2022

Academic Success and Persistence: African American Males and Divine Nine Fraternities at Small Predominately White Institutions

Tavares Hunter
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Tavares T. Hunter

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Felicia Blacher-Wilson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Kathleen Kingston, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Givens, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Academic Success and Persistence: African American Males and Divine Nine

Fraternities at Small Predominately White Institutions

by

Tavares T. Hunter

MA, Walden University, 2015

BS, Methodist University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

The research on African American male students in higher education has increased over the past few decades, revolving around preparation, access, sense of belonging, retention, and persistence. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the perceived experiences of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors of how participation in Divine Nine Greek Life fraternities may have impacted academic success and persistence to help solve the problem of low academic achievement among African American males in higher education. The conceptual framework of Astin's theory of student involvement, specifically the idea that students' investments in their educational experiences contribute to the likelihood that they persist in their academic endeavors, grounded the study. In this study, nine African American male graduates, advisors, and current students at predominantly White institutions in the Southeastern United States were interviewed about their perceived experiences of participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities and the possible impact on their academic success and persistence. The data were analyzed using open coding and software to group collected information accordingly. The key findings in the research found that joining a Divine Nine fraternity provides access to an accepting group in a college community and essential support for African American males to attain academic success and persistence at small predominantly White institutions. Providing overall support to African American males in higher education can lead to positive social changes in society and allow them provision to excel academically.

Academic Success and Persistence: African American Males and Divine Nine

Fraternities at Small Predominately White Institutions

by

Tavares T. Hunter

MA, Walden University, 2015

BS, Methodist University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2022

Dedication

To my wife, Cannie- the love of my life, for the rest of my life. You have been the
most supportive person throughout this entire process. This is for our future.

Acknowledgments

Jeremiah 29:11 is not just words, it is truth, and I would first like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To my dissertation committee, Dr. Felicia Blacher-Wilson and Dr. Kathleen Kingston- you pushed and pulled me through this. On my hardest days, you never gave up on me. Thank you for your wisdom and guidance throughout this journey. To my wife Cannie, you have been my rock. Love Never Fails! Thank you for your sacrifice, tough love, and continual belief in me. To my mother, Beverly McCain, a mother's love carries you even when you can't see it. Thank you for your unending support. You always said I could be great. To my grandmother, Wilhelmina Burton, this is your legacy. To the strongest man I know, my father, Jerome McCain- your drive, and your display of strength in life is what kept me pushing in all my educational endeavors. To Ronald Hunter, the best parts of you are the best parts of me, and that makes me proud to be your son. To Tamika Hunter, I love you big sis; thank you for always believing. To Uncle Darryl Nance and Uncle Skip Burton, you two are my inspirations and examples of men who love and care for family. To Momma Retha Bethea, I believe you saw this from the beginning, thank you. To Toney Bethea, the smartest man I know, I've learned so much from you as my father-in-love. Thank you for guidance and inspiration. To Rachel Bethea, my favorite sister-in-love, I hope this serves as inspiration for you to reach your dreams and goals. To all my family, friends, teachers, coaches, pastors, and church family, thank you for your unwavering support. To all my ancestors looking down from Heaven, thank you for laying foundations before me to walk a path I never dreamed of traveling. Manhood, Scholarship, Perseverance, Uplift.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 1954, *Brown vs. Board of Education's* landmark decision ended racial segregation in U.S. schools. After years of integration efforts from the 1960s through the 1980s, African American enrollment in postsecondary education has increased steadily. However, African American students' academic outcomes in higher education in the post-Brown era varied (Newman et al., 2015). Historically, African American students have experienced continual challenges in the U.S. education system despite 60 years of struggle and reform since *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Green et al., 2017). Education for African American students continues to be mired in the nation's failure to provide equal access and educational equity (Green et al., 2017). In Chapter 1, I provide the background, problem, purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, and nature of this proposed study. I will then detail this proposed study's definitions, assumptions, limitations, and significance.

Background

Brooms and Davis (2017) stated that research on African American male students in education has intensified over the past few decades. Campus climate has been identified as a major detriment to African American student success at historically White institutions (Black & Bimper, 2017). Previous higher education research on African American males has revolved around their preparation, access, retention, and persistence issues. It is vital to enhance the experiences, efforts, and success of campus climate engagements by having an environment that supports African American males (Brooms, 2018b).

Black Greek Letter Organizations were founded in the early 1900s during racial strife, intolerance, and a societal view that academic education for African Americans seemed impractical (Anderson & Smith, 2016). The racial isolation on predominantly White campuses and social barriers of class created a need for African Americans to align themselves with others who share common goals and ideals (Anderson, & Smith, 2016). Premised in public service, and amidst some denial of memberships in White fraternities, African American males began creating student organizations to support one another, increase persistence, and foster camaraderie (Druery & Brooms, 2019). According to Druery and Brooms (2019), African American student organizations served as outlets for college students' engagement.

Problem Statement

The problem continues to be the low academic achievement of African American males at predominately White institutions (PWI); (Gipson & Mitchell, 2017). Black Greek fraternities (i.e., the Divine Nine) were established to increase African American males' support in academic and social engagement and shape their civic commitments on all college campuses across the U.S. (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). There is a gap in the literature regarding the participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities and its implications for African American males' academic success and persistence at small PWIs (Harper, 2015). Previous general studies have focused on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), but very few have been conducted with PWIs in the Southeastern region of the United States. There have also been different studies on Black male initiatives at historically White institutions that include various mentoring programs

to help enhance the academic experiences of African American males (Brooms, 2018a). However, Divine Nine fraternities were not included in these studies.

African American males' academic success and persistence are among the lowest of all racial and gender groups in higher education (Brooms, 2018a). A possible way to improve African American male academic success and persistence is through participation in organizations on campus, including Greek organizations (Walker et al., 2015). Divine Nine organization members are predominantly African American (Jones, 2017). The organizations consist of four sororities for women, (Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho) and five fraternities for men (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, Iota Phi Theta); (Anderson & Smith, 2016). The national data of the U.S. Department of Education from 2011 showed that the college graduation rate for African American males was 33.1% with only 34% graduating from 4-year institutions over 6 years (Brooms, 2018a). More than two thirds of all African American males who enter college will leave before earning their college degree, decreasing the graduation rate (Sinanan, 2016). Teaching experts increasingly considered student engagement to be a reliable indicator of educational and academic success (Mercadal, 2017). The involvement of African American male students in on and off-campus student activities, and on-campus clubs and organizations, can directly affect their motivation and success in completing academic goals and remaining in higher education programs (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Studies have indicated that engaged students are less likely to fail academically or drop out of school (Mercadal, 2017).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. It is essential to uncover how Divine Nine fraternity participation efforts can influence overall African American males' success and persistence through a supportive campus environment (Brooms, 2018b). Uncovering this information will add insight into the impact of African American male students being involved in activities to help increase their academic success and persistence.

Research Questions

RQ-1: What aspects of Divine Nine participation most impacted your academic success and persistence?

RQ-2: What most impacted your decision to participate in a Divine Nine fraternity?

RQ-3: How does advising a Divine Nine fraternity help to create academic success and persistence for African American males at a PWI?

Conceptual Framework

Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement formed the conceptual framework of this study. Astin stated, "the greater the investment students make in their educational experiences, the more likely they are to persist in their educational endeavors" (p. 67).

While the student involvement theory can include a wide range of activities for student participation, this research study will focus on African American males in Divine Nine Greek fraternities at PWIs. Involvement in Divine Nine Greek fraternities encompasses the student's experiences through academics, social and civic engagements, on and off-campus activities, and living and working on campus (Roksa & Whitley, 2015). Astin's theory covers a wide array of student experiences from their classroom and academic interactions to their involvement in extracurricular activities and living and working on a college campus. Astin also stated that involvement is the physical and psychosocial investment of energy into an object such as the college experience. The results of the study will add insight into the impact of students being involved in activities to help increase their academic success and persistence.

Nature of Study

In this research study, I employed a basic qualitative design to develop an understanding of the participants' experiences, concepts, and opinions. This differs from a quantitative approach which would have been used to focus on the amount of success the participants have had in their undergraduate experience. The participants of this study were African American male students, graduates, and advisors who are members of a Divine Nine fraternity. I explored how participating in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity may impact the academic success and persistence of African American males in their years of enrollment up to the completion of their undergraduate degrees. Research data were gathered by interviewing African American males regarding their thoughts and experiences on how participating in a Divine Nine Greek organization aided in their

academic success and persistence. I collected, coded, and analyzed the data from the interviews to form the results of the study.

Definitions

Academic success: The extent to which a student has achieved their short- or long-term educational goals by maintaining a grade point average (GPA) that is in good standing with the university and consistently progresses toward graduation (Jones, 2017).

African American: A person having any origins of Black racial groups of Africa (Belgrave & Allison, 2018).

BGLOs: Four sororities for women (i.e., Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho) and five fraternities for men (i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta); (Anderson & Smith, 2016).

Divine Nine: Nine international Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) that make up the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC); historically, African American fraternities and sororities collectively referred to as The Divine Nine (Jones, 2017).

HBCUs: Established under the Morrill Land Grant Act and allowed African American students the opportunity to attend college; African Americans were not accepted into predominantly White institutions (PWIs) until separate but equal was overturned- (Allen et al., 2020); The main access point for African American college students who sought to achieve economic and social mobility through higher education (Sinanan, 2016).

*PWIs: H*igher learning institutions in which White students account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Karkouti, 2016).

Student engagement: Ways in which students interact with their studies, peers, teachers, extracurricular activities, and all other factors related to their educational experience- (Mercadal, 2017).

Assumptions

In this study, I explored how participation in Divine Nine Greek Life fraternities may impact the success and persistence of African American male students at PWIs. The participants were current students, graduates, and advisors that are members of the Divine Nine fraternities. The first assumption is that participants may not answer interview questions honestly because of loyalty to their fraternity. Support and camaraderie are fostered in Black student organizations (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Therefore, allegiance to their fraternity may have caused participants to exaggerate their responses to decrease any negative outlook on the organization.

The second assumption was that the participants may not have needed individual guidance from an advisor to help with motivation and encouragement towards academic success and persistence. Advisors are in place to support students in their sense of belonging and academic endeavors having been through similar experiences (Sinanan, 2016). However, some students may have personal goals or are highly motivated and may not need the extra support.

Although the campus environment can be different at a PWI, participants' experiences in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity may offer students a sense of belonging

and support. Through developing a better understanding of participants' experiences, this study may potentially show that involvement in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity can impact African American males' academic success and persistence.

