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“I’M TOO WHITE FOR BLACK PEOPLE AND I’M TOO BLACK FOR
WHITE PEOPLE”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK MEN IN
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE FRATERNITIES

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We recommend acceptance of this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the candidate's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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ABSTRACT

Christman, A. D. “I'm too White for Black people and I'm too Black for White people”: A phenomenological study on the racial identity development of Black men in predominantly White fraternities. Ed.D. in Student Affairs Administration and Leadership, August 2021, 194 pp. (J. Vianden)

White fraternity members harm Black fraternity members when they perpetuate racism and uphold White supremacy. When Black men join predominantly White fraternities, White peers expect Black members to assimilate to Whiteness and subject them to hypervisibility, tokenization, and color-blind ideologies (Hughey, 2010; Joyce, 2018; Mills, 2019; Ray & Rosow, 2012). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and racial identity development of seven Black men in predominantly White Greek letter organizations (WGLOs) at a public regional institution in the southern United States. After conducting two individual interviews with each participant and one focus group, the researcher analyzed the data and identified five themes: (a) positive fraternity experience, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) danger, and (e) Black lives matter. The results indicated that Black fraternity members experienced contradicting expectations from White peers in their organization and tension in the development of their racial identity. I recommend White fraternity and sorority life professionals do more to recognize and address anti-Black racism, increase education and training for ourselves and the student community, hire and retain Black FSL staff members, and develop inclusive marketing strategies. Further, I also recommend White fraternity men recognize and address anti-Black racism, eliminate the usage of racial jokes and the n-word, and change organization processes including membership selection, education, and leadership elections.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC, 2019), there are fraternities on 800 college campuses with over 380,000 undergraduate members reported during the 2015-2016 academic year. The NIC does not publish statistics on the racial diversity of fraternity members; however, many historically White Greek letter organizations (WGLOs) remain segregated with a predominantly White membership (Syrett, 2009). There is limited research on the lived experiences of Black men in predominantly WGLOs. Many WGLOs perpetuate racism, even those with Black members (Ross, 2015). Watson-Singleton et al. (2021) defined *racism* as “the system of power, privilege, and oppression based on socially constructed racial hierarchies” (p. 27). Anti-Black racism in WGLOs preserves a system of unequal power, authority, privilege, and resources between White people and people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Carruthers (2018) defined anti-Black racism as a “a system of beliefs and practices that attack, erode, and limit the humanity of Black people. It was cultivated through the transatlantic slave trade and continues today in the policies and practices of nation-states, corporations, individuals, and entire societies” (p. 25).

Institutions of higher education reported anti-Black hate crimes are on the rise (Bauman, 2018). Lantz et al. (2019) defined *hate crimes* as “criminal incidents motivated by prejudice based on race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation” (p. 194). Black students face a range of racialized incidents at Predominantly White

Institutions (PWIs), from hate crimes and overt racism to covert racism (Bauman, 2018; Ross, 2015). Black students experience both subtle and covert microaggressions, including verbal and nonverbal, indirect and unconscious, remarks used against marginalized populations (Davis & Harris, 2015; Smith et al., 2011). They are often *tokenized*—expected to speak for and represent the entire community of their minoritized social identity (Harper, 2013).

There have been numerous incidents of overt anti-Black racism in WGLOs across the United States, but few brought national attention to institutions and fraternal organizations. In the last few years, several racist incidents did draw the public eye. For example, at the University of Mississippi, photographs surfaced of fraternity men posed with guns at an Emmett Till memorial (Farzan, 2019). At the University of Georgia, White fraternity men recorded a video mocking slavery (Riess & Levenson, 2019). At Vanderbilt University, a student posted a video of a White fraternity member using the n-word (Vanderbilt University, 2020). Two fraternities were closed at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania after organizational documents revealed racist jokes amongst other disturbing content (Grinberg et al., 2019). These incidents only touch the surface and fail to encompass the significant and exhausting racism Black students experience across the nation. PWIs and predominantly WGLOs must grasp their oppressive nature and make changes to improve the experience of minoritized students, particularly Black men.

Racist activities and speech by White people at PWIs and in WGLOs serve to perpetuate and preserve White supremacy and protect White privilege (Cabrera, 2014; Salinas et al., 2019). *White supremacy* upholds the belief that White people are superior to people of color (Beck, 2019; Bonds & Inwood, 2016). White supremacists enact and

maintain practices meant to ensure White people have power and dominance in society (Beck, 2019; Bonds & Inwood, 2016). Many PWIs expect Black students to shed their Black identity and conform to Whiteness. Such expectations further a system of oppression.

White students expect Black students to dress, talk, and act White (Mills, 2019). In an environment of conformity, White peers only accept Black students when they have assimilated into White culture (Cabrera, 2014; Mills, 2019). PWIs normalize Whiteness through this White expectation (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018), lack of diversity in curricular and co-curricular opportunities (Mills, 2019), limited representation of people of color among faculty and staff (Beatty & Boettcher, 2019), media stereotypes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and resource allocation (Jones & Reddick, 2017). As Black men gain access to predominantly WGLOs, White peers expect them to fulfill prescribed roles based on their race. For example, a Black member may be the chapter's service chair, responsible for coordinating community service for the organization because White members assume Black members understand poverty and community needs (Hughey, 2010).

As Whiteness is normalized at PWIs and in WGLOs, Black students face ongoing challenges to their racial identity (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strunk et al., 2018). Involvement in student organizations, including cultural organizations and predominantly White organizations, aids Black students' racial identity by refining their cross-cultural communication skills. This engagement prepares Black students to work with White people without losing their Black identity (Harper & Quaye, 2007). However, it is unclear whether the same is true of Black students' involvement in predominantly White

fraternities. Although non-White students join predominantly White fraternities, White peers may not value or respect their perspectives (Hughey, 2010). Silencing Black student voices and neglecting to consider their perspective leads to their continued marginalization in WGLOs.

This introduction explored racism at PWIs and in WGLOs, and the impact anti-Black racism has on the racial identity development of Black members. Student affairs professionals must learn to recognize anti-Black racism and better understand the campus's racial climate and its effect on the sense of belonging and identity for Black men. This study sought to understand Black men's experiences in WGLOs. The overview of fraternities in the United States presented in the next section informed the study.

Background and Context

The history of fraternities begins in 1776 with the founding of Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary (Brown et al., 2005; Hughey, 2010). Phi Beta Kappa and other Greek societies utilized Greek letters for their organization names because most members studied the Greek language (Syrett, 2009). Many Greek-letter organizations established in the late 1700s and early 1800s eventually dissolved or evolved into what is known today as academic honor societies (Brown et al., 2005; Syrett, 2009). Today's social fraternities began appearing in the mid-1800s as a space for individuals with shared values to discuss controversial topics ignored in the curriculum, advocate for student rights, and provide a social outlet (Brown et al., 2005; Syrett, 2009).

Although fraternal organizations started with goals to maintain high academic standards, develop leadership skills, participate in service work, and build brotherhood, unconstructive behaviors such as drinking and smoking became ingrained in the

fraternity experience (Brown et al., 2005). As college enrollment diversified in the late 1800s, fraternities implemented exclusionary policies that ensured members remained White, Christian men (Brown et al., 2005; Syrett, 2009). Excluded from participation in the already established fraternities, Black students founded Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. in 1906 at Cornell University as the first Black fraternity (Brown et al., 2005). Over the next 60 years, Black students founded eight other Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs). BGLOs provided a place for students excluded from WGLOs. BGLOs created a place for Black students to gather, support each other, and advance together toward their goals (Brown et al., 2005). These nine BGLOs are often referred to as the *Divine Nine* or *NPHC organizations* because their governing body is the National Pan-Hellenic Council (Ross, 2015).

White students treated Black NPHC members cruelly. For example, Kappa Alpha Nu fraternity, a BGLO founded at Indiana University in 1911, was distorted into "Kappa Alpha Nig" by White peers. This racial slur resulted in the organization changing its name to Kappa Alpha Psi (Ross, 2000). Unlike the WGLOs, at their founding Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. established policies and practices of inclusivity in their membership, prohibiting the exclusion of potential members based on race, religion, or national origin (Kappa Alpha Psi Northern Province, 2019).

From the mid-1940s through the 1960s, many colleges implemented policies that prohibited fraternities from discrimination based on race (Syrett, 2009). WGLOs eliminated segregation and exclusionary racial policies from bylaws and governing documents; however, these organizations remain predominantly White today (Ross, 2015; Syrett, 2009). Syrett (2009) explained that after segregation became illegal in the

United States, “the most visibly race-segregated fraternities were in the southern states” (p. 259). Although inter/national WGLO removed the written language on segregation, they maintained White organizations by requiring fraternities to submit photographs of prospective members, visit from White headquarter staff and volunteers during initiation, and encouraged undergraduate members to only pledge White men (Syrett, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the racial identity development of Black men in predominantly WGLOs at a PWI in the South. For this study, I explored racial identity development using Cross’s (1991, 1995) theory of Black racial identity development. *Black racial identity development* is the identity change experienced as individuals become more aware of and embrace their Black identity (Cross, 1991, 1995). Cross’s theory includes four distinct stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization (Cross, 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). I approached this study using critical race theory and the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Research Questions

I explored the racial identity development of Black men in the context of membership in predominantly WGLOs by answering two central research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities?

RQ2: How do Black men in predominantly White fraternities make meaning of their own racial identity development in the context of their fraternity membership?

Research Design

Qualitative research studies investigate how people interpret the world, how they construct their worlds, and how they make meaning of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenological research explores the lived experiences of participants and the phenomenon of how the participants perceive the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015). I used a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences and racial identity development of Black men in predominantly White fraternities at a mid-sized southern regional institution.

Blake (2014) explained that the label African American combines race and ethnicity. African Americans are Black people who are descendants of Africa (Blake, 2014). Sigelman et al. (2005) surveyed Black people of African descent and discovered an equal split on their preferences of the term Black or African American. In accordance with like research (Harper 2015; Harris & BrckaLorenz, 2017; Mills, 2019, Strunk et al., 2018), this dissertation study uses the racial label Black rather than African American.

I conducted this study at a public PWI in the South. At the time of the study, the institution had 11 predominantly White fraternities with a combined membership of approximately 290 student members. Of these 290 students, only nine men identified as Black. SRU recognized all the fraternities as student organizations, and several fraternities had partnerships with the institution for over 40 years, with the first fraternity chartered at the institution in 1974. A fraternity chapter *charters* after it has fulfilled the requirements of the inter/national organization. At the time of this study, the newest organization at the institution had university recognition for two years and was still

considered a colony. A *colony* is a fraternity chapter in a probationary period, petitioning for full recognition (a charter) from an inter/national organization (Syrett, 2009).

I asked all Black men enrolled at the institution who were active members of a predominantly White fraternity to participate in the study. For this study, active members included those who completed their fraternity's *initiation ritual* — where they pledged an oath to the organization, learned the secrets of the fraternity, and earned full membership privileges. Seven of the eligible nine students agreed to participate. Participants in the study completed a demographic survey, participated in three individual interviews, and participated in a focus group.

Rationale and Significance

Black men experience severe and persistent racism at PWIs and in WGLOs (Patton, 2008; Ross, 2015). Of interest is how their experiences aid or prevent Black student progression through the stages of Black racial identity development (Cross, 1991, 1995). Little research exists on the experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities and still less exists on the racial identity development of Black men in WGLOs. This study will contribute to the limited research and fill gaps in the existing literature on Black racial identity development and the experiences of Black men in WGLOs.

