence your persistence?

6) In what ways, if any, do your relationships with your line brothers/line sisters influence your persistence? Given this, how important is the fact that your line brothers/line sisters are male/female?

7) In what ways, if any, do the administrative and community service demands of being in a BGLO influence your persistence?

---

3. The students in the study stated once they joined BGLOs they became popular amongst their African American peers. "Celebrity" status is used to explain their popularity after joining BGLOs.

Appendix I

Final Interview Protocol

1) In what ways, if any, is extracurricular involvement during college important to your persistence?

2) In what ways, if any, have you ever made academic sacrifices because of the demands of your fraternity/sorority? Are you ok with those sacrifices? Why or why not?

3) Reflecting on all of our conversations, have you learned anything surprising about your BGLO experience?

4) Out of everything we have discussed, what would you say is the most important?

5) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix J

Vita

Donald Mitchell, Jr., a native of Portsmouth, VA, received his bachelor's of science in Chemistry from Shaw University (Raleigh, NC), the oldest historically Black institution in the South, in 2006, and his master's of science in educational leadership from Minnesota State University (Mankato, MN) in 2007. He has served as a research assistant, instructor of educational leadership, and graduate recruitment and retention specialist within higher education. His professional, honor, and social affiliations include the Association for the Study of Higher Education, the American Educational Research Association, Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, Free and Accepted Masons (Prince Hall Affiliated), and he is a life member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

Donald joined the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (formerly the Department of Educational Policy and Administration) at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities (Minneapolis, MN) in 2007, pursuing the doctor of philosophy degree in educational policy and administration with a higher education concentration.

Donald's research interests include: Black Greek-lettered organizations, race and gender in higher education, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, students' experiences navigating higher education, and qualitative research methods. His dissertation titled, *Are they truly divine? A grounded theory of the influences of Black Greek-lettered organizations on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions* qualitatively explored how Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) serve as a form of social capital for African Americans at predominantly White

institutions through the social networks established via BGLO membership, and how the social capital gained influences persistence. Donald has published in the *Journal of Experiential Education* and has presented papers at the Association for the Study of Higher Education, the International Conference of the Association of Experiential Education, the Faculty Resource Network National Symposium, and the National Conference on Students in Transition. Donald graduated with the doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities in 2012.