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem of low academic success and persistence of African American males justified the need to explore how participation in Divine Nine Greek organizations may provide opportunities for improved outcomes. Druery and Brooms (2019) asserted that barriers and the lack of resources to help African American males find their sense of belonging could be more evident at smaller PWIs. In this study, I focused on African American males at small PWIs in the southeastern region of the United States. The participants were 9 African American males that are currently enrolled at a PWI and members of a Divine Nine Greek fraternity, the advisors of a Divine Nine Greek fraternity on a PWI campus, and African American Divine Nine fraternity members that are graduates of a PWI within the last 3 to 5 years.

Research has been conducted on different programs on college campuses that are in place to potentially help African American males; however, they did not focus on their academic success and persistence. Skipper (2005) emphasized that student social and academic integration related to retention, stating that social integration involves the degree to which students feel their values, beliefs, and behaviors are in congruence with the social norms on campus. Students must locate at least one community in which to find membership and the support membership provides. More insight into Divine Nine Greek fraternity organizations' support and academic standards may help in

understanding the impact of involvement in the fraternities on students' academic success and persistence. While this study was conducted in the southeastern region of the United States, it may potentially be transferable to small PWIs in other regions of the country with similar participants and populations.

Limitations

The study participants were 9 African American males that are members of a Divine Nine fraternity at PWIs in the Southeastern United States. My goal was to recruit four currently enrolled students, four graduates, and two advisors that have completed school and/or advised a Divine Nine fraternity within the last 3 to 5 years. One of the limitations of this study was that it included a maximum of 10 participants, which may not be enough to reflect the population's perspective. I explored common themes and experiences among participants. While I do not have an instructor relationship with any of the potential participants, another limitation may be that current or former students at the institution of my employment may see me in an advisory role and feel uneasy in sharing their responses or be concerned about anonymity. To address the limitation, I made sure the objective of my research was clear, shared how the information I gathered would be used, and assured the confidentiality of their responses and personal information.

Significance

College students must be devoted to their academic schedules, which include, but are not limited to class assignments, projects, class attendance, and study groups. It is also important for students to participate in social activities, such as athletics, fraternities

or sororities, and various clubs and organizations that present opportunities to grow as an individual (Thibodeaux et al., 2016). In this study, I explored how African American males' involvement in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity may impact their academic success and persistence at a PWI institution (see Armstrong & Jackson, 2017). Student involvement is essential to academic achievement and ensuring that students have a thriving college experience (Wilson et al., 2016). Once students are committed to an institution of higher learning, the focus on academics along with engagement, or finding a place where they can increase their participation role on campus, can help them find activities in which to participate (Wilson et al., 2016). I conducted this study to determine how positive participation in Greek Life activities in college could help increase practices to aid in the academic success and persistence of the African American males at PWIs.

Implications for Social Change

Education for African Americans has evolved since the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision for integration. With these opportunities in higher education, the hope is that African American males will find a place to thrive on PWI campuses that will allow them to be successful academically. Opportunities for faculty and staff to embrace differences in race, bringing reassurance to African American males in the higher education learning environment, may bring about positive social change. This type of social change can lead to African American males being positive role models on their campuses as well as leading in their communities and jobs after graduation. Stereotypes and racial barriers can also be dispelled and opportunities for African American males to thrive academically and socially.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the background, problem, purpose, conceptual framework, and nature of the study. The definitions, assumptions, limitations, and significance were also provided. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature on the topic and conceptual framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males' involvement in Divine Nine Greek fraternities helps African American males increase academic success and persistence at PWIs in the southeastern United States. African American males' academic performance in higher education is the lowest of all ethnic groups and genders (Sinanan, 2016). According to Sinanan (2016), African American males' lack of a sense of belonging is an issue on PWI campuses, and Black males at PWIs are treated in stereotypical and dehumanizing ways.

In this chapter, I provide information on the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and literature review related to key concepts about African American males in higher education throughout different periods. I also discuss the role of Divine Nine fraternities in the higher education of African American males to promote academic excellence, success, and mentorship with specific academic standards for membership and advising. Fraternities display the purpose of positive educational and social values that lead to African American men's success (Jones, 2017). The overall outlook presented is that joining a Divine Nine Greek fraternity may benefit and increase African American males' academic success and persistence.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review of this topic includes peer-reviewed articles and journals published within the last 5 years of research. I retrieved the articles from different libraries and sources through multiple databases accessed through the Walden Library, Methodist University Library, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. The main

databases used were ERIC and SAGE Journals. There were different terms used to obtain information on the research. The keyword search terms used were *African American males, predominantly White institutions (PWIs), Black males, higher education, sense of belonging, racism, mentorship programs,* and *the Black Male Initiative.*

Conceptual Framework

Astin's theory of student involvement formed the conceptual framework of this study. Astin (1999) stated, "the greater the investment students make in their educational experiences, the more likely they are to persist in their academic endeavors" (p. 67). While the student involvement theory can include a wide range of activities for student participation, in this research study I focused on African American males in Divine Nine Greek fraternities at smaller PWIs. Involvement in Divine Nine Greek fraternities encompasses the student's experiences through academics, social and civic engagements, on- and off-college campus activities, and living and working on campus (Roksa & Whitley, 2015). The theory of student involvement consists of concepts on the amount of time members spend engaging in community service, sports, and other extracurricular activities instead of studying and going to class. I conducted interviews to obtain information from the participants on how their organizations helped with their academic success and persistence.

Another theory that supports Astin's student involvement theory is Tinto's student departure theory. In this theory, Tinto suggested that the degree to which a student is integrated into colleges' academic and social environments determines whether a student will remain enrolled at a college (Skipper, 2005).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

African Americans in Higher Education

Before the early 1800s the African American population was prohibited from learning to read, write, or attend college to obtain a degree; however, today, African Americans are enrolling in higher education institutions all over the country (Karkouti, 2016). In 1823, Alexander Lucius Twilight was the first known African American male to attend and graduate from college (Skiljaica, 2018). Twilight received a bachelors degree from Middlebury College in Vermont. A college degree was uncommon in a time when African American people did not have the same open educational rights and privileges as their European American counterparts. As time progressed, the number of African Americans that obtained a degree grew, but there was still not an equal number of African Americans receiving education compared to European Americans. In 1823, after Alexander Twilight graduated from college, there was a surge in higher education for African Americans, but only through what is now known as HBCUs (Skiljaica, 2018).

The first college on record for African Americans is Cheyney University, located in Pennsylvania, which started in 1837 (Harper, 2019). According to Allen et al. (2020), Historically Black Colleges originated as normal schools to train African American teachers to educate African American children in the South. In 1867, Biddle Institute located in Charlotte, North Carolina was established to train Black men and women to become teachers so they could teach other formerly enslaved Blacks (Brosnan, 2019). Since the earliest days of freedom, formerly enslaved men and women demanded access to education because approximately only 5% of the enslaved population could read by

1860 (Brosnan, 2019). These HBCUs segregated African American students from southern public institutions viewed as the province of White students. The continued growth of African Americans in higher education was evident in HBCU growth in the United States. HBCU institutions produced many African American male college graduates during the Great Depression up to the Civil Rights movement. However, landmark court cases in the 1950s and 1960s changed the scope of education. According to Newman et al. (2015), the landmark decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 ruled that all segregation in public schools was inherently unequal and ended racial segregation after years of tumultuous integration efforts in previous years, although higher education institutions in the northern region on the United States had already begun integration.

African American students entering PWIs experienced psychological challenges from negative campus climates (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 led to affirmative action programs that were intended to improve economic opportunities for African Americans (Rui, 2016). Although African Americans continued to face obstacles to equality in education, the era of overt discrimination attempting to rectify the history of systematic inequitable access to higher education still existed for African Americans and other disadvantaged groups (Allen et al., 2020). According to Allen et al. (2020), African American students make up 13% of current college students; however, in 1976, they only constituted 9%. Historically, most PWI institutions have had a lengthier history of excluding African Americans than inclusion, which caused conduct that hindered interaction across racial and ethnic lines (McClain & Perry, 2017).

Academic Performance of African American Males in Higher Education

There has been an increase in African American males' attendance in college; however, the number of African American males attending PWIs have decreased throughout the years (Armstrong, 2019). African American males' academic success and persistence are among the lowest of all racial and gender groups in higher education (Brooms, 2018a). Academic disparities persist between African American males and their gender and ethnic counterparts (Simmons, 2019). According to Gipson and Mitchell (2017), this is especially true at PWIs. African American males graduate from college at a 36% rate compared to African American women at 47% (Robertson, & Chaney, 2015). Other ethnic groups' academic performance rates are European American males at 60%, Asian males at 40%, and Latino males at 40% (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). On average, the African American male student population is relatively small at less than 20% of the student population on White-dominated campuses (Armstrong, 2019). There is a need for PWIs to develop practices that enhance undergraduate African American males' academic and social experiences (Simmons, 2019).

Academic achievement is also strongly associated with stimulating meaningful learning by clearly presenting information, relating it to the students, and using conceptually demanding learning tasks (Schneider & Preckel, 2017). Researchers have studied different ways to improve African American males' academic performance at PWIs by examining various mentoring program initiatives that may improve academic performance and persistence. Research has stated that fraternal membership can amplify the educational outcomes of students in the direction of entering academic ability (Hevel

et al., 2015). More than two-thirds of all African American male college students who enter college leave before earning their college degree, which results in the highest attrition rates among all races (Sinanan, 2016). African American male students are often behind schedule and have fewer credit hours towards graduation, which results in extended years in college beyond the traditional 4 years (Rui, 2016). Being behind academically prolongs graduation or can disqualify African American male students from earning a degree. When African American males can participate in higher education, and well-conceived and formalized support systems are put into place to promote achievement they succeed in academic settings (Sinanan, 2016). Involvement in a network with a strong academic orientation is also important to the success of African American males (Rui, 2016). The importance of social interaction, active involvement, and student engagement are critical factors for promoting college success (McClain et al., 2015).

Support systems such as faculty advocates and Student Affairs professionals at HBCUs also promote academic success. Faculty-student interaction is the most critical component of a student's satisfaction with college (Gipson & Mitchell, 2017). Teachers' lack of positive affirmation and stereotypical viewpoints (i.g., Black males are stupid, academically incapable, or thugs) can contribute to the failure syndrome (Robertson & Chaney, 2015). The failure syndrome refers to the idea that when teachers attribute negative characteristics to African American students, they may underperform academically (Robertson & Chaney, 2015). African American males enter college and

eventually psychologically withdraw because of self-defeating attitudes and behaviors due in part to few positive academic experiences (Patterson, 2020).