Fraternity and sorority practitioners will benefit from a better understanding of how membership in predominantly White organizations, including White fraternities, influence Black racial identity development. Understanding the experiences of Black men in WGLOs may guide fraternity and sorority practitioners and White undergraduate fraternity members to improve practices that include recruitment, new member education,

elections, and officer training. This study may help fraternity and sorority practitioners work with White men in WGLOs, enabling them to recognize and take action to stop anti-Black racism, end White supremacy, and disrupt the systemic oppression of Black fraternity members. Institutions may use results derived from this study to review and change policies impacting Black men's experiences in WGLOs.

Organization of Dissertation

There are five chapters in this dissertation. Chapter I introduced the problem, explained the purpose, research questions, rationale, and significance, and included a brief description of the research design. Chapter II examines the literature. The literature review explores racism on college campuses, including microaggressions, normalized anti-Black racism and Whiteness, and toxic racial climates at PWIs. The review focuses on Black student involvement in predominantly White organizations. It introduces the theoretical frameworks: (a) Cross's theory of Black racial identity development, (b) critical race theory, and (c) model of multiple dimensions of identity.

Chapter III is the methods section, which provides context for the research site and participants, outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis, explains the researcher's positionality, and explores ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and delimitations of the proposed study. Chapter IV introduces the seven participants and discusses the five themes I identified: (a) positive fraternity experience, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) danger, and (e) Black lives matter. The final chapter includes the discussion and implications of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on the experiences of Black undergraduate men at PWIs. The review incorporates studies on Black experiences, regardless of gender, at PWIs, and includes studies across various institution types. Some studies focus solely on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The review includes the literature from the last ten years, with limited older yet critical research incorporated. The beginning of this paper provides context for the study by (a) reviewing anti-Black racism at PWIs and (b) exploring Black student involvement in predominantly White organizations. The latter half of this chapter explores the theoretical frameworks used: (a) Cross's Black racial identity development theory, (b) critical race theory, and (c) the model of multiple dimensions of identity.

Anti-Black Racism at PWIs

Black students face racism in the classroom (Harper, 2009; Smith et al., 2011) and predominantly White student organizations (Ross, 2015). In predominantly White spaces, Black students experience discrimination when asked to "talk White," to speak for the perspective of all Black people, and to fill prescribed roles based on racialized schemes. (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hughey, 2010; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Strunk et al., 2018).

Black students experience more racially motivated incidents than White students (Strunk et al., 2018). Through a survey of 69 institutions by the Fund for Leadership, Equity, Access, and Diversity (LEAD Fund), Jones and Baker (2019) found PWIs

reported more hate and bias incidents than other institutions, including hate crimes, hate speech, discrimination, bullying, threatening, and intimidating behaviors. Two-thirds of the responding institutions reported reoccurring hate and bias incidents in the previous two years (Jones & Baker, 2019). More than half of the institutions reported the distribution of racist literature on their campuses (Jones & Baker, 2019). When racial incidents occur on college campuses, many PWIs fail to claim responsibility and fail to respond with action (Davis & Harris, 2015; Fuller, 2016).

When that failure to act happens, Black students are left to navigate racially toxic environments without adequate support from the institution, many of which rely on student-led efforts rather than institutional change (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Watson-Singleton et al. (2021) discovered that Black individual's participation in Black Lives Matter activism decreased the link to depressive symptoms related to racial discrimination. In an exploratory case study of Black male collegiate athletes, Agyemang et al. (2010) found Black athletes felt obligated to speak out about social injustice because of their positionality and a desire to model the way for others. The participants believed as athletes, they held the power to influence change because of media visibility.

Other students may not feel they hold the power to influence change. George Mwangi et al. (2019) studied racial activism among Black immigrant college students. They found Black students may remain disengaged from racial activism because of other more salient identities. However, when Black students speak up about racism and the toxic racial environments they experience, university administrations may side with White students who are resistant to change and feel uncomfortable with Black activism (Fuller, 2016). The participants in George Mwangi et al.'s (2019) study acknowledged

hesitation with involvement in activism; however, they also described being targets of racism on campus. DeCuir et al. (2020) explained that some Black people use maladaptive coping mechanisms to respond to anti-Black racism at PWIs, such as avoidance or John Henryism. *John Henryism* occurs when someone works twice as hard as others to respond to sustained stress, feeling a need to overcompensate to achieve (DeCuir et al., 2020). *Avoidance* includes avoiding addressing racism for fear of punishment, avoiding addressing racism because the racism will persist regardless, or avoiding specific people responsible for the harm. Hoyt (2012) discussed a *cognitive dissonance* with racism, whereby some view racism as a system and others view it as a person. This racial dissonance, along with lived different experiences and identities, will influence one's response to racism (Bimper, 2015; DeCuir et al., 2020; Hoyt, 2012; George Mwangi et al., 2019).

In a mixed-method study at a southern United States PWI, Strunk et al. (2018) found Black students did not respond to the anti-Black racism they deemed less severe. Some do not perceive subtle, implicit forms of discrimination as racially charged or racially motivated; therefore, they minimize racism that is not obscene, racial behavior (Bimper, 2015). Ortiz (2019) reported that racial slurs and racial jokes online were not considered real racism by family and friends of Black adolescents. Black students also accepted racist experiences as preparation for working and living in a predominantly White society (Strunk et al., 2018).

Though life-threatening and appalling actions of overt racism occur less today than in years past, anti-Black racism continues to plague Black students and people of color everywhere (Carruthers, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). While some students

internalize the racism they face at PWIs, others have found ways to confront anti-Black racism by provoking White self-reflection and by gaining access to resources and individuals in power through organization involvement (DeCuir et al., 2020; Harper, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones & Reddick, 2017). In a qualitative research study on Black male achievers, Harper (2015) identified a three-step process whereby Black men can confront racism by provoking White self-reflection:

1. A White individual asks a racialized stereotyped question.
2. The Black student calmly asks a question to force the White individual to reflect on what they assumed.
3. The Black student waits for the White individual to reflect and answer, ideally recognizing the problematic racism in the initial question.

Though some Black students are skillfully confronting anti-Black racism, they alone cannot change the toxic racial climate at PWIs. Anti-Black racism and White supremacy survive at higher education institutions because many administrators fail to act, leaving Black students alone to fight for their rights and lives (Fuller, 2016). The examples of racism students experience discussed in this literature review are (a) microaggressions, (b) segregation, (c) tokenization, (d) normalized Whiteness, and (e) toxic racial climates at PWIs.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are subtle and covert, yet pervasive, everyday acts of racism often disregarded and unreported (Davis & Harris, 2015). Microaggressions include verbal and nonverbal insults that may be indirect or unconsciously committed against marginalized populations (Smith et al., 2011). For example, in WGLOs, White fraternity

men may make uninformed assumptions about Black members' experiences and backgrounds, continually mispronounce the names of Black members, deny their individual racism because they have Black friends, and mock or question the communication style of Black men.

Grigg and Manderson (2015) reported that both minority and majority groups referred to racist humor as generally acceptable, minimizing the significance of the racism. Beyond surface-level acceptance of racial humor, Pitcan et al. (2018) shared that humor and compartmentalization are coping strategies for dealing with racism and White peers' assumptions of Black inferiority. Kohlu and Solórazano (2012) explained that young people of color sometimes internalize microaggressions after repeated experiences of feeling invisible because of their racial identity. They "confused the racism with a burden of their culture" (Kohlu & Solórazano, 2012, p. 455).

As Black men achieve academically, they suffer more microaggressions while also experiencing increased physical health risks due to racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2011). *Racial battle fatigue* results from repeated psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses of experiencing and responding to recurrent microaggressions (Smith et al., 2011). Continual racial discrimination may lead to depressive symptoms with long-suffering effects on Black individuals (Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). Mills (2019) identified five environmental microaggressions Black students experience at PWIs: segregation, lack of representation, cultural bias in courses, tokenism, and pressure to conform. The following sections will explore how three of these forms of microaggressions appear at PWIs and in WGLOs.

Segregation

In the early 1900s, many fraternities added exclusionary clauses, limiting membership to White, Christian males (Syrett, 2009). These policies have changed, and segregation is no longer legal. However, campus social environments are segregated by race and gender (Ray, 2013). Segregation is justified as a natural occurrence and attributed to student choice (Jackson et al., 2014; Jayakumar, 2015). Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006) found White students normalized segregation. They reported a misalignment in White students' stated opinions on segregation and their actions. They found White people claimed to support racial integration, yet White people upheld segregation and had little contact with Black people (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006).

In a phenomenological study on the desegregation of fraternities, Barone (2014) interviewed four of the first Sigma Chi members of color and four of the first Delta Chi members of color. Barone (2014) learned when some organizations removed exclusionary language from their governing documents, White administrators and members implemented other practices to ensure the membership remained White, such as campus headquarter visits before initiations. Many of Barone's (2014) study participants shared a color-blind perspective, where race was supposedly not a factor in their membership experience. They justified the lack of diversity in the fraternity because of the lack of diversity on campus (Barone, 2014).

Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006) claimed that White people uphold a color-blind approach to life when they do not interpret segregation as a racial issue. A color-blind approach uses a raceless explanation for race-related affairs (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). While White people dismiss their role in segregation, some White fraternity members justify

segregation because most of the recruits are White men, claiming Black students lack interest in joining because of racist stigmas and stereotypes (Joyce, 2016). White men founded WGLOs to exclude others, and years after segregation became illegal, WGLOs continue to create hostile environments, including exploiting Black members as tokens of diversity (Harris et al., 2019; Mills, 2019).

Tokenization

After interviewing 68 students and hosting four focus groups at a large public PWI in the Midwest, McCabe (2009) found Black students felt invisible, where they were often the only student of color. PWIs may include Black students in college viewbooks and other recruitment materials (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018), but often have limited Black representation among faculty, staff, and mainstream student organizations, such as student government and predominantly White fraternities (Harper, 2012; Mills, 2019). Black students are placed at the bottom of an unspoken hierarchy of value yet are exploited when institutions want to appear diverse and inclusive (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018; Harper, 2013; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Mills, 2019).

Mills (2019) found many Black students experiencing tokenism felt exploited by their White peers and the institution. Kanter (1977) explained *tokenism* as an experience whereby someone is “treated as a representative of their [identity] category, as symbols rather than individuals” (p. 966). People who experience tokenization are identified by their ascribed characteristics and forced to represent their designated category, without their consent (Kanter, 1977). White people often call out Black students, ask them to speak on behalf of the Black community, and continually remind them of their position at the bottom of the unspoken hierarchy at PWIs (Harper, 2013; Jones & Reddick, 2017;

McCabe, 2009). The tokenization experienced by Black students is a heavy burden of representation (McCabe, 2009). At PWIs, Black men are not evaluated as individuals but rather as representatives of the Black race (Ray & Rosow, 2012). Some Black students feel obligated to be a positive representation of the Black community, resisting racial stereotypes and working to better the whole Black community through activism and leadership (Harper, 2015).

In WGLOs, Black students may experience the burden of representation from tokenization when the organization is considering event themes, t-shirt designs, and other programming. WGLOs may rely on Black members to provide feedback and opinions on behalf of all Black students. As Black students experience tokenization in predominantly White environments, many institutions normalize anti-Black racism and Whiteness, placing added racial burden on Black students. Kanter (1997) identified two ways those experiencing tokenization respond: overachievement or limited social visibility. The concept of limited social visibility implies that the Black people who White people tokenize attempt to blend into their background. For Black men at PWIs and in WGLOs, this may result in assimilation and normalized Whiteness.

Normalized Whiteness

Institutions normalize Whiteness in recruitment media, course curriculum, and the lack of diversity among faculty, staff, and administrators (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018; Harper, 2012, 2015). Institutions protect Whiteness by institutions through the concentration of power, lack of diverse curricula, and institutional failure to respond to racism (Beatty & Boettcher, 2019). White behaviors set the standard for society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

White students benefit from their White privilege, normalized by society, but Black students are disadvantaged by the racialized society (Ray & Rosow, 2012). *White privilege* refers to the many unearned rights, advantages, and benefits White people have because of the color of their skin (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). White people expect Black students to conform to Whiteness, shedding their identity by displaying less Black culture (Mills, 2019; Smith et al., 2011). In WGLOs, Black men may experience conformity to Whiteness by changing their hairstyles, dress, communication style, and word choices. *Whiteness* is a system of racial oppression that preserves White privilege and protects White supremacy (Cabrera, 2014).