Many factors can contribute to the lack of success of African American males in higher education. Robertson and Chaney (2015) contended that two fundamental factors are financial concerns for African American male college students and the ability to find a connection or sense of belonging. African American males are disproportionately more likely than Whites to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and they are less likely to have prior exposure to educational milieus like PWIs, which makes the social adjustments and academic success at PWIs more tenuous. Sinanan (2016) also said that since African American males are more likely to grow up in residentially segregated neighborhoods, they more than likely possess negative social networks that host poor schools and provide limited academic preparedness for college. Academic identification and dis-identification have led researchers to believe that negative stereotypes have a drastic impact on Black males, and these perceived stereotypes are considered to serve as a barrier to a positive academic domain for Black males (Newman et al., 2015). Unfortunately, these realities coalesce to undermine chances for optimal academic success for African American males in college; however, involvement in campus organizations can positively influence persistence to graduation due to the amount of time and effort students place on activities to encourage academic success during college (Gipson & Mitchell, 2017). According to Gipson and Mitchell (2017), the students' involvement occurs most frequently in cultural organizations for African American college students. Researchers have found that interaction with peers plays a critical role

in academic high achievement for students of color (Armstrong, 2019). The academic integration of African Americans into the campus life of PWIs is important for social engagement, student leadership, and psychological well-being (Armstrong, 2019).

Divine Nine Fraternities

The NPHC is a collection of nine Black Greek organizations supporting African American students on college campuses across the United States and internationally (Jones, 2017). Each organization in the Divine Nine was founded on different dates between 1906 and 1963. The Divine Nine's original name is the NPHC, formed on May 10, 1930, on Howard University's campus in Washington, DC (Jones 2017). The Divine Nine is not the council's official name, but it is the most common name recognized and used amongst students on college campuses. The Divine Nine organizations members are predominantly African American and consist of four sororities for women, (i.e., Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho) and five fraternities for men (i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, Iota Phi Theta); (Jones, 2017). The first Black Greek fraternity was established in 1906 (i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha) and the last one in 1963 (i.e., Iota Phi Theta). These organizations increase African American males' support in an educational setting and shape their social and civic engagement on college campuses across the United States (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Fraternities hold a contested place in higher education and society and foster positive relationships with other students to provide a connection to the college and promote increased engagement (Bowman & Holmes, 2017). The purpose of the Divine

Nine fraternities in its creation was to establish a community of African American males that would uphold a standard of education, civic duties, and social activism (Anderson & Smith, 2016). Each fraternity has a distinct code of ethics for its members' education that the founders of the organization put into place that conveys a motto or principles that establish their commitment to upholding their values of societal contributions.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. has a principle of manly deeds, scholarship, and love for all humankind (Alpha Phi Alpha, n.d.), while Kappa Alpha Psi, Fraternity, Inc. has a motto of achievement (Kappa Alpha Psi, n.d.). Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. has four cardinal principles of manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift, as well as a motto of "friendship is essential to the soul" (Omega Psi Phi, n.d.). Phi Beta Sigma has a motto of "culture for service and service for humanity" and promotes brotherhood, scholarship, and service (Phi Beta Sigma, n.d.). Iota Phi Theta's mottos are "building a tradition, not resting upon one!" and "it takes a man!" (Iota Phi Theta, n.d.). These mottos and principles are in place to motivate African American males to succeed in education and to continue beyond the educational field and into their careers. These fraternities hope to promote, standards that help college men understand that they have an academic duty to perform at a high level and keep a commitment to society. This commitment is to fulfill civic duties to enhance their communities by keeping them accountable with academic standards and social service (Chambers, 2016).

African American Males' Sense of Belonging in College

The sense of belonging construct was developed as an alternative concept to social integration for understanding how students of color may develop a sense of

membership in a university community at PWIs (Brooms, 2019). "Double

Consciousness" is a term brought about by a notable African American historian and

scholar W. E. B. Dubois that double consciousness is defined as always seeing oneself

through the eyes of others, which enables the feeling of belonging (Wright, 2018).

African American males generally feel out of place entering higher education (Brooms,

2018b), and underrepresented student groups face difficulties in their success at PWIs

(Franklin, 2015). A sense of connectedness with others is a core yearning that influences

how individuals engage with and react to others in a social setting, particularly found in

college (Newman et al., 2015). Experiences within college, connections with peers,

involvement beyond the classroom, and external activities can positively predict and

impact a sense of belonging (Brooms, 2019). The perception is that students must go

through a process of separation from precollege communities and transition into college

life so that they can maximize the possibility of academic success (Museus et al., 2017).

African Americans experience feelings of not belonging on a PWI campus even before

entering the institution based on their socioeconomic status in society such as low-income

environments, poor school districts, and other factors (Franklin, 2015). Some African

American students who attend PWIs can also experience internal tensions such as

feelings of violence but not acting on them, regarding their cultural identity and the desire

to acclimate (Sinanan, 2016).

  The impact of a racial society in the United States has been a long-standing

obstacle for African Americans (The Kerner Commission, 2018). This racial difficulty is

especially evident in African American males, as they continue to seek to build a better

reputation in the educational setting and raise better performances and graduation rates in higher education. African American males have indicated that they do not feel welcomed or safe on PWI campuses which stifles their trust and lessens their feelings to belong (Parker et al., 2016). Peers, administration, and faculty target African American males through negative stereotypes that create less of a sense of belonging (Newman et al., 2015). Black students often look for comfort among one another and find enjoyment in each other's friendship due to personal motivators and experiences (Brooms, 2019).

The integration of schools in the 1960s was a step forward in providing passages for African Americans to intermingle with White students in college; however, with the integration, the graduation rates are still relatively unchanged (Jones et al., 2018). 21st century, African American males at PWIs continue to face a unique set of social circumstances such as racism and cultural biases, that have led to feelings of social isolation and were prevalent during earlier times like the Civil Rights movement (Sinanan, 2016). Historically, Black Greek fraternities allow African American men to develop deep meaningful relationships and provide a portion of a sense of belonging (Brooms, 2019). Involvement in groups such as Greek fraternities allows African American students to give back to their community and gives purpose and belonging (Jackson & Hui, 2017). African American students who had the luxury to participate in non-ethnic organizations did not do so because of their inherent feeling of being disconnected (McClain & Perry, 2017). However, joining ethnically oriented student organizations reflects the sense of belonging of African American students (Jackson & Hui, 2017). With the proper guidance, joining Black male initiative programs will also

increase a sense of belonging (McGuire et al., 2020). Therefore, the importance of having examples to follow and mentor leadership can help guide African Americans in obtaining academic success in higher education (Sinanan, 2016).

Mentorship of African American Males

Mentoring is a rich tradition in our general society and its importance is paralleled in the historical and philosophical foundations of African American adults in higher education (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Therefore, it is evident that for success in higher education to become a reality for African American males, they must be adequately prepared, given access to, and properly supported by those that have already been through a similar experience (Sinanan, 2016). The goal of mentoring programs for African American males in higher education is to provide them with opportunities to connect with African American faculty as support systems but also to reduce alienation, provide access to informal social networks with faculty and academic professionals, and improve academic achievement and retention (Green et al., 2017).

African American male students strongly depend on their integration into higher education institutions' academic and social systems including social activities such as joining a fraternity (Sinanan, 2016). Although inquiries into African American male students' success in higher education have increased, research on their experiences in Black male mentoring programs remains much needed (Brooms, 2018a). Many of the retention and mentoring programs such as Brother2Brother and Student African American Brotherhood focus on increasing the retention and academic success of Black male students, especially at PWIs (Brooms, 2018a). Druery and Brooms (2019) stated

that BMI programs allowed students to build positive connections with peers and better understand the intersection of race and gender. They also serve an important role in providing avenues for Black males to gain the academic and social resources needed to excel in college. Creating an environment for African American males on college campuses to help them succeed is important for academic success and that is shown through having positive mentors. Bringing together students, invested faculty members, and role models as mentors create a community that offers alternative images of what it means to be Black men. This effort offers a safe place for self-expression and contributes critical support to Black males' academic performance (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

The presence of positive African American role models on PWI campuses is an essential factor for African American student retention and academic success (Green et al., 2017). There continues to be a lack of African American faculty and staff for students to identify with at PWIs (Green et al., 2017). Meaningful interaction between African American faculty and students has proven invaluable in African American males' academic and social development and coping. Also, successful mentoring programs have increased retention, academic success, and degree attainment of African American males (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Several studies have identified faculty mentors and role models as institutional agents that provide critical sociocultural capital for Black males in college (Brooms & Davis, 2017). The presence of African American professors typically enhances the level of engagement in the classroom; however, African American males have relied on their interactions outside the classroom, especially with African American professors, for their social adjustment (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Meaningful supportive

relationships with faculty and staff at PWIs can positively influence African American males' satisfaction with their college experience (Strayhorn, 2016).

African Americans Experience Racism in Higher Education

African American males have experienced racism in education in a process of dehumanization, which is a reinforcement of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as dumb jocks, and black male criminals from the local community who do not belong on campus (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). The concept of "White normativity" was brought forth to help understand racism from a White person's perspective. White normativity is summarized by saying White people are people and that White people are not always superior to other races (Morris, 2016). This concept suggests that African Americans especially males, have a distinct advantage athletically because they are more like animals than humans. While this distinction is a stereotype, it suggests that African American athletes do not possess the cognitive qualities to excel them forward in academic achievement (Morris, 2016). Since the impact of campus racism on African American males can be attenuated by strong racial identity, the ability to successfully navigate potentially hostile racial terrain is crucial to the matriculation of African American men (Sinanan, 2016). According to Sinanan (2016), discrepancies in the number of Black males that graduate from PWIs and HBCUs suggest that the PWI classroom atmosphere may hinder these men's academic success. Consequently, the impact of race, the classroom environment, and the interactions between Black males and White faculty members become paramount. Having courses that could help African

American students identify and reflect their interests could be a deterrent to the racial climate by helping with giving African Americans a sense of belonging.

Universities are experiencing increased pressure to demonstrate their utility to society, meet the demand of increasingly diverse students, and apply knowledge of research toward solving societal problems (Mwangi et al., 2018). African Americans have negative perceptions of their campus climate due to racial/ethnic hostility, inequitable treatment, microaggressions, isolation, tokenization, lack of representation, and overt racism (Mwangi et al., 2018). This negative racial climate for minority students is because minority students are more likely to experience racial harassment, prejudice, or discrimination on the campus or in other societal environments (Swanson et al., 2016). African American males often shift to outsiders on campus, largely because of anxieties due to the constant anti-Blackness they face (Brooms, 2018b). Much research has been done on the critical race theory (CRT) and its effects on African American males in higher education. CRT is the lived experiences of people of color in a White-dominated society and how various contexts, such as the PWI environment, could be a site of oppression for Black males (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). CRT has been commonly utilized as a theoretical lens to support methodological approaches to explore powerless groups' circumstances (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). In cases of racism, the lives of African Americans are filled with many obstacles which could impede their learning abilities and propel them to prioritize their daily troubles over education (Becker, 2017). Scholars studying student success in higher education need to pay closer attention to conditional effects and college environments as this can contribute to racial

tensions, microaggressions, and lack of connectedness for African Americans (Roksa & Whitley, 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, many different factors have affected the African American educational influence, some positive, and some negative. However, the overall efforts to help bring positive influence through Divine Nine Greek fraternity were displayed through the brief expressions of the values and commitment to the community was exhibited. The positive impact and the importance of mentorship from faculty and staff, Greek organizations, the community, and other groups provide insight to promote a guide to the upward movement for African American males. Although there were disparities of the African American people throughout the years, there are lessons to be learned and ways to encourage positive in the higher education system today.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this qualitative research study, I explored the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. In Chapter 3, I focus on the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

African American males' academic success and persistence are among the lowest of all racial and gender groups in higher education (Brooms, 2018a). I designed this study to explore the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ-1: What aspects of Divine Nine participation most impacts your academic success and persistence?

RQ-2: What most impacted your decision to participate in a Divine Nine fraternity?

RQ-3: How does advising a Divine Nine fraternity help to create academic success and persistence for African American males at a PWI?

I used a basic qualitative design. Merriam and Grenier (2019) asserted that the qualitative approach allows researchers to explore concepts and themes via participants' perceptions of their experiences within a specific context. The basic qualitative approach

was most appropriate for this study because exploring participants' understanding of their experiences via interviews provides a context for determining how their participation in a Divine Nine fraternity was beneficial to their academic success and persistence in their years of enrollment up to graduation.

I alternatively considered case study and phenomenological designs. Researchers use case studies to examine an individual, a group, an organization, or an event in its real-world context (Yin, 2018). I did not choose a case study design for this study because this study was not limited to a single person, group, or organization; instead, this study was focusing on current students, graduates, and advisors from multiple fraternities and institutions. A phenomenological study is aimed at discovering the foundation of a phenomenon, focusing on participants' feelings and emotions (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This study focused on the impact of the participants' experiences rather than underlying emotions, so a phenomenological approach was not suitable.

Role of the Researcher

In the researcher's role, I identified participants and conducted interviews to explore the experiences of current students, graduates, and advisors to discover how membership in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity may have impacted their academic success and persistence in college. At the time of the study, I was employed at an institution of higher education as the director of the Center for Student Success and am a member of a Divine Nine fraternity. This role has an emphasis on students' first-year experiences in college, and first-year students were not participants in this study. I did not have an instructor relationship or advisory role with any of the participants. I kept an open and

honest rapport with the participants throughout the interview. I made the objective of my research clear and shared how the information I collected will be used. Additionally, I reminded the participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary and encouraged open and honest responses.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. The participants were nine African American males from a PWI in the Southeastern region of the United States that fell into one of three categories: (a) African American male students who were sophomores, juniors, or seniors and had joined a Divine Nine fraternity at their current PWI; (b) African American males who had graduated within the previous 3 to 5 years and joined a Divine Nine fraternity at the PWI where they received their undergraduate degree; and (c) advisors of Divine Nine fraternities at PWIs who had been advising for 2 or more years. The sample size for the study reflects basic qualitative research practices that tend to be smaller to support the fullness of the data (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The detailed collection of experiences, patterns, and categories confirmed data saturation through common themes (see Korstjens, & Moser, 2018, p. 10). If recruitment had resulted in not enough participants to reach saturation, I would have contacted regional Divine Nine fraternity offices to identify additional potential participants that meet the research criteria.

Instrumentation

I used interviews to explore the research questions. The interview setting was comfortable for the participants. I began the interviews with a brief explanation of what the interview is about and told the participant that they can speak truthfully and freely. The interviews were one-on-one and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a video recorder, tape recorder, and transcription software to ensure that the information was appropriately gathered for adequate documentation.

Interviews

The interviews focused on the research questions regarding the experiences of current students, graduates, and advisors. I used the interviews to collect data on how membership in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity may have impacted the participants' academic success and persistence in college. The advisors shared their perspectives of being in a mentor role to current and former African American students that are Divine Nine fraternity members.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before collecting my data, I obtained approval (11-02-21-0504698) to conduct the study from the Walden University from my Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving IRB approval for research and recruiting, I contacted the appropriate university officials to request permission to conduct research on various PWI campuses. After receiving approval from the PWI university officials, the names of potential participants including current students, graduates, and advisors from Divine Nine fraternities at the approved schools were requested. I confirmed that participants met the inclusion criteria

with the Divine Nine Greek fraternities' offices. After gathering these names, I reached out to each potential participant through email, phone, or social media to see if they were willing to participate in this study. After receiving a written agreement to participate, each participant was provided with a letter of consent including an explanation of relevant background information, procedures, the nature of the study, and benefits of the study. I also informed the participants of my requirement to protect their privacy by keeping their identities confidential. Potential dates for interviews were confirmed at that time.

I collected data for this study in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with participants. The open-ended interview questions addressed the experiences of the participants' memberships in a Divine Nine Greek fraternity and their perceptions of how their involvements in the fraternity may have impacted their academic success and persistence in college. I recorded the interviews via video and tape recorder in a face-to-face session or teleconferencing software for virtual interviews. The interviews were transcribed using transcription software and each participant was provided with a transcript of their interview for review. If a participant requested a follow-up interview, I accommodated and scheduled another meeting time, recording any additional participant responses. After completing the interviews and receiving each participant's reviewed transcription back from them, I thanked each participant individually via email. The data collected were preserved to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The results revealed common themes among the participants that aided in understanding how joining

a Divine Nine fraternity may increase African American males' academic success and persistence.

Data Analysis Plan

According to Kennedy (2016), the coding process generates recurring patterns and themes based on participants' responses, describes how the themes will be characterized in the narrative, and interprets the data. I used the data gathered during the interviews to gain each participant's perspectives and experiences. After completing the recorded interviews, I analyzed the data by first reviewing the notes and recordings and transferring the data from speech to text. Following transcription, I completed an open coding process to develop themes and categories before conducting a pattern matching process. Common perspectives were then defined until there were confirmed themes. From there, I developed a description of meanings from the participants' perspectives representing the entire group. I repeated the process as needed to confirm that the analysis was dependable (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure that the participants' identities are kept confidential, I used codes such as Participant 1 (P1), instead of using their names.

.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that participants who can provide the richest information for the research study are those who know about a phenomenon and are willing and able to discuss it at length. Spending time with participants in a comfortable setting for the interviews aided me in identifying distinctive issues, problems, or solutions. I further established credibility by documenting the interviews through notes

and recordings. Credibility was also established through the repetition of thoughts and ideas. Outliers were addressed, and I analyzed the common themes expressed by using the data gathered in interviews. Confirmability will be established by validating the common themes expressed in the interviews through documentation and the review of transcripts by both me and the participants.

Transferability

Providing a thorough description of the research outcomes was imperative to establish the transferability of this qualitative study. Daniel (2019) suggested that transferability in qualitative research can occur if "the findings have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences" (p. 104). Transferability can be achieved if the participants' selection, knowledge, interviews, and experiences can be generalized and transferred to educational settings in other geographical areas. To establish transferability, I triangulated the perceived experiences and perceptions of African American male current students, graduates, and advisors of Divine Nine fraternities at small PWIs. The information gathered was used to interpret and analyze the similarities and differences between the participants' experiences.

Dependability

I achieved dependability by retaining records of the data collection and process and procedures that can be confirmed through the video and audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews and their transcriptions. The data were collected using a consistent method of interviewing and reporting data findings. This consistency brings validity

through the transcription and interview recording, which allows the participant's words to not be misused by me.

Ethical Procedures

The agreement to gain access to the participants began with obtaining the study site universities' approval to conduct the study as well as approval from the Walden University Institutional IRB. After receiving IRB approval for research and recruiting, I contacted the appropriate officials to request permission to conduct the research at various PWI campuses. After receiving approval from university officials, I requested the names of potential participants including current students, graduates, and advisors from Divine Nine fraternities at the approved schools. After receiving a written agreement to participate, I provided each participant with an IRB letter of consent that included an explanation of background information, procedures, the nature of the study, and benefits of the study. The participants had to sign and complete the IRB letter of consent before any data were collected from them.

 I informed the participants that I would protect their privacy by keeping their identities confidential. All participants were treated with respect from recruitment to completion of the study. The data were collected in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews that took place in a location comfortable to the participants. All participants had the opportunity to ask questions or express any concerns at any time during the process. I assured each participant that I would gather data as a researcher without prejudice or judgment. All participants were informed that they could exit at any time for any reason without penalty. If a participant had elected to withdraw from the research

study, they would have been thanked for their time and any information gathered would not have been used.

All participants were provided the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. I did not share participants' personal information with anyone, and the data will remain confidential to protect the participants' identities. The outcomes of the research were written to minimize the likelihood that a participant could be identified by an individual reading the participant's responses to the interview questions. I will preserve all data in a private, password-protected, external hard drive accessible only to me. After 5 years, the data and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I focused on the research design and rationale for this qualitative study, and this included an in-depth overview of the processes and procedures of my role as a researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. Upon receiving approval from IRB, I began the recruitment and data collection process. In Chapter 4, I will detail how the study was implemented and provide the results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ-1: What aspects of Divine Nine participation most impacted your academic success and persistence?

RQ-2: What most impacted your decision to participate in a Divine Nine fraternity?

RQ-3: How does advising a Divine Nine fraternity help to create academic success and persistence for African American males at a PWI?

The results of this study are based on the data collected through individual, virtual interviews with (a) college students that were enrolled in an undergraduate program and were members of a Divine Nine fraternity, (b) members of Divine Nine fraternities who had graduated with an undergraduate degree and joined the fraternity while in college, and (c) advisors of Divine Nine fraternities. These participants were interviewed to gain their experiences with and perspectives on the academic success and persistence of Divine Nine members at undergraduate institutions.

In this chapter, I explain the study outcomes, including themes that emerged from interview data. This chapter includes a discussion of the setting and any organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences, the demographics and characteristics of the study, data collection, and data analysis. In the chapter, I also

present evidence of trustworthiness: (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability), the results, and conclude with a summary.

Setting

The participants in this study were all members of a Divine Nine fraternity and either current undergraduate students, graduates, or had been a Divine Nine fraternity advisor at a PWI of higher learning. I interviewed the participants to gather insight into their experiences and perspectives of joining a Divine Nine fraternity and their academic success and persistence. The interviews took place in a one-on-one, virtual conferencing platform and were recorded. During the meetings, the participant's location was of their choosing and I was in a private office without outside interference. The participants' schools were in the southeastern part of the United States with active Divine Nine fraternities on campus. I did not encounter any personal or organizational conditions that would have influenced the interpretation of the study results after receiving IRB approval. I sent out invitations to the schools and received an influx of responses from potential participants; however, scheduling conflicts due to the COVID-19 pandemic and participants' preferences for face-to-face interviews instead of virtual interviews impacted the participation of some.