Corces-Zimmerman (2018) found Whiteness is normalized through White expectations, whereby White individuals determine the role of racial diversity in the campus culture. For example, White fraternity men may expect that the organization features a White member as an academic achiever on social media and features a Black as athletic. The benefits of White privilege are perpetuated by systems of oppression that continue to place White people at the top and people of color at the bottom of society. Anti-Black racism is also normalized as institutions fail to provide adequate resources, both financial and structural, to support Black students, staff, and faculty (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018; Jones & Reddick, 2017). Structural support includes changing policies and practices to align with verbal commitments to diversity. Financial support includes reallocating funding to Black student programs, support services, and faculty recruitment efforts, often rare at PWIs (Jones & Reddick, 2017). The lack of support and covert and overt racism creates a toxic campus racial climate for Black students.

Toxic Campus Racial Climate

Understanding the critical state of anti-Black racism at PWIs allows professionals to work to change the campus racial climate. “When Black and White students arrive on these predominantly White college campuses, these spaces aren’t predominantly White, they’re overwhelmingly White, even Whiter than the segregated communities where White students have grown up” (Ross, 2015, p. 134). In predominantly White spaces, people of color experience *cultural invalidation*, whereby White people use continuous insults and identity threats to challenge the validity of Black people’s membership within one or more social identities (Durkee et al., 2019). White people use cultural invalidation to target Black people’s speech patterns, style preferences, and cultural ideologies (Durkee et al., 2019). When White people target the identities of Black people through overt or covert racism, White students and administrators often excuse it as isolated incidents (Grigg & Manderson, 2015; Ross, 2015).

PWIs invalidate Black student’s concerns by considering racist incidents as misinterpretations or by applying exceptions and excuses, such as intoxication or age (Grigg & Manderson, 2015; Ross, 2015). PWIs’ lack of acknowledgment and response creates a toxic racial climate that may hinder Black student success. Chen et al. (2014) suggested Black student satisfaction with an institution is related to the campus environment. An inclusive and safe campus environment values the representation of students of color and their experiences at the institution (Jayakumar, 2015). At inclusive and safe campus environments, Black students are more likely to persist to graduation.

The culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) Model describes the campus environments where students of color can succeed (Museus et al., 2018). Using

the CECE model to evaluate the influence of campus culture on the sense of belonging, Museus et al. (2017) found collectivist cultural orientation strongly correlated with a sense of belonging. *Collectivist cultural orientation* is the degree to which a campus environment supports teamwork over individualism (Museus et al., 2018). Sense of belonging refers to the “perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus” (Strayorn & Terrell, 2007. P. 4). Though the CECE model outlines an environment for success, many PWIs and WGLOs do not adequately address the elements of the CECE model and often fail to acknowledge appropriately and respond to racialized incidents (Baker, 2019; Fuller, 2016; Mills, 2019). When institutions respond to racism, it is often after an incident has garnished media attention, and typically the response lacks action (Beatty & Boettcher, 2019).

In a mixed-method study of Black undergraduate students at PWIs, George Mwangi et al. (2018) found campus racial climates reflected national racial climates. There has been an increase in reported hate crimes on college campuses (Bauman, 2018). However, the actual number of hate crimes occurring on campuses is likely higher than reports show, as officials filing reports often fail to classify hate crimes appropriately (Lantz et al., 2019). While PWIs fail to acknowledge anti-Black racism and hate crimes committed by White students, Black students are over-policed and profiled by campus security (Mills, 2019).

The race-related experiences Black students face—both institutional and interpersonal, positive and negative—influence students’ racial centrality, private regard,

and public regard (Chavous et al., 2018). *Racial centrality* is “the extent to which a person normatively defines [themselves] with regard to race” (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 25). *Regard* is the “feelings of positivity and negativity toward being Black” (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 26). *Private regard* is the meaning one individually attaches to their racial group, while *public regard* is one’s perception of how others view their racial group (Chavous et al., 2018). While being members of the Black community, some Black students choose to get involved in predominantly White organizations. However, White organizations reproduce and protect the White supremacy and oppression present at PWIs (Salinas et al., 2019). The subsequent section will discuss Black student involvement in White organizations, specifically in WGLOs.

Black Student Involvement in WGLOs

Reasons Black students choose to be involved in predominantly White organizations include: (a) greater access to resources to aid minority initiatives (Harper, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones & Reddick, 2017), (b) an obligation to work toward the collective good for the Black community (Ray, 2013), and (c) development of relationships with White administrators who may have poor perceptions of Black students (Harper, 2009). These various reasons for Black student involvement are discussed below, followed by a review of Black men’s participation in WGLOs. Black students feel an obligation to work for the benefit of the Black community (Ray, 2013). Students can adapt to White student organizations while still advancing the Black community and their own racial identity development (Harper and Quaye, 2007). Harper and Quaye (2007) discovered Black students are committed to racial uplift and use their membership in White organizations to advocate for needs and resources for the Black

community. *Racial uplift* is the concept that Black people are responsible for the social advancement of their race (Gaines, 2010).

Predominantly White student organizations are often well supported by campus administrators (Harper, 2015). Black students who choose to be involved in predominantly Black student organizations feel segregated from campus and barred from campus resources and support (Frazier, 2012; Jones & Reddick, 2017). Black students can access resources otherwise withheld from the Black community through membership in a predominantly White organization. Many mainstream college student organizations at PWIs, such as student government and WGLOs, have few students of color (Mills, 2019). Due to the lack of diversity in WGLOs, Black students experience hypervisibility, role expectation, racial color blindness, and assimilation when they join WGLOs.

Hypervisibility

Black students are always visible at PWIs, unable to hide from their choices and responsibilities like their White peers (Ray & Rosow, 2012). Ray and Rosow (2012) conducted an ethnographic study at a large public PWI in the United States, where approximately eight percent of undergraduate students were predominantly White fraternity members. The study included four historically Black fraternities and three top predominantly White fraternities, as ranked by academic achievement, philanthropic efforts, athletic abilities, and overall popularity. Ray and Rosow (2012) collected data through observations of the fraternities, interviews with 15 White men and 15 Black men, focus groups, and a demographic survey. The study results showed that Black fraternity men are hyper-visible at PWIs and are held accountable more often than White fraternity men (Ray & Rosow, 2012).

Hypervisibility refers to the increased surveillance of people with marginalized identities and the superfluous accountability the dominant population enforces (Kanter, 1977). Settles et al. (2018) explained that visibility varies by context, and some people may experience both hypervisibility and invisibility. Faculty of color who participated in Settles et al.'s (2018) study felt increased visibility when White peers used tokenization to have them represent diversity but felt invisible when they experienced social, professional, and epistemic exclusion.

The way faculty of color experience varied levels of visibility and invisibility at PWIs relates to the experience of Black men in White organizations. White members of a WGLO may engage in poor behavior without reflecting on the organization; however, due to the hypervisibility of Black men at PWIs, others will likely recognize a Black fraternity member and associate their behavior with their fraternal organization. Additionally, Ray and Rosow (2012) found Black men were often addressed by their name, even by others they did not know, indicating the hypervisibility of their presence on campus. The hypervisibility leads to Black people feeling they must always be “on” and performing to avoid judgment because Black people always experience added scrutiny in White spaces (Anderson, 2015).

Role Expectation

Black students are more susceptible to stereotype threat induced by faculty and administrators because PWIs often lack diversity in their faculty and administration (Harper, 2013). In a qualitative study at a midsize public PWI in the Midwest, Jagers and Iverson (2012) found Black men regularly encounter stereotypes that promote the idea that they will struggle academically, are skilled athletically, and have criminal

tendencies. Harper (2015) found as Black students become more involved, Faculty stereotype Black men less; therefore, student involvement may be a way for Black students to navigate toxic campus racial climates. By joining White organizations, Black men gain the opportunity to foster relationships with White administration who may view Black men as problematic and disengaged (Harper, 2009).

Though Black students can gain entrance into predominantly White organizations, these organizations are often segregated with one's race determining one's role expectations. Pitcan et al. (2018) explained that there are different rules for different races, including appearance and performance. White members are expected to behave in one way, whereas Black members are expected to act out racial stereotypes (Hughey, 2010). In WGLOs, White members may expect Black members to be familiar with poverty when involved in service, use slang, and struggle academically. Hughey (2010) found that Black students are pushed into leadership roles in the WGLOs that the White members feel are suited to their experience, often based on racist assumptions. Black students may experience tension when navigating membership in a White organization and maintaining involvement in the Black community (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Black students' challenges navigating the dichotomy of Black student leadership may be exacerbated in WGLOs, surrounded by members engrossed in color-blind thinking (Jayakumar, 2015; Jones & Reddick, 2017).

Racial Color Blindness

Color-blind racism is the belief that one should not recognize race and should treat everyone equally (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2001) and Bonilla-Silva and Dietrick (2011) presented four frames of color-blind racism:

- **abstract liberalism:** use of decontextualized economic and political ideals of liberalism to justify racial inequity.
- **biologization of culture:** use of presumed cultural deficiencies to justify racial inequity.
- **naturalization of racial matters:** belief that racialized outcomes are natural.
- **minimization of racism:** belief that racism has disappeared, and that racial inequity results from class or other issues.

Those who believe in a color-blind idealism believe racism is an issue of the past (Hughey, 2006). A color-blind framework is often the result of segregated communities and schools (Warikoo & de Novais, 2015).

In a qualitative study conducted at Harvard University and Brown University, Warikoo and de Novais (2015) discovered 51% of student participants use a color-blind frame, believing students were equally privileged and afforded the same opportunities. Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2001) reported that Black people are significantly less likely to use color-blind frames than White people. However, Cox (2021) discovered that “when POC are closer to Whiteness via characteristics like skin color or cultural practices, they may have an ideological view that more closely align with Whites” (p. 9). The participants in Cox’s (2021) study used minimization of racism to naturalize segregation, although they acknowledged the role race played, they still explained it as natural.

Joyce (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore race and fit in predominantly White fraternities and found fraternity men use color-blind tendencies during the recruitment process to defend the fraternity as unbiased. White men in

WGLOs minimize racism by claiming to be color-blind, as they may not believe race is an issue within the fraternity and that their organizations are diverse compared to the institution and society (Jayakumar, 2015). WGLOs fail to focus recruitment efforts on welcoming Black students and are indifferent toward diversity, thus leaving the fraternities predominantly White (Joyce, 2018). Black men in predominantly White fraternities experience added stress because of the tension of straddling two identities (Ray & Rosow, 2012), overt and covert racism within the brotherhood (Ross, 2015), and expectations to conform and assimilate to Whiteness and racialized stereotypes (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018; Hughey, 2010).

Assimilation

Black students may be granted admission to the fraternal brotherhood but may never experience the brotherhood White peers promised. White peers' acceptance of Black students in WGLOs is contingent on racial assimilation and proper performance of racialized schemas (Hughey, 2010). WGLOs normalize Whiteness, and only those who assimilate to the dominant White culture have a chance for acceptance (Hughey, 2010). “*Assimilation* is a process in which formerly distinct and separate groups come together to share a common culture and merge together socially” (Healey & Stepnick, 2020, p. 43).

Gordon (1964) identified seven subprocesses of assimilation: cultural or behavioral, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behavior receptional, and civic assimilation. *Cultural or behavioral assimilation* occurs when a person with a minoritized identity changing patterns and behaviors to align with the dominant culture. *Structural assimilation* occurs when members of a marginalized population enter

dominant culture organizations. *Marital assimilation* happens through intercultural marriages. *Identification assimilation* represents the experience of the marginalized group identifying with the dominant culture. *Attitude receptional assimilation* signifies the absence of prejudice against the minoritized group. *Behavior receptional assimilation* denotes the absence of discrimination against the minoritized group. The final stage of assimilation—*civic assimilation*—occurs when there is no longer a power differential (Gordon, 1964).

During recruitment, White fraternity members expect Black men to culturally assimilate by dressing similarly to White fraternity members and speaking like White members (Joyce, 2018). Black students culturally assimilate into the WGLOs; however, structural assimilation alone is not sufficient for acceptance (Hughey, 2010). Black men are only accepted by their White fraternity brothers when they successfully act on racialized schemas, whereby they act out behavior based on their Blackness, benefiting the WGLO (Hughey, 2010).

White students expect Black students to display less Black culture and conform to a standard of Whiteness (Mills, 2019). White peers expect Black fraternity men to be like them in dress, language, and interests. Black students in WGLOs straddle between dual identities, one as a member in the WGLO and the other as a member of the Black community (Hughey, 2010; Ray & Rosow, 2012). Black men in WGLOs are both insiders and outsiders, a dichotomous experience that may be stressful for Black men (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Ray & Rosow, 2012). Sullivan and Platenburg (2017) explained that Black racial identity is affected by context, including one's friends and the racial composition of one's surroundings. Black members' identities are in flux as they

transition between their friends in the Black community and their brothers in the WGLO (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017).

Black students may use code-switching to mask their authentic identity in White spaces (Allen, 2020; Apugo, 2019). *Code-switching* softens one's behaviors or uses two or more languages or linguistics in conversations to accommodate the dominant culture (Allen, 2020; Apugo, 2019). White fraternity men expect Black fraternity members to show just enough of their Blackness to benefit the organization, but not too much to the point the White members are uncomfortable (Hughey, 2010). Students balancing dual identities addressed how taxing it was to be involved in both the Black community and White organizations due to the tensions and high emotional cost (Jones & Reddick, 2017).

Black students navigate toxic racial climates (Corces-Zimmerman, 2018; Davis & Harris, 2015; Fuller, 2016; Jones & Baker, 2019) and racism in the classroom (Harper, 2009; Smith et al., 2011). When joining a predominantly White fraternity, White men expect Black men to assimilate while acting out stereotypes and racialized schemas. This section reviewed some reasons for Black student involvement in White organizations and Black men's challenges after joining WGLOs. The following section will discuss theoretical frameworks used in this study, including (a) Cross's (1991, 1995) theory of Black racial identity development, (b) critical race theory, and (c) the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Theoretical Frameworks

Cross's Black Racial Identity Development

Cross's (1991, 1995) theory of Black racial identity development is useful to understand Black men's experiences in WGLOs. Cross's (1991, 1995) theory of nigrescence details four stages of Black racial identity development:

1. pre-encounter
2. encounter
3. immersion/emersion
4. internalization

There are six identities situated within the four stages that the Cross racial identity scale (CRIS) measures:

- miseducation, self-hatred, and assimilation - within the pre-encounter stage;
- anti-White identity - during the immersion-emersion stage; and,
- Black nationalist/Afrocentricity and multiculturalist - in the internalization stage (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell et al., 2001, 2011).

The CRIS categorizes Black attitudes, including attitudes about oneself, other Black people, and people of different races (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Worrell et al., 2011). The CRIS is used to measure Black racial identity and is the only instrument that past researchers have not criticized for its reliability and validity (Worrell et al., 2011).

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) further offered a life-span model of Black racial identity development, which presented identity development from adolescence through adulthood and considered racial salience and internalized racism. *Racial salience* is “the

extent to which one's race is a relevant part of one's self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation" (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 24). The life-span model acknowledged that Black identity might be achieved through formative socialization or identity conversion, using the four stages of Cross's (1991, 1995) model. Regardless of how one achieves a strong Black identity, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) explained that "during the adult life span Black identity enhancement and modification is achieved through Nigrescence Pattern C, or what Thomas Parham (1989) calls Nigrescence Recycling" (p. 244). During nigrescence recycling, a Black person may move among the four stages Cross (1991, 1995) identified.

During the *pre-encounter stage*, one deemphasizes their race because of race neutrality, low racial salience, and anti-Black attitudes. The three identities in the pre-encounter stage are miseducation, self-hatred, and assimilation (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell et al., 2001). The *miseducation identity* negative Black stereotypes and distances themselves from the Black community (Vandiver et al., 2002). The *self-hatred identity* overvalues White people and undervalues Black people (Vandiver et al., 2002). The *assimilation identity* represents Black people who deemphasize their racial identity and instead emphasizes their American identity (Vandiver et al., 2002).

Black men are more likely to be associated with White people during pre-encounter, including involvement in predominantly White organizations. "African American adolescents who identify with Whites while rejecting Blacks as a reference group (Pre-Encounter status) are more likely to not select Blacks and to select Whites, people of different races, or both, as peers" (Wade & Okesola, 2002, p. 107). Similarly,

Rivas-Drake et al. (2017) found that Black students with diverse friend groups reported increased ethnic-racial exploration. A homogenous White peer group suggests a Black person is in the pre-encounter stage of racial identity development (Cross, 1991, 1995; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Wade & Okesola, 2002).

Individuals will stay in the pre-encounter stage of racial identity development until they are transformed by a racialized experience and enter *the encounter stage* (Cross, 1991, 1995). As Black individuals experience anti-Black racism, they are forced to acknowledge their Blackness. In a WGLO, a Black member may reach the encounter stage after experiencing racism, leading to an increased awareness of their race.

During the third stage of immersion-emersion, one becomes immersed in Black culture, surrounded by visual symbols of Blackness, while simultaneously avoiding all associations with Whiteness (Cross 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). *Immersion-emersion* is a transition stage from an old identity to a new identity rooted in Blackness (Cross, 1991). The CRIS measures Anti-White identity during the immersion-emersion stage (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell et al., 2001). *Anti-White identity* includes hatred for White people (Vandiver et al., 2002). A Black student in the immersion-emersion stage may become more involved with Black student organizations and campus diversity efforts. Additionally, a student may change hairstyle, dress, and other aspects of their appearance.

An individual enters the final stage of Black racial identity development, internalization, when one is secure in their Black identity (Cross, 1991, 1995). Black individuals expand relationships with White people during the *internalization* stage, becoming more open and less defensive, though still self-protective of their individual

needs (Cross, 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The identities measured within the internalization stage include Black nationalist/Afrocentricity and multiculturalist (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell et al., 2001, 2011). The *Black nationalist/Afrocentricity identity* prioritizes the perspective of Black people in all aspects of everyday life (Vandiver et al., 2002). The *multiculturalist identity* includes other marginalized identities as priorities alongside Black identity (Vandiver et al., 2002). Internalization pushes Black male students beyond their own needs to commit to the Black community and other oppressed communities.

Black men at PWIs are at various stages of their racial identity development. As Black men begin their higher education journey at varying places in their racial identity, the environmental factors of PWIs will influence a Black student's movement through the stages of Cross's Black racial identity development. PWI campuses are plagued with anti-Black racism, which may progress a Black individual in the pre-encounter stage into the second stage of Black racial identity development- encounter. Harper and Quaye (2007) discovered high-achieving Black students engaged in leadership within student organizations exhibit characteristics of the final stage of Black racial identity development, internalization.

Though Cross's (1991, 1995) theory of Black racial identity development has remained relevant since its inception, the theory is not without critique. Constantine and associates (1998) identified four limitations to the theory: (a) the four stages are depicted as linear stages, (b) the theory simplifies the experiences of many individuals into a limited range of stages, (c) the theory assumes all Black people begin in a stage of White idealization, and (d) the theory fails to separate Black culture and oppression.

Researchers have criticized Cross's (1991, 1995) Black racial identity development theory for the linear progression and its failure to incorporate and recognize other social groups' influence on one's identity (Johnson & Quaye, 2017). Recognizing the limitations of Cross's (1991, 1995) theory, this study will evaluate Black men's racial identity development using Cross's (1991, 1995) Black racial identity development theory while considering the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and critical race theory. The following section will explain critical race theory as it relates to this study.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) began as a legal movement in the 1970s and has since permeated other fields, including higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Theorists use CRT to transform the association between race, power, and privilege.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identified the basic tenets of CRT as:

- permanence of racism
- interest convergence
- social construction
- differential racialization
- intersectionality
- voice of color

These six tenets explained below informed the research design, data collection, and analysis for this study.

The *permanence of racism* indicates that racism is “ordinary, not aberrational” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 19). People of color experience racism every day in the

United States of America. Bell (1992) advised that racism was internalized and institutionalized in society since the country's founding. White people ignore racism because it is ordinary in our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Bell (1992) added that racism is embedded in society; therefore, "Black people will never gain full equality in this country" because White society is dependent on racism for growth and stability (p. 12).

Interest convergence explains that White people materially and psychically, providing little motivation to eliminate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Bell (1980) stated, "true equality for Blacks will require the surrender of racism-granted privileges for Whites" (p. 522-523). Ultimately, interest convergence implies that racial justice is only achievable when it converges with the interests of White society (Bell, 1980).

Race is a *social construction*, which means race is a category invented and manipulated by society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Society disregards scientific evidence that skin color is a minimal component of the human genome (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Wolf et al. (2020) emphasized that race is defined socially rather than biologically or genetically. No biological distinction exists between races (Wolf et al., 2020).

Racialization is the process of assigning people to socially constructed categories of race (McDermott, 2018). *Racialization* justifies the mistreatment of people of color and the privileges of White people (McDermott, 2018). *Differential racialization* occurs when White people racialize races at different times in different ways based on the needs of White society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Differential racialization explains how

stereotypes and imaging of minority groups change over time to meet the needs, fetishes, fears, and expectations of White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Intersectionality acknowledges that people have “potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 20). Intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, drawing attention to the layers of oppression Black women experience because of sexist and racist practices. Crenshaw (1989) asserted, “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (p. 140). Intersectionality is an analytic tool for developing strategies to address problems of equity and inclusion (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality recognizes the complexities of individual identities utilizing six core ideas: social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice. Intersectionality considers how one experiences oppression through a multitude of identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The *voice of color* holds that people of color can share their experiences with racism, which White people are unlikely to know (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counterstories legitimize people of color’s experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The voice of color thesis urges people of color to recount their racist experiences and apply their perspectives to disrupt the master narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The use of voice, referred to as “naming your reality,” intends to contribute to the effort to dismantle oppression and reconstruct society (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT is used to expose and challenge systems of oppression that protect White supremacy (Davis & Harris, 2015). Yosso et al. (2009) concluded that CRT as a framework requires that the research “name racist injuries and identify their origins” (p. 678). I considered CRT when designing this study and used CRT as a framework in the discussion in Chapter V to suggest actions aimed at improving the experiences of Black men in WGLOs.

Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

When considering the experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities, one must acknowledge their identities other than race. The final section on theoretical frameworks introduces the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and discusses masculinity in WGLOs. As this study sought to understand Black men in WGLOs, it was critical to recognize identities beyond race. Students come to college with different experiences and with various social identities:

No one identity theory explains entirely the identity makeup of all human beings... a multicultural or multifocused theory of identity is needed, where Black identity is understood in relation to other socially constructed attributes such as gender, social class, and sexual orientation. (Cross & Vandiver, 2001, p. 390)

Jones and McEwen (2000) created a model representing the multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) that is fluid given changing contexts. Abes et al. (2007) later reconceptualized the MMDI to incorporate meaning-making capacity.