Demographics

This study had nine participants from PWIs that were members of Divine Nine fraternities including three currently enrolled undergraduate students, four graduates, and two Divine Nine fraternity advisors who had been advisors for at least 2 or more years. The participants in this study came from three of the five fraternities in the Divine Nine

organizations (i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.). There were two participating schools in this research study, and both are considered smaller PWIs with approximate student populations that range from 2,500 and 2,800 students.

Data Collection

I received approval from the Walden University IRB on October 28th, 2021. After receiving approval, I contacted four schools in the specific area related to the study about participation. I received responses from two schools that granted permission for me to collect data at their institutions from current students, graduates, and advisors. The student involvement offices of these institutions were then contacted to send out invitations to current student members, graduate members, or advisors of a Divine Nine fraternity to participate in this research study. I received a total of 30 responses; however, time conflicts, potential participant preferences, and potential participants not meeting all the inclusion criteria lowered the overall participant pool. The nine remaining individuals from the participant pool that met the study criteria were selected to participate. There were three Divine Nine organizations represented in this study.

I collected data for this study through asking the participants open-ended interview questions. Their responses were transcribed and coded for recurring themes. I met with each participant in a one-on-one, virtual interview that ranged from approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length. All participant interviews were conducted over the course of 1 month. I used Zoom as the platform for the interviews for its

efficiency in virtual conference and recordings. These interviews were recorded through Zoom's audio and visual recording function and were transcribed using Otter.ai software. The transcripts of each interview were sent to the participant for them to review and evaluate. The participants exhibited knowledge about and understanding of the interview questions; however, I had to reiterate some questions and clarify the meaning of several words in the questions asked during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began with the transcription of the interview audio recordings, which were uploaded from Zoom to Otter.ai. After thoroughly reviewing the interview audio recordings and correcting words that Otter.ai did not interpret correctly, I made corrections to the transcripts. The participants used the names of schools and occasionally mentioned other peoples' names, so I changed this information in the transcriptions. To keep the participants' identities confidential, the transcription notates "P" and the corresponding number as the participant (i.e., P1. P2. P3, etc.).

I developed codes and themes through a thorough review of the transcripts using MaxQDA software. Each interview transcript was categorized into broad themes based on the responses given by each participant. The MaxQDA software helped me group the participants' perceptions through similar responses. The broad themes from the interviews were support, accountability, and community. Codes were determined by transcribing responses from the interviews, reading through the text carefully, thoroughly reviewing notes from the interviews, and looking through the data for clarity. Through coding, I highlighted phrases and sentences in each interview applying common words

and allowing categories to describe their content. Once coding was completed, the larger themes were broken down into smaller themes by identifying common words used throughout the interviews. The smaller themes were developed from the common words used in the interviews. The smaller themes included a sense of belonging, influence, academic standards, mentoring, accountability, and motivation/positive reinforcement.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I demonstrated trustworthiness by coding the data and selecting themes from the participants' interview responses. The participants were able to view their responses for validity to ensure their answers to the interview questions were not altered by me. The participants were also able to add any information they may have forgotten to mention during the interview. This was done so participants could provide the richest information for the research study because they knew more about their experiences and shared their perceptions of academic success and persistence at length. Spending time with participants in a comfortable interview setting helped me identify specific issues, problems, and solutions. Credibility was established by documenting and reviewing the interview notes, and recordings. To further establish credibility, I emailed the transcriptions to each participant so they could confirm its accuracy. Confirmability was established by validating the common themes expressed in the interviews through documentation and the review of transcripts by both me and the participants.

Transferability

I established transferability by triangulating the experiences and perceptions of African American male current students, graduates, and advisors of Divine Nine

fraternities at small PWIs. The information gathered was used to interpret and analyze the similarities of the participants' experiences. The outcomes from the study showed that most of the participants conveyed that joining a Divine Nine fraternity helped with their academic success and persistence. The participants' experiences, through their perceptions of a sense of belonging, mentorship, and accountability provided within a Divine Nine fraternity membership were major factors that led to their academic success and persistence. A thorough description of the research outcomes was imperative to establishing the transferability of this research study. Daniel (2019) suggested that transferability in qualitative research can occur if "the findings have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences" (p. 104). The participants' knowledge achieved transferability and experiences transferred to educational settings in other geographical areas such as high schools and community events.

Dependability

To achieve dependability, I retained data collection records throughout participants' interviews. I recorded the interviews through the Zoom application and then transcribed with Otter.ai software. The data were collected through a consistent method of interviewing, and the data were then compiled in MaxQDA software. I reviewed interview the transcriptions thoroughly to ensure there were not any mentions of names of participants or other outside entities. The participants were also allowed to ask any questions about the study and add any information they felt they may not have mentioned during the interview. I emailed the participants a copy of their transcripts from the

interview. Consistently following this procedure allowed me to maintain the participants' confidentiality and ensured that the participants' words could not be misused by me as the researcher.

Results

This research study included nine participants from three different Divine Nine fraternities. The participants included three currently enrolled undergraduate students, four graduates, and two advisors that were members of a Divine Nine fraternity at small PWIs in the Southeastern region of the United States. The results offered insight into the participants' perceptions and experiences of academic success and persistence at small PWIs.

The broad themes from the participants' interviews were their experiences with support, accountability, and community. Understanding the context of participants' experiences, makes the experiences more meaningful, and provides rich data for the study (Korstjens & Albinem, 2018). From the broad themes, six focused, common themes from the participants' experiences emerged: a sense of belonging, academic influence, accountability, academic standards, motivation/positive reinforcement, and mentoring support (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Themes From Broad to Focused

Research Question 1

With the first research question, I obtained the perspectives and experiences of the participants' academic success and persistence, producing three common themes: academic standards, academic influences/support, and mentoring (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Focused Themes of Research Question 1

RQ1: What aspects of Divine Nine participation most impacted your academic success and persistence?

Academic Standards

All nine participants expressed with great confidence that their fraternity believes in having and upholding academic standards before and after joining their organizations. This was evident in the academic requirements listed for each fraternity. Fraternities want to promote standards that help college men perform at a high level and keep a commitment by keeping them accountable to academic standards (Chambers, 2016). P6 stated,

> The academic standards for my fraternity are to always pursue academic excellence. Not just try to get the easy C try for a B or an A. One of our cardinal principles is scholarship. So, we are highly regarded in terms of academics. We take academics very seriously. And we don't want you to just have the baseline

GPA requirement, we want you to have a higher baseline GPA to become a

member.

P9 shared the importance of having a good GPA to show academic excellence on

campus, stating,

Our fraternity is all about scholarship. We want to see each individual graduating

with a 4.0 GPA, or at a minimum, be the best that they can be. Our standards are a

2.5 GPA, to join the fraternity: That is the bare minimum. We're really looking

for individuals with higher GPAs and higher goals to represent the fraternity well.

So, academically we want the best on campus.

The consistency in the responses from all participants gave assurance that academic

standards had a positive impact on joining a Divine Nine fraternity and helped keep

members focused on their academic goals.

Influence

The participants indicated that influence comes in a variety of avenues and

dynamics. Six of the nine participants mentioned either internal or external influences,

that encouraged them to reach academic success. These influences ranged from family

members to other students who were a part of an accepting community on campus, many

of them Divine Nine groups. Academic influences are important because they motivate

students to do their best knowing that they have a support system to foster the end goal of

academic success and earning a degree. P3 said,

I never thought that I could be able to achieve coming from a single-parent

household and knowing the grind that it takes to be a successful Black man. It was

literally the amount of discipline that my Divine Nine fraternity has put into my life, making sure that I keep that the high standard with anything I do—from academics, my job, my community, my family, and my faith. It all ties into back to D9 in a in a positive way. Joining my D9 fraternity was probably one of the best things that could've ever have happened to me.

P7 added,

I would say that my biggest academic influence is my mom. She is known for intelligence within her sorority and with that intelligence, she inspires me to basically do the best I can every single class. So, with that being my life and into my structure growing up, I feel like that motivated me to want to do the best I can in every single situation with classes.

Mentoring

Having a mentor, mentors, or a mentoring program is an essential element that all nine participants expressed had an impact on their academic success and persistence through aspects of the Divine Nine fraternity. The examples set by older members of a Divine Nine fraternity gave some of the participants a reason to do well academically. Their experience showed that mentorship is vital to the success of African American males in higher education. African American role models on PWI campuses are an essential factor for African American student retention and academic success (Green, et. al, 2017). P3 talked about his mentors from high school and how they had an impact on him, saying,

I was a part of this group called Project Manhood. My high school was predominantly White. However, it was run by Black father figures at the time and two of them were members of a Divine Nine fraternity. So, they instilled principles in us about Divine Nine and let us know that whatever institution we decided to go to, whatever we did after college or after high school, it all ties together because we all seek the same goal. And that's Black excellence, wherever we go and whatever we do.

Research Question 2

I used the second research question to gain perspectives on what most impacted the participants' decision to join a Divine Nine fraternity, providing insight into how the Divine Nine fraternities helped influence the participants' families, friends, and communities. The results yielded the four themes: a sense of belonging, influence, accountability, and motivation/positive reinforcement (see Figure 3). The participants shared their experiences on campus at PWIs, describing overall discomfort and feeling out of place. The participants also explained how the accountability from other fraternity members allowed them to stay focused on their academic success.

Figure 3

Focused Themes of Research Question 2

RQ2: What most impacted your decision to
participate in a Divine Nine fraternity?

SENSE OF BELONGING

INFLUENCE

ACCOUNTABILITY

MOTIVATION/
POSITIVE
REINFORCEMENT
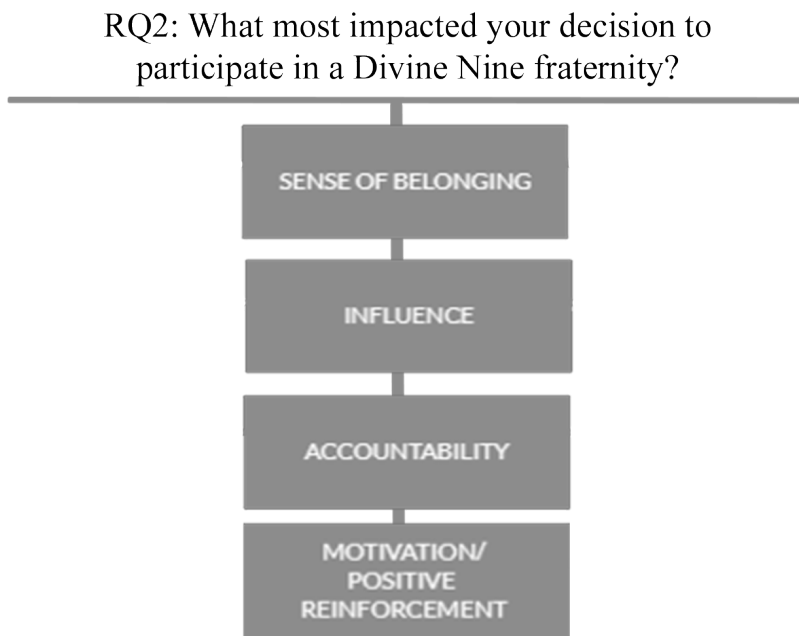
Sense of Belonging

Eight out of nine participants showed a desire for building rapport and friendships and expressed how they felt being on a PWI campus.

P1 shared his experience, saying,

When young Black men come to predominantly White institutions, they are the minority. They already feel a sense of insecurity. They feel a sense of loneliness and of being overwhelmed, because they don't see many people who look like them- other Black students.

Robertson and Chaney (2015) contended that a fundamental factor for African American male college students is the ability to find a connection or sense of belonging. The sense of belonging construct was developed as an alternative concept to social integration for

understanding how students of color may develop a sense of membership in a university community at PWIs (Brooms, 2019). All students want to feel like they have a place to belong when they come to college; however, when they do not find that place, they can suffer academically. Students who lack a sense of belonging can be found looking for connection within a college community or simply looking for acceptance from a peer group. P3 explained,

> Going to a private PWI was very challenging being a student of color, and especially as a student member of a Divine Nine fraternity because we have two targets on our backs. On campus, we are not just Black kids at a university. We're not just athletes. We're a representation of a whole group and now we're put under a microscope even more. We're considered to be outsiders because we have our own community. But the fact that we work together in our Divine Nine community allowed us to accomplish the same academic and social goals.

According to Brooms (2019), experiences within college, connections with peers, involvement beyond the classroom, and external activities can positively predict and impact a sense of belonging. P5 explained his experience in being a member of a Divine Nine fraternity on a PWI campus, saying,

> Being a D9 member in a predominantly White institution is special. It's a way to come together. When you sometimes may feel alone, you're not alone. You have a group of brothers. No matter which fraternity or sorority you join, you have a band of people that's behind you, always willing to help you. It's another community within a community. It's a family within a family.

Influence

Influence was a major factor in seven of the nine participants joining a Divine Nine fraternity. The participants shared their views on how the Divine Nine fraternities had positive effects on the community and influenced their families' perceptions of them. P5 described how his family looked at him after joining a Divine Nine fraternity saying,

> Once they see the change and the growth that you have once you join a fraternity, it's like a new beginning. In a sense, when your family can see that you're growing and maturing and becoming someone who's not only willing to take care of yourself but willing to take care of others, they say, "I like what this has done to you."

P6 added his experience in what was important about helping the community saying, "Once we crossed, the journey begins. People think it's a social group, but it's not. It is more about helping the community by guiding others in the right direction and becoming a leader." P7 described some community initiatives saying, "my fraternity frequently hosts leadership workshops, toy drives, trash pick-up, step shows and participates in different forms of community service." In describing the influence on the community at large, P3 stated,

> I feel that Divine Nine has a positive light on the community. Everybody loves the Divine Nine. It's rare to hear negative things about us because there's so much that we do in the community. We participate in town hall events, political events,

voter registration... It's just all those aspects tied into one that make people want to join as well.

Accountability

The theme of accountability emerged from eight of the nine participants that spoke on how being in a fraternity created academic accountability which attributed to their academic success in college. Accountability was expressed with an emphasis on improving academics, improving study skills, and using resources around campus to increase academic performance. P7 mentioned this about his accountability experience within his fraternity: "One way that we held our members accountable for academic success is being transparent about our GPAs. We were honest with each other about areas we were struggling in and needed help." P5 talked about accountability through study halls and using technology saying,

> The brothers getting together studying and going over schoolwork motivated us to hold each other accountable. We also had a group chat where we regularly kept in contact to help each other. We would send our grades to each other and if we saw someone slacking or falling behind, we would jump in to help. We were always lending a hand and that helped us tremendously with grades.

P2 talked about holding meetings to maintain accountability while finding ways to improve everyone's academic performance stating, "Oh, we constantly have meetings; it's not something that we just overlook. We always talk about different ideas and ways we can improve. And it just motivates everybody, pushing us to do better."

Motivation/Positive Reinforcement

Six of the nine participants talked about what motivated them to join a Divine Nine fraternity and included the positive impacts it had on their academic success and persistence. Brooms and Davis (2017) stated, the involvement of African American male students in on-campus and off-campus student activities, and on-campus clubs and organizations, can directly affect the motivation and success in completing academic goals and remaining in higher education programs. P8 talked about wanting to be a leader as motivation for joining the fraternity saying, "that's why I joined because I want to be a leader. And I wanted to be able to teach other young men how to be leaders, not just college men, but younger men as well." P2 added the reason he joined stating, "I feel like it was the best fit for me. I felt like I was the most like those members and I could do great things in the organization." P7 mentioned a program he was a part of in high school that led him to join his fraternity stating,

> Lamplighters influenced my decision to join a D9 fraternity because I witnessed how they carried themselves and the leadership qualities that they instilled in me growing up. Their example inspired me to pursue higher positions within different clubs and organizations and positions within the fraternity. Because of the example of how they carried themselves, I wanted to model that in my own life and in leadership.

P1 shared his insight on positive reinforcement from Divine Nine fraternities saying,

> In our fraternity, these young men have a sense of belonging, a brotherhood, the direct link to a professional like me, who's also an academic. They have somebody acting as a surrogate father figure while they are here at college.

Having someone hold them accountable, that's an adult who truly has their best

interests at hand has the most significant impact on their academic success and

graduation.

Research Question 3

The third research question focused on the advising experience of the participants

and how having an advisor and mentorship supported their academic success. All nine

participants expressed the importance of mentorship while being a member of a Divine

Nine fraternity. The three themes that emerged were accountability, academic standards,

and mentorship (see Figure 4). Sinanan (2016), asserted that having examples to follow

and mentor leadership can help guide African Americans in obtaining academic success

in higher education.

Figure 4

Focused Themes of Research Question 3

RQ3: How does advising a Divine Nine fraternity
help to create academic success and persistence
for African American males at a PWI?

ACCOUNTABILITY

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

MENTORING

Accountability

Participants shared their perceptions of how accountability from a mentor and advisor helped to foster academic success. P7 spoke from his perspective from a student standpoint saying, "having an advisor in our fraternity is essential because of their support and guidance in helping us with school matters like assisting us to find mentors, helping us to connect with our academic advisors, and reaching out to others on campus that specialize in our field of study." P1 offered a perspective from an advisor standpoint,

> I, as the advisor, can leverage my authority for accountability. For example, fraternity students enjoy hosting contests, shows, and events on campus. Before I will sign off on those fun activities, I'll let the undergraduate members know that if their GPAs are not at a certain level, then I will not allow them to host those activities until their grades reflect improvement. I use the authority I have not to sign off on those social activities. However, I tell them, you can still do your volunteer service to the community and the campus, but you don't have time to be having fun gatherings if your grades are suffering. And if one person's grade is suffering, everybody's grades are suffering. That's what brotherhood is all about.

P3 stated that within the Divine Nine, all are members of different organizations but are all working together for accountability as a key for success saying,

> We're all trying to accomplish the same goal, which is to graduate from an institution and get a great job and career. We are here to help each other out in

any aspect, whether it is academically or socially. To reach successful goals together is accountability on a larger scale.

Academic Standards

Divine Nine fraternities have standards that help keep undergraduate members on track for academic success and persistence. P9 gave some insight on how advisors help with academic guidance sharing,

Academically, we are monitoring their grades and GPA to ensure they uphold the academic standards of the fraternity. This is to mirror the value of scholarship in the fraternity. The members must be serious about their grades and remember that education comes before all other things that they do on campus.

P1 offered the guidelines for his fraternity stating,

We have standards that we must maintain. The minimum is a GPA of 2.5. So, if a member dropped below 2.5, our guidelines consider that student inactive. He cannot participate in social activities until his grades return to the minimum GPA.

Mentoring

The support through mentoring that advisors provide to the members of the Divine Nine fraternity is an important element in academic success and persistence at a PWI. P6 asserted, "If you don't have a great advisor, you're not going to succeed. So, you need that great leader. You need that great advisor to guide you in the right direction when it comes to academics and even when it comes to life." P7 mentioned the educational advancement he received from his Divine Nine mentor saying,

My advisor motivated me to go for higher degrees. Instead of being done at the bachelors degree level, they encouraged me to pursue a master's degree as well as a doctorate degree. They're always there to help guide me in the right direction to ensure success.

From the advisor's perspective of mentoring, P9 added,

Mentorship while they're away from home can help them understand and get through the new environment, they're in and maintain their focus on their grades. I can help them understand and deal with those new challenges. Each young man is an individual, so as a mentor, I need to look at their strengths and their weaknesses. I press, push, and help them in any weak areas to pick up their performance to meet their academic goals.

Finally, P6 asserted how mentoring supports the overall goals of success and persistence saying, "our advisor helps us to focus on academic success because we want to graduate. It was the push that he gave us that propelled us towards graduation."

Overall, the participants' responses lead in the direction of supporting that advising a Divine Nine fraternity helps to create academic success and persistence for African American males at a PWI.

Summary

The responses to the research questions have given understanding and thoughtful insight into the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek Life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities at PWIs impacted their academic success and persistence. Although the responses did not

have the same answers, they were similar in perspectives. The participants expressed how

joining a Divine Nine fraternity had positively affected their academic success. Their

experiences surrounded several themes like a sense of belonging which conveyed that

being in a Divine Nine fraternity allowed the participants to be a part of a community

within a college environment. Multifaceted support indicated the importance of

accountability, influence, positive reinforcement, and mentoring on campus to attain

success and persistence.

In Chapter 5, I will summarize the key findings of the research and describe ways

to extend knowledge by comparing the literature found in Chapter 2. I will also evaluate

the context of the conceptual framework and understanding of what was learned, discuss

limitations that arose out of the study, and give recommendations on how the research

can be expanded within the strengths of the current study.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek life fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. I conducted this study because of the low academic achievement of African American males at PWIs (see Gipson & Mitchell, 2017). The participants' experiences and perspectives were gathered through asking them interview questions that addressed the three research questions guiding the study. Astin's (1999) student involvement theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Research Question 1 focused on the aspects of Divine Nine participation that most impacted students' academic success and persistence at a small PWIs. Research Question 2 centered on the influence of decisions to participate in a Divine Nine fraternity. Research Question 3 concentrated on advising and its influence on academic success and persistence for African American males in a Divine Nine fraternity at a PWI. After the interviews were conducted, I coded and analyzed the data using the MaxQDA software program. The analysis revealed themes for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 that were the basis for my conclusions in this study. The key findings in this study showed that joining a Divine Nine fraternity provides access to an accepting group in a college community and essential support for African American males to attain academic success and persistence at a small PWI.