The core of one’s identity is one’s sense of self, a personal identity, and is surrounded by intersecting socially constructed identities varying in proximity to the core based on salience (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). The socially constructed

identities are understood in relation to each other and are experienced through individual contexts, such as family, sociopolitical culture, and career (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The MMIDI encourages understanding of the varying, intersecting identities of students when considering identity development. To understand the experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities, one must consider race and the various identities these students hold. These varying identities include gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, citizenship, and more. It is critical to consider the multiple identities of the participants because other identities may be more salient than race, as demonstrated by Watson-Singleton et al. (2021). Since predominantly White fraternities remain men's only organizations, this study will consider masculinity a noteworthy identity in understanding the MMIDI.

Black men on college campuses are navigating expectations of masculinity (Syrett, 2009). Thompson and Bennett (2017) explained that men face a plethora of gendered expectations. In a qualitative study conducted at a PWI in the Midwest, Jagers and Iverson (2012) explored how Black men navigate masculinity in their residence halls. McCabe (2009) found Black men reported more interactions with police, with more severe consequences than other students. The study found Black men experienced anti-Black racism and isolation and felt criminalized and stereotyped.

Men in fraternities exacerbate masculinity ideologies (Thompson & Bennett, 2017). These ideologies are the socially constructed values, expectations, and beliefs of what it means to be a man. Fraternity members are more likely than other men not involved in fraternities to hold the belief that men should strive for high social status, be held to a different standard than women for sexual activity and use sex as a coping

method (Waterman et al., 2019). Additionally, fraternity members are more likely to drink to intoxication and experience problems with alcohol consumption than other undergraduate men on campus (Iwamoto et al., 2011).

Considering the ways fraternity men exhibit productive masculinity, Harris and Harper (2014) found undergraduate fraternity leaders prioritized leadership and accountability, appreciated diverse brotherhoods, and challenged sexism, homophobia, and racism within their organizations. Although the students participating in the study shared many positive experiences, the men also shared times where they failed to address these detrimental issues within their fraternal organization.

Masculinity, homophobia, and a culture of elitism and racism construct the predominantly White fraternity experience at PWIs. Students with non-dominant, marginalized identities continue to gain access to predominantly White spaces, but White people subject Black people to negative experiences within these organizations. Acknowledging Black members' multiple identities and the dominant toxic culture inherent in WGLOs is essential for understanding the Black membership experience and its influence on their racial identity development.

Chapter Summary

As anti-Black racism continues to plague PWIs (Harper, 2012; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Hughey, 2010; Ross, 2015), student affairs professionals may benefit from a better understanding of the influence of membership in predominantly White fraternities on Black men's racial identity development. Research indicates that Black individuals who experience anti-Black racism transition in their racial identity (Cross, 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell et al., 2011). PWIs can better meet the

needs of all students if they acknowledge and address anti-Black racism, promote Black student involvement, and explore the influence of environmental variables on Black racial identity development.

Understanding Black student experiences and the impact of membership in WGLOs on Black student racial identity development will guide professionals to foster inclusive and safe fraternal environments in which Black men can thrive. In Chapter V, I will discuss the implications from the study, including ways professionals can work with White students to transform the campus racial climate and lessen the racism Black students experience daily.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This qualitative phenomenological research study aimed to explore the racial identity development of Black men in predominantly White fraternities at a southern regional institution. Two central questions guided the research:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities?

RQ2: How do Black men in predominantly White fraternities make meaning of their own racial identity development in the context of their fraternity membership?

I begin this chapter with a review of the pilot study, an explanation of the research design, and a description of the research site and participants. Then, I explain the data collection and analysis methods. Next, I evaluate my positionality as the researcher. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a description of the trustworthiness and delimitations of the study.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in March and April 2019 during a doctoral qualitative research course. Three Black male students initiated in predominantly White fraternities participated in an hour-long interview. The pilot study's purpose was to explore the experience and engagement of Black men in WGLOs.

I used purposeful criterion-based selection for sampling in this study. The

criteria for the sample participants included:

- enrolled in undergraduate courses
- identified as a Black man
- initiated member of a predominantly White fraternity

In my role at the institution, I knew the three participants through their involvement in student organizations and asked them in person to participate in the pilot study.

Although I knew the three participants before the interview, the relationship levels varied. When I asked the students to participate in the study, I explained the purpose and nature of the interview. The participants received no incentives for completing the interview. I interviewed each participant in person for approximately 30-60 minutes in a private office space. At the start of the interview, I greeted the participants, reminded them of the purpose of the study, asked for permission to record, and explained the measures I took to ensure confidentiality.

I recognized how my positionality influenced the interactions and engagement with the participants. Participants understood that I would not share their information with others at the institution. For additional confidentiality, I removed the participant names, fraternal organization names, and names of others mentioned in the interview from the transcripts.

In the interviews, I asked participants about their decision to join a fraternity, their experience as a new member and active member, their involvement and engagement within the organization, and their lived experience as a Black man in a predominantly White fraternity. Questions asked included “what is it like to be a Black man in a

predominantly White fraternity” and “how does your racial identity influence your engagement and leadership within your fraternity.”

Each interview was transcribed verbatim, including observer notes of non-verbal behavior. Following transcription, I read each transcript in its entirety, adding reflection to identify what was understood and the remaining questions. Additionally, I utilized open coding to highlight phrases, important words, and recurrent codes throughout the transcripts using Microsoft Word’s comment feature. After open coding, I identified 132 initial codes among the three interviews, including participant language such as “act White,” “talk White,” “not Black enough,” “know my place,” and generalized codes including fear, anger, racist jokes, microaggressions, assimilation, and segregation.

I stored the list of codes in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. After combining the codes from each interview, I analyzed the data to identify patterns by sorting and refining. I identified four emerging themes: (a) sense of belonging, (b) leadership, (c) racial identity, and (d) racism. Two participants discussed racism, but the other participant did not use this word nor described experiences of racism. Two participants discussed their leadership roles while discussing their involvement and engagement, while the other participant did not acknowledge leadership roles in his interview. The themes of sense of belonging and racial identity were reoccurring in all three participant interviews.

Although the pilot study had a limited sample, the information gathered in the study informed the current study’s purpose, which transitioned away from research on sense of belonging and engagement to research on racial identity development. Additionally, I improved my interview skills and coding skills through the constructive

feedback of a course instructor and peers. While this study has transformed from the pilot study, much of the research design, including the research site, some participants, and data collection and analysis methods, remained the same.

Research Design

Qualitative research focuses on the participant's meaning rather than the researcher's meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research explores "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). I utilized the qualitative research approach in this study because it focuses on meaning and understanding. In qualitative research, the researcher is a primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher may gain a deeper understanding and clarity of the phenomenon by clarifying with the participants and probing for additional information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The qualitative approach I used in this study is phenomenology, which is interested in lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Seidman (2019) explained that lived experiences encompass what participants hear, see, feel, and do. Phenomenological studies explore how a person experiences a given phenomenon and the meaning in the phenomenon (Bhattacharya, 2017). Phenomenology does not study individuals but rather how individuals experience a phenomenon in the world (Vagle, 2018). While qualitative research generally draws on phenomenological philosophy, phenomenological research focuses on understanding the essence. *Essence* is the structure and qualities of a particular phenomenon, discovered through the shared experiences of different people experiencing the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vagle, 2018).

I framed this research with the concepts of the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and critical race theory perspectives. CRT questions systems of oppression, examining how racism and inequities are maintained through these systems, and moves beyond awareness of injustice to create action (Bhattacharya, 2017). Incorporating perspectives from the model of multiple dimensions of identity and CRT “begins with the questions [researchers] are asking of themselves, of the resources, of the process, and of the product with regard to their connections to race, racism, inequality, and inequity” (Morris & Parker, 2019, p. 25). Critical research positions the researcher to make or advocate for change and empower participants by framing the research in terms of power (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I included a demographic survey, three interviews (Seidman, 2019), and a focus group in the data collection. Data analysis simultaneously occurred with data collection. It is important to remember that qualitative research is emergent; that is, some of the planned processes shifted as I learned about the phenomenon through the perspectives and experiences of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The previous section explained why phenomenological qualitative research was suited for the identified research questions, shared the theoretical perspectives guiding the approach, and briefly introduced the data collection and analysis methods. The following sections will introduce the research site and participants.

Research Site

I conducted this study at a PWI in the southeastern United States of America, given the pseudonym Southern Regional University (SRU), to ensure the confidentiality of participants. According to the Carnegie Classifications (2017), SRU is a four-year,

medium-sized, primarily residential, public institution. SRU had 7,077 undergraduate students enrolled during the 2017-2018 academic year, with 5,317 full-time equivalent undergraduates (IPEDS Data Center, 2019). Of the students enrolled in fall 2018, 72% identified as White and 14% as Black/African American (IPEDS Data Center, 2019). According to SRU's 2018-2019 Common Data Set, 13% of undergraduate men were members of a fraternity at SRU. At the time of the study, SRU recognized 22 fraternities and sororities, 11 of which were predominantly White fraternities. The remaining organizations included six predominantly White sororities, three historically Black sororities, and two historically Black fraternities.

The 11 predominantly White fraternities on campus included approximately 290 undergraduate members. At the time of the study, the average predominantly White fraternity size at SRU was 29, with the chapters ranging in membership size from 8 to 57 students. Only nine of the 290 total members of predominantly White fraternities identify as Black, and of the 11 predominantly White fraternities, only five have Black members.

Participants

I used purposeful convenience and criterion-based sampling for this study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select the sample from which they can learn the most (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Convenience sampling is selecting the sample based on the convenience of access and resources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to my affiliation with SRU, I had access to the research site and sample. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that convenience sampling is often present in most sample selections; however, it is not credible alone. Additionally, I used criterion-based selection to explore

the lived experiences of a distinct population: Black men in predominantly White fraternities. The participant criteria were:

- enrolled at SRU
- identity as a Black man
- initiated member of a predominantly White fraternity

Vagle (2018) recommended that researchers consider the phenomenon under exploration and the proposed data to collect to determine the appropriate sample size. Understanding SRU's demographics, I invited all nine students at SRU who met the selection criteria to participate in the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated that the researcher should determine the size of the research sample by the ability to reach a point of saturation. *Saturation* occurs when there remain no new insights to gain in the study. To increase the likelihood of participation, a \$75 gift card was given to each participant who completed all three interviews (\$20 per interview) and participated in the focus group (\$15).

I emailed students who met the criteria for the study, asking them to participate in the study. The recruitment email (Appendix A) explained the purpose of the study, the requirements of participation, strategies for protecting participant privacy, and the incentive for participation. I offered to meet with students who have questions regarding the study, but I did not require a pre-data collection meeting with the participants. As students often overlook emails at SRU, I contacted several students that did not respond to the initial email by phone. Seven Black fraternity members participated in my study. Participants represented all five of the predominantly White fraternities with Black members.

Data Collection

Qualitative research typically collects data through multiple sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I collected data through demographic information obtained via a demographic survey, three phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2019), and one focus group. The following sections will provide specifics on the three methods of data collection I used in the study.

Demographic Survey

Before scheduling the first interview, each participant completed a demographic survey online (see Appendix C). The demographic survey gathered pertinent demographic information on each participant that was not available from SRU. I asked SRU to provide participants' age, classification, and program of study. Kumar (2011) explained that the researcher should know the demographic characteristics of participants, including age, ethnic background, and education level.

On the demographic survey, I asked the participant to share the racial diversity of their high school, fraternity name, initiation semester, hometown, high school, and current residency. The information on the participants' hometown and high school racial diversity informed the data collection in the first interview. Collecting the participants' fraternity initiation semester provided information on the students' length of membership in the organization. Finally, the residency options I included in the survey were: (a) in a residence hall on campus, (b) in a fraternity house on campus, or (c) off-campus.