Interpretations of the Findings

The results showed how joining a Divine Nine fraternity improves African American males' academic success and persistence at a small PWIs. The participants

were members of a Divine Nine fraternity and students on a small PWI campus, have

graduated from a small PWI within the last 5 years, or was an advisor of a Divine Nine

fraternity on a PWI campus. In the interviews, I asked the participants three research

questions along with a subset of questions to better clarify how their academic success

and persistence was impacted by being a member of a Divine Nine fraternity at a small

PWI. Astin's (1999) student involvement theory was the conceptual framework. The

emergent themes were academic standards, influence, mentoring, sense of belonging,

accountability, and motivation/positive reinforcement. In the following subsections, I

provide my interpretations of the findings by theme and discuss how the themes confirm,

disconfirm, and extend the knowledge in the literature in Chapter 2.

Academic Standards.

One of the main components of joining a Divine Nine fraternity is meeting the

academic standards of the organization. Members of Divine Nine fraternities take their

academic success seriously because education is one of their most valued principles.

When a standard is set for potential members to attain a higher GPA above the bare

minimum the pursuit of academic success encourages African American male students to

achieve that result. Though having high GPAs above the bare minimum is not a

requirement to join a Divine Nine fraternity, the fraternity exudes a positive influence on

members want to represent their fraternity in the best light. The most common GPA

minimum standard set by all the fraternities is a 2.5 GPA. The advisor's role toward

academic standards is to keep up with fraternity members' grades and to monitor their

GPAs. Divine Nine fraternity advisors would not allow members with lower academic

performance to participate in certain activities while giving them more academic alternatives to aid in improving academic performance.

This study revealed through participants' experiences that students who were not performing well increased their academic performance to join a Divine Nine fraternity. Additionally, participants that were already a member of a Divine Nine fraternity maintained high academic standards to participate in fraternity activities and community service as well as to excel at the highest caliber individually and as a group. Having academic standards is a means to produce higher academic performance and will lead to the persistence of graduating from college for African American males in Divine Nine fraternities.

Influence.

Sinanan (2016) noted that the likelihood of African American males growing up in residentially segregated communities and the lack of social networks that provide limited academic preparedness and social stereotypes are barriers to their academic success. However, in this study, the participants shared the many influences that helped them decide to join a Divine Nine fraternity in college ranging from family to programs from high school to members in the college community that had already joined a Divine Nine fraternity. The influence that Divine Nine membership had on the families of the participants was a vital part of academic success and persistence in their college experience.

Students must go through a process of separation from precollege communities and transition into college life so that they can maximize the possibility of academic

success (Museus et al., 2017). The participants' responses showed the impact that other people had on their life and how being a part of something greater than themselves brought value to their education and their lives overall. The positive influences of the Divine Nine fraternities taught them how to make sound decisions for themselves and their futures. Positive influences allowed the participants to realize how grateful they were to have encouraging inspirations on campus and throughout their lives. They hoped to be impactful in that manner for others who come after them to continue a cycle of societal impact.

The Divine Nine fraternities had a positive presence in the families of the members who joined a Divine Nine fraternity in college, helping them mature and grow to become better people. The positive influence encouraged their families and increased the support and influence in their communities. These types of influences show that the greater the influence, the greater the impact.

Mentoring.

Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) asserted that the importance of mentoring is a rich tradition and is paramount to the success of African American males. The participants shared their views on mentoring and how that support helped them achieve academic success in college. Before college, the mentoring programs set the groundwork for success in college for some of the participants by laying a foundation for African American males that had access to such programs. Mentoring programs for African American males in higher education are to provide them with opportunities to connect with African American faculty as a support system (Green et al., 2017). Having faculty

staff advisors, and mentors from Divine Nine fraternities provided a comfortable college atmosphere for African American males and other people willing to serve as a mentor on campus. The mentorship was beneficial in areas that provided support to African American males' academic success. This finding provided insight into the academic connection with faculty advisors and mentors that allowed the participants the ability to pursue academic success. The mentor role often provided a parental figure away from home in which the mentor functioned as a surrogate parent. Mentoring and advising were essential components for the overall academic success and persistence for African American male students.

Sense of Belonging.

Robertson and Chaney (2017) noted that African American males entering PWIs experience psychological challenges from negative campus climates. The participants conveyed that attending a PWI was difficult because it was tough for them to find a place they belonged. They expressed feelings of seclusion, insecurity, and loneliness within the PWI campus community; however, having a common ground within the Divine Nine community provided them familiarity and acceptance. This common ground gave participants a safe place to feel like themselves within a thriving campus community, encouraging openness to learn and move towards academic success and persistence.

Involvement in an organization on campus can positively influence persistence when African Americans can find belonging; often this leads to graduation (Gipson & Mitchell, 2017). Joining a Divine Nine fraternity was an important component for participants in increasing their sense of belonging and a positive campus experience. This

finding supports one of the reasons why Divine Nine fraternities were started on PWI campuses, to create social engagement and psychological well-being by providing a sense of belonging. African American students look for comfort amongst one another to find enjoyment in each other's friendships due to personal motivators and experiences (Brooms, 2019). Experiences within the college, connections with peers, involvement beyond the classroom, and external activities can positively predict and impact a sense of belonging (Brooms, 2019).

Accountability.

The common focus on accountability is ensuring that everyone within the fraternity maintains the required academic standards. The participants reported that the importance of helping fellow fraternity members was shown with study groups and encouragement displayed towards academic success. Upholding fraternity values and standards by creating programs and attending fraternity meetings was a component used to provide others who were interested in joining a Divine Nine fraternity with a sample of accountability. This display of dedication and completing class assignments promptly were a focus for keeping members accountable for academic success. Accountability was also achieved through mentorship roles, peer-to-peer accountability, encouragement, tutoring sessions, study programs, and the use of other resources to ensure consistency in the pursuit of academic success and persistence.

Advisors had a key role in holding members of Divine Nine fraternities accountable for academic success. The role of advisor sometimes called for a notion known as "tough love." The participants conveyed that they may have suffered

academically without this kind of accountability and their persistence would have lacked.

Accountability is one of the factors that lead to the academic success and persistence of

the participants and provided the right amount of support needed to overcome several

challenges.

Motivation/Positive Reinforcement.

The participants stated that the motivation and positive reinforcement they

received in a Divine Nine fraternity transformed into leadership. Leadership was an

important motivator in helping the participants choose their fraternity because of the

history of each fraternity. The positive acts of being a leader on a college campus were an

inspiration for these participants because they wanted to be viewed by their peers as

leaders around campus and in the community. The participants discussed how joining the

Divine Nine fraternities allowed them to learn more about becoming leaders by

continually being encouraged and reinforced to always remember whom they represent in

every situation and every decision that they make. Motivation and positive reinforcement

also aided in the participants choosing the fraternity they joined because they found it to

be the best fit for their personality and academic pursuits.

Limitations of the Study

When looking at the limitations of this qualitative research study, I referred to

Chapter 1 as a reference. One of the concerns from the limitations of Chapter 1 that

remained was the number of participants involved in the study. The data gathered were

checked thoroughly and the responses to the interview questions gave insight into the

academic success and persistence of African American males at small PWIs. However,

the results of this study may lead readers to want to hear from more Divine Nine students at other PWIs to gain an even deeper perspective. The participants shared their feelings about how this study would provide good information for other universities to use to increase their African American male student retention. I remained focused on academic success and persistence in the Southeastern United States in this study, allowing future studies on the topic to be conducted in different locations.

Recommendations

This research study offered a perspective on how joining a Divine Nine fraternity influenced African American males' academic success and persistence at small PWIs. Though the research was limited to a specific area and number of participants, a broader perspective could be offered to assess how participation in Divine Nine fraternities impacts African American males' academic success and persistence at other PWIs. To expand research of this magnitude, the study would have to extend into other parts of the United States at other small PWIs with Divine Nine fraternities. This research could also become broader by adding other elements, such as focus groups, to gain a perspective in a group setting instead of interviews being used as the method for data collection.

Research could also be conducted on Divine Nine sororities and African American females' academic success and persistence at small PWIs. It would be interesting to find out if African American females shared the same perspectives as African American males on how joining a Divine Nine sorority helped improve their academic success. Furthering this research could provide more insight into Astin's student involvement theory and how can be used as a lens through which to view African

American students' academic success and persistence in Divine Nine fraternities, sororities, and other campus organizations. This future study could also offer insight into and expand the body of research on Tinto's student departure theory at higher education institutions facing retention issues with African American students (see Skipper, 2005). The extended research may aid higher education institutions, particularly PWIs, by offering an understanding of the need for mentorship programs and activities focused on efforts to support a sense of belonging among African American students.

Implications

The implications of social change have been displayed throughout the perceptions of African American males' experiences at PWIs. The change communicated by the participants about how a community, family, or organization can shape and form African American males' perception of society shows how it is important to them to have positive influences at an early age. This concept is reflected in the participants' expressions that peers, mentors, advisors, faculty, and staff that look like them provide positive influences as they pursue academic success and persistence on PWI campuses. These positive influences help deliver a bright outlook for African American males and provide them with structure and accountability to become academically successful. The impact of learning how to lead, becoming a positive role model, and succeeding educationally can also provide the impact needed to help improve the family, community, and the college environment for positive social change.

The theoretical implications provide insight through Astin's (1999) student involvement theory that students involved on college campuses will become successful academically. Joining a Divine Nine fraternity provides that involvement and is suitable for African American males' academic success and persistence. Empirically, this research could help universities become more inclusive and accepting of African American males by providing more alternative activities and creating safe spaces to feel included within the college community. This type of social change can provide opportunities for faculty and staff to accept differences in race and bring support to African American males in the higher education learning environment.

Finally, providing overall support to African American males at a PWI can lead to positive social changes in society and allow them provision to excel in higher education. With total support from the entire community, African American males' academic success and persistence will lead to graduation. The support will not only come from Divine Nine fraternities but also the entire campus community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the perceptions of current students, graduates, and Divine Nine Greek fraternity advisors about how their participation in Divine Nine Greek fraternities may have impacted their academic success and persistence. This study outlined the background, problem, purpose, conceptual framework, and how many different factors have affected the African American educational influence.

The overall perceptions of Divine Nine fraternities displayed through the perceptions and experiences of the participants' values and commitment to the community were presented. The positive impact communicated and the importance of mentorship from faculty and staff, Greek organizations, the community, and other groups provide the necessary support to help foster academic success and persistence for African American males at a PWI. The participants' experiences led to the same outcomes of how joining a Divine Nine fraternity in college helps academic success and was a main point of reference. The themes developed from this research shows African American male students' need for inclusion in the PWI campus community and should be a development focus to aid academic success and persistence.