Phenomenological Interviewing

Phenomenological research relies on participants reflecting and sharing, in detail, their lived experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). Context is necessary to explore the meaning

of the participants' experience (Seidman, 2019). Semi-structured interviews seek specific information from the participants but allow flexibility in determining question wording and order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I designed the interview questions as open-ended and conversational, yet specific, to guide the participant through the reflection process. The individual interviews followed Seidman's (2019) three-interview series and included various questions, including behavioral, values, feelings, and knowledge. I conducted the individual interviews using Zoom video conferencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the individual interviews, I asked the participants to be in a private room with headphones, as I was.

The first interview focused on the participants' life history (Seidman, 2019), specifically the participants' lives before college. The interview questions (see Appendix D) centered on the students' home and family life, high school experiences and involvement, and the decision to attend SRU. Questions in the first interview included:

1. Please tell me about when you first realized you were Black.
2. What did it mean to be Black in high school?
3. Please tell me about your interactions with White people in high school.
4. What did you know about fraternity life before coming to college?

I designed the questions so the participants would "reconstruct and narrate a range of constitutive events in their past family and school experience that provide[d] a context for exploring their participation" in the WGLO (Seidman, 2019, p. 21).

"The purpose of the second interview [was] to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of study" (Seidman, 2019, p. 22). In the second interview, I asked participants:

1. What does it mean to be Black in college?
2. Please tell me about your decision to join a fraternity.
3. What does it mean to be Black in your fraternity?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your White fraternity brothers?
5. How has racism impacted your fraternity experience?

Conversation centered on the participants' experiences in the recruitment process, new member education period, and experience since being initiated as an active member of the fraternity. I focused the interview questions (see Appendix D) on the participants' lived experiences, including their feelings, behaviors, and observations (Seidman, 2019). As I framed this study using Cross's (1991, 1995) theory of Black racial identity development, I intentionally designed questions in the second interview to learn about the participants' current understanding of their racial identity.

I interviewed the participants in May and June of 2020. Between the second and third individual interview, George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was murdered by police in Minnesota. The murder of George Floyd led to increased activism and demand for racial justice. During this time, Black Lives Matter protests, and counter-protests, were held across the United States. The unrest, racial reckoning, and the sociopolitical climate of the United States influenced the conversations in the final individual interview and the focus group.

The final interview explored the participants' meaning making, specifically as it related to their racial identity development. Conversations centered on their experiences as described in their second interview situated in the context of the sociopolitical climate

of the United States of America. I initially asked the participants generalized questions (see Appendix D) and then transition to asking questions specific to their first and second interviews. Questions in the final individual interview included:

1. Please tell me about how your understanding of race and racism has developed since beginning college.
2. How does your relationship with White people influence your identity?
3. How does membership in your fraternity influence how you see yourself?
4. How has participation in the study influenced your racial identity?

The interview provided the participants an opportunity to share how they understood their race, especially in the context of their fraternity membership and the sociopolitical climate of the United States of America.

Focus Group

A focus group is like an interview; however, a focus group brings together a group of people who have shared knowledge on the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Focus groups may result in a more honest discussion, especially if a participant was reluctant to share in their individual interviews (Barbour, 2007). Merriam & Tisdell (2016) recommended that focus groups be between 6 and 10 participants; therefore, all participants participated in the same focus group. I conducted the focus group online, using Zoom video conferencing, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The focus group conversations reviewed the racial climate from the participants' experience. I asked participants to share their experiences with anti-Black racism on campus and in their fraternity. As the moderator, I began the discussion broadly with simplified questions (see Appendix E). I asked the participants to discuss how they felt

being Black on campus, and then I narrowed the conversation to their respective fraternities. The three examples of racism discussed in Chapter II of this dissertation were central to the focus group discussion: microaggressions, normalized racism, and toxic racial climates. I intended to create a dialogue among participants by encouraging sharing different and similar viewpoints and experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study included protecting participant privacy, safeguarding data, maintaining confidentiality, and taking steps to ensure student safety. When I asked each student to participate in the study, I explained the measures taken to protect their privacy. I also explained the study's purpose and nature, reviewed the informed consent form with each participant before the interviews and focus group, and allowed time for questions, as needed. I used pseudonyms for the institution, fraternities, and participants to help increase confidentiality. Though I strove to protect privacy, I informed participants that I could not guarantee privacy in the focus groups.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended that written notes be avoided during interviews and focus groups unless recording was not an option. I recorded each interview and focus group, and an online transcription program transcribed the audio. Audio recordings ensured everything shared during the interviews and focus group was available during analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I immediately deleted the video recording produced by Zoom, as video recording is intrusive. During the interviews and focus group, I took notes, limited to non-verbal behaviors unavailable on the audio recording.

Following the interviews and focus group, I typed notes in a word document and stored the documents electronically on my password-protected computer. I stored the paper copies of interview notes in a fire-proof safe at my home. I saved the demographic survey results on my password-protected computer. Participants did not include their names on the survey; instead, they chose a pseudonym that I used throughout the study. The confidentiality of participants was maintained through the recording process as the recordings were password protected and stored on my password-protected computer. I deleted the recording from the transcription program after receiving the transcripts.

In addition to these strategies to protect privacy and maintain confidentiality, I took additional steps to ensure student safety and wellbeing during the research study. As the topic of discussion could elicit an emotional reaction, I provided each participant a list of resources after each interview and the focus group.

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis were intertwined and occurred concurrently in this phenomenological qualitative research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Vagle, 2018). As the interview took place over several weeks—approximately “3 days to a week apart” (Seidman, 2019, p. 27)—followed by the focus group, the data analysis from earlier interviews influenced the data collection of later interviews and the focus group.

After each interview, an online program transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. To review transcriptions for accuracy, I listened to the audio and read the transcripts several times. Vagle (2018) recommended that the researcher begin data analysis reading without note-taking, spending time with the material as is. After listening and updating the transcripts, I added in my observer notes for non-verbal

behaviors. I then read the transcripts, took notes, and identified follow-up questions for later interviews. I followed this process after each interview to prepare for the following individual interview and the focus group.

After I finalized the transcriptions from the interviews and the focus group, I reviewed the transcripts again, line-by-line, within the NVivo software. During this readthrough, I added annotations throughout the transcripts to articulate my understanding of the material (Vagle, 2018). I highlighted words and phrases throughout the transcripts. Next, I coded and organized data in NVivo, segmenting the data into labeled categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Open coding is the process of “generating categories of information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 333). This method of data analysis establishes a comprehensive list of themes through an inductive process of continuous review of all identified themes and a deductive process of identifying where additional information is needed to support the identified themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I initially identified 62 categories during open coding, including act White, dress White, talk White, code-switching, segregation, representation, diversity, racial jokes, n-word, caution, hidden feelings, love, activism, family, support, belonging, and more. I narrowed the categories to five themes: (a) positive fraternity experiences, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) danger, and (e) Black lives matter.

Although I situated this research with the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), I did not use these theories to identify themes. Critical research aims to challenge and analyze power relations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I did not intend to solve a problem

with this study. I designed this study to understand the essence of the participants' experiences as Black men in predominantly White fraternities and provide guidance for student affairs professionals to take action and make changes. I include the theories as perspectives in Chapter V, where I present the discussion, implications, and recommendations from the data.

Positionality

“Researchers do not exist in a vacuum” (Morris & Parker, 2019, p. 27). Since the researcher is a key instrument in qualitative research, collecting and analyzing data, it was essential to identify and address my own experiences and bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained reflexivity as a process a researcher uses to understand and acknowledge their experiences and assumptions, impacting the research. I am a White woman who attended a PWI, where I joined a WGLO as a first-year student. As an undergraduate, I served my WGLO in various leadership roles, and I continue to volunteer with the organization today. In addition to membership in a WGLO, I have served as a fraternity and sorority advisor (FSA) for the last five years of my career at an institution for higher education in the southern United States.

My interest in the lived experiences of Black men in WGLOs stems from my interest and experience in fraternity and sorority life. While my WGLO membership in a WGLO and FSA experience positions me as an insider, my race and gender place me as an outsider. “The assumption is that power in combination with hegemonic social structures results in the marginalization and oppression of those without power” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 61). Critical race theory assumes that power relations

influence everything. Therefore, I gave special attention to the power dynamics between myself as the researcher and the participants in this study.

Research shows Black students are experiencing racism at PWIs, and anti-Black racism continues in WGLOs, organizations established for connection and belonging. WGLOs foster racist environments and negative experiences for Black students, hindering Black racial identity development. Though I support fraternity and sorority life, a disconnect exists between the organization values and White members' behaviors, impeding the experiences and racial identity development of Black members and oppressing them in the process.

Milner (2007) reminded researchers of seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers. They urged researchers to be aware of their racialized positionality and cultural ways of knowing. As I am White, I restrained from normalizing White experiences and beliefs. This restraint happened after reflecting on who I am, evaluating the privileges of my Whiteness, and understanding the historical and ever-present anti-Black racism in society, on college campuses, and in segregated fraternities and sororities. Additionally, I stayed aware of my identity as a woman while conducting this research. When I first began working with fraternities in the South, I felt challenged by men who did not value me in my position because I was a woman. Fraternities are men's only organization known to perpetuate masculine norms (Seabrook et al., 2018). Understanding the multiple dimensions of my identity and the multiple dimensions of the research participants' identities was necessary to identify and address bias.

Critical race theory compels researchers to acknowledge racism and understand that people have many identities simultaneously influencing experiences (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). In this study, my objective was to learn about the lived experiences of Black men in WGLOs, and I did this by centering their voices throughout the research process. My role as a researcher was to amplify the experience of the study participants, whether positive or negative. While conducting the research, I worked to be transparent, recognizing my power and privilege, building trust with participants, and focusing on learning through shared dialogue.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is how the researcher checks the validity of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that researchers should address trustworthiness in the research's conceptualization, design, data collection and analysis, and in the presentation of findings. The strategies I used in this study to check for accuracy in the data included (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, (c) peer debriefs, (d) clarifying researcher bias, and (e) rich, thick description.

Triangulation is the practice of using multiple methods of data collection or examining multiple sources of data when identifying and justifying themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The selected methods of data collection—demographic surveys, three individual interviews, and a focus group—provided different data sources to triangulate in this study. I utilized member checks to verify the accuracy of findings by providing participants with identified themes and allowing them to provide feedback (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Two peers in the fraternity and sorority life profession, with similar identities to the participants, served as peer debriefers. The peer debriefers reviewed the data and asked additional questions as I analyzed the data. In addition to acknowledging my

positionality while designing the study, I continued self-reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process to identify how my own experiences and background shaped the findings. Finally, I use rich, thick description to present the findings in Chapter IV. The rich, thick description allows the reader to connect with the participants and the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Delimitations

The various delimitations of this study included the choice of research participants, research site, and methodology. Vagle (2018) explained intentionality as “intentional relations that manifest and appear... how people are connected meaningfully within the things of the world” (p. 58). I made choices about this study with intentionality in mind.

This study focused on Black male undergraduates in predominantly White fraternities. There are many students involved in fraternities and sororities; however, I did not include others in this study as I was specifically interested in the lived experiences of Black men in WGLOs, as they navigate their racial identity development. I reduced the study to one region of the United States of America when I chose a PWI in the South as the research site. The findings of this study may not be generalized; however, that is not the purpose of qualitative research.

The research methods of choice were interviews (Seidman, 2019) and a focus group. I considered including observations in this study; however, due to my position at SRU, I decided against this method. Observations are useful for exploring topics that may be difficult for participants to discuss and provide researchers familiarities with

participant experiences; however, observations can be intrusive (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained why a phenomenological qualitative approach was best suited to study the experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities. I explained how I utilized phenomenology and designed this study to explore how the participants make meaning of their racial identity development in the context of their fraternity membership. This chapter reviewed the research site, participant criteria, and concurrent data collection and analysis method. This chapter concluded with an explanation of researcher positionality, strategies for addressing trustworthiness, and delimitations of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities. Two research questions guided the study:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black men in predominantly White fraternities?

RQ 2. How do Black men in predominantly White fraternities make meaning of their own racial identity development in the context of their fraternity membership?

Through open and axial coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I initially coded 62 categories I later narrowed and regrouped into five themes: (a) positive fraternity experiences, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) danger, and (e) Black lives matter.

This chapter presents the results from the individual interviews and focus group interview using the participants' own words as "verbatim quotations play an important role in grounding complex analyses in the participants' own accounts" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 396). First, I introduce the seven participants, then present the themes, which include a rich description of the results.

Participant Introductions

Though I include an in-depth introduction to each participant below, I first outline key demographic characteristics. All seven participants identified as Black men who are

initiated members of a predominantly White fraternity and who attended Southern Regional University (SRU) during the time of data collection. Of the seven participants, one was a sophomore, two were juniors, and four were seniors. Two of the seven participants lived or previously lived in their fraternity house. Three participants identified extended family members who hold membership in BGLOs, while the other four participants had no relatives in fraternities or sororities. All except one of the participants were from predominantly White hometowns and attended predominantly White high schools.

The participants chose their own pseudonyms. Other names in quotations have been changed or removed, along with names of locations and organizations, to protect the participants' identities. The individual introductions below provide background context for the participants. The introductions detail their hometown and high school diversity, their first memory of understanding race as a concept or first memory of experiencing racism, and their decision to attend SRU and join their fraternity.

Cole

At the time of data collection Cole was a junior from a town an hour away from SRU. Cole shared, "my whole life I've really grown up around like White people, so I've just always, I guess, naturally adapted to White culture more than Black culture, even though I've had Black friends and stuff." Although public data reveals his hometown is 70% White, Cole described his hometown as "very, very equal." Cole also presented this perception of diversity in his description of his high school. "I'd say it's very racially diverse. I'd say it's about 50 White, 50 minority... Blacks, Hispanics, Asians. So, it wasn't very predominately White."

Cole shared that he became aware of race as a concept in middle school when he first experienced racism:

The only time I did really experience, I guess, what you could say racism, in middle school... I tried to date a girl... and her dad didn't allow it because I was Black... At first, I was like "oh, okay, that kind of sucks." And then I guess I started to realize, like wow, there are people in the world that really don't like other skin colors.

As a high school athlete, Cole was "a standout" as he was "one of the only Black ones on the team." Cole disclosed that his high school peers made jokes about his decision to participate in a predominantly White sport rather than "playing football and basketball."

When choosing an institution to attend, Cole only considered predominantly White institutions:

Ashley: When you were looking at colleges, did you consider any historically Black colleges or universities?

Cole: Um, no... I didn't want to like put myself in that category. I wanted to go to a public school with all kinds of races.

Cole joined his fraternity as a first-year student at SRU and had been an initiated member for two and a half years at the time of the study.

Though none of Cole's immediate family were members of fraternities or sororities, he has an extended family member who is a member of a BGLO. Cole's perception of being in a diverse environment continued when describing his fraternity. Though he was the only Black member of his fraternity at the time of this study, he emphasized that when he joined,

It wasn't just all White. I think there were two other brothers at that time who were Black... We had eight people in my pledge class, and we were, we were kind of diverse... There were six White guys, then me, and another, he was half-Mexican, half-White. So, there's a little bit of diversity in there.

Cole described some diversity in his fraternity; however, the overall organization lacked racial or ethnic diversity and was predominantly White. Cole was familiar with being in predominantly White spaces. He shared,

I'm in a predominantly White fraternity and I've been around predominantly White areas my whole life and I think it's just... I couldn't see myself being any other thing because, you know, that's just how I've grown up and it just fits me more.

Cole repeatedly implied that his fraternity membership was a positive experience; "I'd say my fraternity experience was very captivating."

Jamal

During the time of my study, Jamal was a senior from a large, predominantly Black city; "it's like a bigger city, but it kind of felt really small. Like, since I guess, the part that I lived in, I only seen like the same people." He attended a predominantly Black high school and felt he was "very culturally embraceful." "I never like wanted to be like in a space where there was only one culture being like a thing and I always wanted to be like embracing different cultures." Jamal struggled to identify the first time he understood race as a concept:

I can't really think of one because from my personal experiences, I've never been like judged for it... If anything, I would say maybe in middle school... I think it

was civics... We would talk about stuff in there... I guess it was a thing like the whole class like cared about and... we had an open discussion kind of thing... I guess that would be like the moment. It was like in middle school when we talked about those things. Outside of school I don't think I ever been like judged for being Black. I think the people that I surrounded myself with like didn't care as much.

Although his mother attended an HBCU, Jamal indicated that he wanted to attend a different type of institution. He shared,

I was kind of against going to an HBCU for myself because I feel like being predominantly Black and I like diversity I didn't want to go there because I wanted to be around like a different culture and that kind of thing or a place that like has multiple different cultures.

SRU was the first and only institution Jamal applied to: "I applied, and I got accepted. It's the only school I applied to, so it was like, I guess it was meant to be."

Jamal revealed that as a gay man, he did not come out until college because of judgment from his community:

Me also being gay, um, I feel like I didn't align with how people wanted me to be... Being gay was one of those things that was like oh, you probably shouldn't do that because of like X and X and X reasons... I didn't tell anyone till college. College is when I felt like I could be like more free with who I was and those kinds of things because I wasn't going to be around like the same people.

Jamal joined his fraternity as an upperclassman. However, he told himself before coming to college, “I was never going to join a fraternity [*laughs*], but when I said those things, um, in my head at least... I was talking about joining like a Black fraternity.”

Initially, Jamal pledged a different predominantly White fraternity but “dropped before getting initiated. Um, it was complications, I think, not really with them. It was with me and them. I wasn’t sure if they were the right fit for me.” He further shared, “it wasn’t really the Black part that was getting to me. It’s more the gay part that was the issue with me. I wasn’t sure because none of them knew that I was gay at the time.”

When deciding to join his current fraternity, he felt comfortable because the members knew of his sexual orientation. He also acknowledged, “there was already members in the fraternity who were Black, so like I guess it seemed kind of a normal thing of me being there.” Jamal expressed satisfaction with his fraternity experience: “For me in my life, it has been like a really big positive thing that I’m glad I decided to do, and glad I decided to stick with.”

Emmanuel

Emmanuel was a sophomore from a town about an hour away from SRU’s campus. Though the town is predominantly White, Emmanuel noted, “my side of town, where I stay at, is the majority of the Black community.” He described his high school as predominantly White: “My graduating class had about, I would say maybe 11 to 12 Black kids graduating... There was a little bit more Mexicans than Black. Then the majority White.”

Emmanuel recalled his first experience conceptualizing race as an 11-year-old:

So, I was at a grocery store, well a convenience store, not a grocery store and the owners were just eyeballing me the whole time I was in there. Always checking their cameras, always looking to see where I was at when I was looking around, and then, would just give me these weird looks when I would walk up to the counter to pay for what I had. Like, they were shocked that I actually bought something or that I didn't steal anything.

He later discussed this experience with his mother:

I was like "why do they have to do that? Like, we're not going to hurt them," and she would tell me, "There's still people in this world they're going to think that you're going to do something no matter what you do or how you do - like, how you walk, how you talk. They're going to always analyze that and overreact to some extent."

Emmanuel decided to attend SRU because of the major program of study, location, and cost. He figured, "it's only like three schools that offer it basically. Well, there's more, but all the major ones are really expensive." Though he briefly considered attending an HBCU, he remarked,

I didn't want to go change it to be at a predominantly Black school because it would be different. The experience would be different. I mean it might have been good to do something like that, but I'm just used to going to these schools, predominantly White and being around these people and making these friends and these connections. I like it, it doesn't bother me because I'm used to it.

Discussing his college choice further, Emmanuel shared, “I didn’t want to put myself in too far debt trying to go somewhere when I could go somewhere close to home and get the same program and the same degree.”

When he first came to SRU, Emmanuel did not plan to join a fraternity. “When I first was getting ready to go to school, I didn’t have any intentions of joining a fraternity. I was gonna just go to school, get my degree, and graduate.” His best friend invited him to attend a recruitment event in the summer, and he continued to attend the fraternity events when arriving on campus in the fall. “I went to some more, met more of the guys and then my interest piqued, and I wanted to learn more about them, and then I eventually joined.” At the time of the study Emmanuel had been an initiated member of his fraternity for one year. At the time of his initiation, the organization had one Black initiated member; however, of his 13-member pledge class, he was the only person of color. “I was the only Black one for my pledge class, everybody else is White.” Emmanuel reflected positively on his membership, sharing, “I feel me personally, it’s made me to be a leader, but it’s also made me to be a, uh, better person overall.”

Joseph

Joseph was a senior from a predominantly White city about an hour from SRU during the time of the study. Joseph described his hometown’s racial diversity as “kind of split,” specifically “the north side of town, um, is mostly African-American. And once you pretty much get past downtown, then it starts to go into the, um, White, Caucasian side where, that’s where you’ll see most of them.” Though his family lived on the north side of town, Joseph shared that his parents enrolled him in a school outside of his district:

I started out at a predominantly Black elementary school and throughout the process of two years, um, my parents decided that... the school was not helping me or my sister... They pulled us out of that. And through a very long process, we were gone from the north side of town to the south side of town.

Joseph became aware of race as a concept at a young age through conversations with his parents. He recalled conversations where his parents told him, "You're going to be treated differently. You're not going to have the same experiences and positive things as your friends, because of the color of your skin."

The first experience with racism Joseph recalled occurred in high school when he went to the store to pick up an expensive item for his parents. As he asked for assistance retrieving the product, an employee questioned Joseph's ability to pay:

The guy looked up, looked me up and down. And he looked at the product and he said, "now son, you realize that's really expensive," and I just kind of looked at him and said "I understand that. I understand that. I have the money to get it.

Could you help me get the product down?" He said, "Sure, sonny."

After getting the product in his hands, the employee followed Joseph through the store:

And as I'm carrying it, walking through, I noticed that a couple of store workers started following me around... As we got up to the cash register, there were two people that were just standing there behind me. I was like, "Why are y'all following me?" Before I even put the thing up there, I turned around and I was getting a little irritated. I said, "Can I help you with something? What have I done wrong?" They said, "Nothing at all."

When thinking about the incident, Joseph shared, “I guess that was the first time I had realized, ‘Oh, so because I'm Black, I'm supposed to be poor, not have money to buy nice things.’ And I'm just supposed to steal stuff.”

Joseph chose to attend SRU because of his program of study and because of the campus size. “It kinda spoke to me because it’s a small university, but it’s still a university.” He expressed appreciation for the campus size: “It’s a university where the teachers know your name and that to me means a lot more than just the big school name.” Before coming to SRU, he perceived fraternities as “just about parties.” Joseph disclosed that he has cousins in historically Black fraternities. He considered joining a BGLO, but after being invited to a recruitment event for his fraternity, he felt it was the place for him “I feel welcome here. Um, I’m enjoying what’s happening, you know? It’s a nice atmosphere and... I feel like I’m home again” At SRU, he found that his fraternity had other priorities: “These guys actually, you know, they care about school, they care about the lives that they’re doing.” He chose his fraternity because of their priorities and brotherhood: “This group of people actually see themselves as a family.”

When he joined his fraternity, Joseph was the only Black member of his new member class. “It’s really not that diverse. Um, my pledge class, I was the only Black guy and the fraternity, when I started, there were like two others that were a part of it.” Although the fraternity membership lacked diversity, Joseph asserted, “I feel like I can actually be who I want to be, you know? And, I feel like, you know, it doesn’t matter my race for that. It doesn’t matter the race that I am, you know?” In reflecting on his fraternity experience, Joseph contended that it “has honestly made a positive impact on

just my college career in general. Just for the sheer fact of like they've made me focus on what is really important to me.”