The undergraduate students who were a part of this study reflected on their current experiences and shared that deciding to join a Divine Nine fraternity was one of the best decisions they have made in college because it causes them to grow as a student and a person. The graduates in this study reflected on their experiences as undergraduate students. They expressed their appreciation for their mentorship and the accountability that allowed them to reach their goals and aspirations of graduating from college. Finally, the advisors in the study conveyed the importance of having a supportive community on a college campus in helping the students in their fraternity stay on track towards academic success and persistence.

Overall, this study opened the conversation of the possibilities of how finding a supportive community for African American males promotes academic success and

persistence. Given the opportunity and a support system to be successful may lead

African American males to graduate with a degree from a higher education institution.

References

Allen, W., Mclewis, C., Jones, C., & Harris, D. (2020). *From baker to fisher: African American students in u. s. higher education over forty years.* The Russell Sage Foundation of the Social Sciences.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (n.d.). *Our history.* https://apa1906.net/our-history/

Anderson, B., & Smith, S. (2016). Black Greek letter organizations: Attitudes and perceptions about membership. *Journal of International Social Issues*, *4*(1), 1-10.

Armstrong, J. (2019). "The reward was worth the sacrifice": How membership in Black Greek letter fraternities (BGLFs) redefines Black men's college experiences. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, *3*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/5808

Armstrong, J., & Jackson, B. (2017). "They expect you to be better: Mentoring as a tool of resistance among black fraternity men". *Oppression and Resistance (Studies in Symbolic Interaction, 48*, 175-190.

Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development, 5*(40)*, 518-529.

Becker, K. (2017). MVP and college success for first-year students. *New directions for Teaching and Learning. 2017*(152), 67-77.

Belgrave, F., & Allison, K. (2018). *African American psychology: From Africa to America* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Black, R. & Bimper, A. Y. Jr. (2017). Successful undergraduate African American men's navigation and negation off academic and social counter-spaces as adaptation to

racism at historically White institutions. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 22(2). 326-350.* *https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1521025117747209*

Bowman, N. A., & Holmes, J. M. (2017). A quasi-experimental analysis of fraternity or sorority membership and college student success. *Johns Hopkins Journal of College Student Development*, *7*(58), 1018-1034.

Brooms, D. (2018a). Building us up': Supporting Black male college student in a Black male initiative program. *Critical Sociology*, *44*(1), 141-155.

Brooms, D. (2018b). Exploring black male initiative programs: Potential and possibilities for supporting black male success in college. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *87*(1), 59-72.

Brooms, D. (2019). Not alone in this: Black men's bonding, learning, and sense of belonging in black male initiative programs. The Urban Review, 51, 748-767. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00506-5

Brooms, D., & Davis, A. (2017). Staying focused on the goal: Peer bonding and faculty mentors supporting Black males' persistence in college. *Journal of Black Studies*, 48(3), 305-326. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0021934717692520

Brosnan, A. (2019). "To educate themselves": Southern Black teachers in North Carolina's schools for the freedpeople during the Civil War and Reconstruction period, 1862-1875. *American Nineteenth Century History*, *20*(3), 231-248. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2019.1690743

Chambers, A. (2016). The African rites of passage and the black fraternity. *Journal of Black Studies, 47*(4), 351-364. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347166311480

Daniel, B. K. (2019). *What constitutes a good qualitative research study? fundamental dimensions and indicators of rigour in qualitative research: The TACT framework*. Academic Conferences International Limited. http://dx.doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.34190/RM.19.113

Druery, J., & Brooms, D. (2019). It lit up the campus: Engaging Black males in culturally enriching environments; *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *12*(4) 330-340

Franklin, J. A. (2015). *The understanding of a single story: Identities amongst Black students at predominately White institutions* [Master's Thesis, Wofford College.]. http://digitalcommons.wofford.edu/studentpubs/10

Gipson, J., & Mitchell, D. (2017). How high-impact practices influence academic achievement for African American college students. *African American Studies Commons and the Higher Education Commons, 3*(2), 123-144.

Green, T., Ammah, B., Byrd, N., Brandon, R., & McIntosh, A. (2017). African American mentoring program (AAMP): addressing the cracks in the graduate education pipeline, *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *25*(5), 528-547. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2017.1415807

Harper, B. E. (2019). African American access to higher education: The evolving role of historically Black colleges and universities. *American Federation of Teachers*, *3*(109-127).

Harper, S. R. (2015). Black male college achievers and resistant responses to racist stereotypes at predominantly white colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review,* 85(4), 646-674.

Hevel, M., Martin, G., Weeden, D., & Pascarella, E. (2015). The effects of fraternity and sorority membership in the fourth year of college: A detrimental or value-added component of undergraduate education? *Journal of College Student Development*, *56*(5), 456-470.

Hotchkins, B., & Dancy, T. (2015). Black male student leaders in predominantly White universities: Stories of power, preservation, and persistence. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 1*(39), 30-44.

Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (n.d.) *About.* https://www.iotaphitheta.org/about

Jackson, B., & Hui, M. (2017). Looking for brothers: Black male bonding at a predominantly White institution. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *86*(4), 463-478

Jones, J., Schmitt, J., & Wilson, V. (2018, February). *50 Years after the Kerner Commission: African Americans are better off in many ways but are still disadvantaged by racial inequality.* Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerner-commission/

Jones, J. C. W. (2017). *Does being Greek work? An analysis of the effect of Greek affiliation on grade point average and retention.* [Master's Thesis, Eastern Illinois University]. Eastern Illinois Institutional Repository. https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/2714

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (n.d.). *Kappa Alpha Psi.*

https://kappaalphapsi1911.com/page/History

Karkouti, I. M. (2016). Black students' educational experiences in predominantly White

universities: A review of the related literature. *College Student Journal, 1*(50), 59-

68.

Kennedy, D. (2016). Is it any clearer? Generic qualitative inquiry and the VSAIEEDC

model of data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, *21*(8), 1369-1379.

https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2444

Korstjens,I. & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative

research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*,

24(1),120-124, https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

McClain, K., & Perry, A. (2017). Where did they go: Retention rates for students of color

at predominantly White institutions. *College of Student Affairs Leadership*, *4*(3).

McClain, M., Sampson, J., Lenz, J., & Reardon, R. (2015). Fraternity and sorority

membership and college student career development. College Student Affairs

Journal, *33*(1), 3-25.

McGuire, K., McTier, T., Ikegwuonu, E., Sweet, J., & Bryant-Scott, K. (2020). "Men

doing life together: Black Christian fraternity men's embodiments of brotherhood.

Men and Masculinities. 23(2-4), 579-599.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18782735

Mercadal, T. (2017). Student engagement. *Research Starters Education*. 1-5.

Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative research in practice* (2nd edition.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Morris, M. (2016). Standard White: Dismantling White normativity. *California Law Review*, *104*(4), 949-978. http://dx.doi.org/10.15779/Z38F55G

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European Journal of General Practice,* 24:1, 9-18, https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091

Museus, S., Yi, V., & Saelua, N. (2017). The impact of culturally engaging campus environments on sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, *40*(2), 187-215.

Mwangi, G., Thelamour, B., Ezeofor, I., & Carpenter, A. (2018). Black elephant in the room: Black students contextualizing campus racial climate within US racial climate; *Journal of College Student Development*, *59*(4).

Newman, C., Wood, J., & Harris, F. (2015). Black men's perceptions of sense of belonging with faculty members in community colleges. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *84*(4), 564-577.

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (n.d.) *The history of Omega Psi Phi fraternity inc.* https://oppf.org/about-omega/

Parker, W. M., Puig, A., Johnson, J., & Anthony, C., Jr. (2016). Black males on White campuses: Still invisible men? *College of Student Affairs Journal*, *34*(3), 76-92. https://doi.org/10.1353/csj.2016.0020

Patterson, A. (2020). Campus engagement and Black American males at a predominantly

    White institution. *Negro Educational Review*. *71*(1-4), 107-130.

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (n.d.). *History of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity*.

    https://phibetasigma1914.org/about/history/

Ravitch, S., & Carl, N. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual,*

    theoretical, and methodological (1st ed.). SAGE Publications.

Robertson, R., & Chaney, C. (2015). The influence of stereotype threat on the responses

    of black males at a predominantly white college in the south. *The Journal of Pan*

    African Studies. 7(8).

Robertson, R., & Chaney, C. (2017). I know it [racism] still exists here: African

    American males at predominantly white institution. *Humbohdt Journal of Social*

    Relations, 1(39).

Roksa, J., & Whitley, S. (2015). Fostering academic success of first-year students:

    Exploring the roles of motivations, race, and faculty. *Journal of College Student*

    Development, 3(58), 333-348.

Rui, L. (2016). On the importance of the American Black fraternity and its enlightenment

    for the fellow townsmen association in Chinese universities. *China Youth*

    University of Political Studies, *13*(4), 308-314. https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-

    8072/2016.04.010

Schneider, M., & Preckel, F. (2017). Variables associated with achievement in higher

    education: A systematic review of meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, *6*(143),

    565-600.

Simmons, L. (2019). Beyond matriculation: Examining factors that contribute to African American male persistence at a predominately White institution. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 21*(3), 358-383. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1521025117714163

Sinanan, A. (2016). The value and necessity of mentoring African American college students at PWI's. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies,* 9(8).

Skiljaica, K. (2018). *Education and Social Inequality of the African Americans through the History of the United States of America* (Final paper). https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:717261

Skipper, T. L. (2005). *Student development in the first college year: A primer for college educators.* University of South Carolina.

Strayhorn, T. (2016). Factors that influence the persistence and success of black men in urban public universities. *Urban Education 2017*, *52*(9) 1106–1128.

Swanson, N., Vaughan, A., & Wilkinson, B. (2016). First-year seminars. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *18*(4), 386-400.

Thibodeaux, J., Deutsch, A., Kitsantas, A., & Winsler, A. (2016). First-year college students' time use. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, *1*(28), 5-27.

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018, November). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7

Walker, J., Martin, N., & Hussey, A. (2015). Greek organization membership and

    collegiate outcomes at an elite, private university. *Research in Higher Education*,

    3(56), 203–227.

Wilson, S. P., Gore, J. S., Renfro, A., Blake, M., Muncie, E., & Treadway, J. (2016). The

    tether to home, university connectedness, and the Appalachian student. *Journal of*

    College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice. Advance online

    publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116652635

Wright, K. L. (2018). The relevance of double consciousness among Black males in

    college. *The Vermont Connection, 39*(1).

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.).

    SAGE publications.