Mark

During the time of the study, Mark was a junior from a predominantly White suburb of a big city about two hours away from SRU. When describing his hometown, he shared,

The area I live in it's like on the outside of the suburbs kind of just more neighborhoods and if you go deeper into the city, like where the mall and all the library is, it's all apartments and that's where majority of the African Americans live. Whites live in the neighborhoods for the most part.

Although his hometown was predominantly White, Mark clarified that mostly Black families resided on his street. “When I was growing up, all the kids that were growing up were Black. We only had three White people hang out, but like 10 Black families on our street.” Growing up, Mark attended all predominantly White schools from elementary school to high school.

Mark remembered first grade as the time he first became aware of race as a concept. “I wasn't really around any other Black kids in my elementary school, honestly... Then when I was six, I guess it just really clicked in my head that we are different, you know?” He learned this by visiting his grandmother, who lived in a nearby predominantly Black city:

I would go back over there, and I'd go like to the barbershop or something and you'd see all these flyers, like, “certain things to tell your Black son,” like or “how to act around police officers,” or something. I was like, “I know they don't have to

go through that," so I guess that just clicked... I had to be more cautious in public situations, getting pulled over, you know. Or just communicating, networking, like, um, I'd just say like really just living life you have to be more cautious in a way.

Mark confessed that these warnings and cautions were still on his mind as a college student.

Mark initially wanted to attend a large research institution; however, the cost deterred him. He shared that his mother encouraged him to consider attending an HBCU; however, "that's just so different from what I'm used to, like that would just be 100% different, like a 100% culture change from anything that I'm used to."

Before coming to SRU, Mark gained his knowledge of fraternities was from the media, and he was not interested in joining. Mark shared that his father is a member of a historically Black fraternity, which he joined through a graduate chapter, and that he has other family members in BGLOs. Mark was unaware of the BGLOs at SRU until after he joined his predominantly White fraternity. "I got a lot of uncles who are Kappas, like three of them. And, I honestly would've gone to Kappa, but I didn't even know they existed until like second semester."

Though he did not see the BGLOs advertised on campus until his second semester, he attended recruitment events for several predominantly White fraternities during his first weeks on campus. "I was just kind of going to hang out because I was just so bored all the time... I just kind of joined the fraternity because those were the only friends I had." Mark was the only Black student in his fraternity when he joined, and the

White fraternity brothers debated offering him a bid (invitation to membership) because of Mark's race:

I saw some guys get bids and... I didn't get one at first. It really didn't concern me... I was like, "I don't really understand but okay. I didn't understand the whole rush process at this point and, um, they told me that they had to vote because like there was some confrontation or something about me being African American trying to rush.

Mark received his bid to the fraternity a week after the peers in his new member class. "It really didn't concern me at the time but, um, you know I look back on it and it's really not that, not that cool." In thinking about his fraternity experience, Mark remarked that he was "satisfied with how it's made me as a person." Although Mark reported an overall positive experience in his organization, he added that he had to continuously do more in his experience to earn respect from White peers, such as taking on more leadership roles, earning higher grades, and being present at more fraternity functions. "I'd say my experience is you have to work harder. You have to do more."

Michael

Michael was a senior from a small town approximately an hour's drive from SRU at the time of the study. Michael described his hometown as "nice and healthy, if you know where to stay and don't go in the wrong places." Michael's hometown is predominantly White and he emphasized that he needed to avoid certain places as a Black man. "I might get some ugly faces. I know, especially even on the way to [SRU] like I can't really stop for gas on that road there, because the gas stations close by probably wouldn't be that friendly to me." Outside of school, Michael spent most of his time with

other members of the Black community in his segregated neighborhood. “We all lived in kind of a section where African Americans were kind of like fenced in.”

Michael shared that his understanding of racism developed while he was in elementary school. “There was times in elementary school where I definitely got bullied. And sometimes, it wasn't really physical, but sometimes it was mental at points.” He detailed how the racism and bullying continued into middle school:

I think what probably hurt the most was the verbal torture in middle school...

They gave me a nickname... They called me Oreo, or White Chocolate, since I look physically African American, but they say I acted like a White person.

Though Michael continued to experience racism in high school, he held that his overall experience was positive due to his extracurricular activities. “It was a rough start, but I guess persistence kind of shined through in the end, and I helped develop myself, and people started appreciating me for who I am.”

When exploring colleges to attend, Michael was seeking an institution with a specific major program. He applied to six institutions but ultimately decided to attend SRU because of the summer bridge program. “Mom was like, ‘Oh, they have it just for colored students. This is wonderful for you. Yeah, we're going to go to this school.’ And that's how I got in, that's how I started.”

When Michael arrived at SRU, his knowledge of fraternity life was limited, though he stated that the Oklahoma Sigma Alpha Epsilon racist chant incident in 2015 concerned him. He first attended a fraternity event after being invited by “one of the few African-American men.” His new member class lacked racial diversity. “Most all of them were Caucasian, except for yours truly.” When thinking about his experience, he beamed,

“I’ve loved them as they’ve hopefully loved me. I’ve grown with them and they’ve grown with me as well. It’s been a process of trying to strengthen each other back.”

Phillip

Phillip was a senior from a city approximately four hours away from SRU’s campus. During his first and second years of high school, he attended a predominantly Black high school; however, he attended a predominantly White school during his third and fourth years of high school. When thinking about the two high schools he shared,

They are both very, very different type schools... My father told me that it was kind of good... because we got to see what our culture is kind of like since it was more like a ghetto type school. It was very low funded and everything... We understood why people kind of like see us as, uh, not as intelligent sometimes...

At [the first high school] I was too White for the school. And then I went to [second high school] and I was too Black for the school because the school was too White.

In his transition from an equally diverse middle school in one state to a predominantly Black high school in another state, he became most aware of race as a concept.

Phillip acknowledged that his peers at his first high school (predominantly Black) grew up in different environments than he and that this contributed to the transition being a “big shocker of this is how we’re seen in the world.” He disclosed,

At one point, I was like I just don’t want to be around these [Black] people because they’re not like me... I don’t know how to get into the culture of the school because they were raised all their lives to be around all Black people and

I've been raised all my life to be around so many colors... it was just a very eye-opener of I'm a Black male and this is how society sees me.

Phillip emphasized that his time in high school introduced him to racial stereotypes he continued to prove wrong in college.

He chose to attend SRU because the institution offered the academic program he was interested in, and it was in-state; therefore, "it'd be cheaper for my parents to pay for." Phillip only applied to SRU. "My father was like, 'do not put all your eggs in one basket.' I was like, 'Oh, okay.' And I still only applied to [SRU]. I did not apply to any other school." When he arrived at SRU, Phillip considered joining a BGLO but decided against it due to his fear of hazing. He shared,

My older sister, she's in a, uh, predominantly Black sorority and I asked her about it. I was just like, "Hey, I want to come and join, whatever." And she's like, "I wish you would join for the right reasons, not just because you want, you know, some friends." I was like, "Okay." So, I, uh, I realized that no matter what happens, they haze. Like, they can tell you they don't, whatever. But no matter, hazing is just one of the rituals they go through to get into the fraternity or sorority.

Phillip ultimately decided to join his predominantly White fraternity as an upper-class student because he felt it was a good way to make friends and felt safe in the company of the fraternity members. Phillip felt relieved during recruitment when a fraternity member told him, "that's one of the things we stand on, we don't haze." Phillip did not consider any other fraternities "because one thing I do like to go off of is like my instinct and my gut feeling and I just got a good feeling about the fraternity." Although the fraternity had

one Black member when Phillip joined, he was the only Black student in his new member class. Phillip described his fraternity experience as “one of the best experiences in my life because I got to know guys on a deep level, and I got to love them as a brother.”

The Essence of being a Black Man in a WGLO: Themes from the Data

In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline the themes I identified through analyzing the individual and focus group interview data. I identified five primary themes: (a) positive fraternity experiences, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) danger, and (e) Black lives matter. I selected these themes because they captured the essence of the participants’ experience in their organizations and most clearly demonstrated the participants’ racial identity development as a Black man in a WGLO.

Though I framed the research by the concepts of multiple dimensions of identity and critical race theory, I did not use these perspectives to identify themes. I will infuse critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) in the discussion and implications presented in Chapter V.

“I’m grateful for it”: Positive Fraternity Experiences

All seven participants described their experiences in their White organizations as positive, fun, and uplifting. The participants found value in their organizations because of the brotherhood, support, and love they perceived. Cole recalled his fraternity experience as “exceptional” and attributed his experience to what his brothers had taught him about respect and love. Echoing the same sentiment, Emmanuel said, “I feel like it’s just made my college experience better and... I love every minute of being in this fraternity. I mean

it's a good decision I did join one.” Michael described a sense of belonging in his organization:

It hasn't always been easy being who I am and being around the people I've been around with, but they show me sincere love and made me a better person because of it. There are some things that could have been better, yes. But they made me feel happy being one of them. And they made me happy to be who I am. I'm grateful for it.

Mark emphasized a feeling of support, stating, “I'd say the best part of being in a fraternity, has been that aspect of having people that cares for you 24/7, friends for life.” Simply put, Jamal proclaimed his overall experience “has been a great time.” Joseph articulated that his fraternity gave him the feeling of being home and feeling welcomed. All seven participants expressed happiness with their decision to join their fraternity, and many attributed the reason for their satisfaction to acceptance and belonging.

Although the participants overwhelmingly portrayed a positive fraternity experience, a few acknowledged challenges with their membership. Phillip felt frustrated when reflecting on his leadership experience because chapter members judged him when he implemented new and unfamiliar programs while serving as Chaplain. Despite these experiences and feelings, he continuously proclaimed positive feedback about the organization. Phillip described the way the brothers cared for each other as unsuspected.

Michael articulated that the fraternal bonds offset any challenges he experienced: “That bond is something I've never really experienced before. Where even though we do have squabbles sometimes and differences, we get past it, we grow together, we learn together. We truly love each other.” Cole also assured that the positive experiences

outweighed the challenges: “There's been some bumps in the road, but I'd say overall, it's probably, it's been like good more than bad.”

Although several participants acknowledged challenges and frustrations with their organization, they pushed these negative feelings aside and centered their positive experiences in their conversations with me. I identified three subcategories when considering the participants' positive fraternity experiences: (a) fraternity as family, (b) accountability, and (c) personal growth.

“A family away from home”: Fraternity as Family

Some participants described the fraternity as family and explained that the support of the brotherhood was similar to their support system at home. When reflecting on his fraternity, Michael remarked it was “like a second family” because “they're people I can confide in, I've grown with. They're wonderful.” Phillip proclaimed that the sense of family was why he joined the organization after being away from his closest siblings. Phillip imagined the fraternity accepted him as his biological siblings do. He maintained that his fraternity was “a family away from home.” Joseph recalled how the fraternity's support felt like family to him:

I call them my second family that I can go to whenever something; whenever I need something. You know, if I just need somebody to talk to, or if I just need to hang with somebody, you know... I have a pretty much a second support system. Cole also used the word family to describe the fraternity, stating, “they, uh, brought me in as a member of their family. They like valued me as a member of their family, and... I've been able to like grow and learn more about myself because of them.”

Although Mark did not directly use the word family to describe his experience, he focused on the brotherhood within the organization and how the brotherhood supported him in times of conflict. He explained the support with potential conflict with non-members:

Nobody's ever said anything to me and if they do of course I've got probably 20 to 30 guys that are [fraternity members] to back me up. So, I'd say that this had a positive effect for the most part.

Phillip also discussed the support and acceptance of his fraternity brothers, specifically when he considered his disability. He shared,

I have a bunch of disabilities... I have dyslexia. I have ADHD. Um, I had brain surgery when I was 16. I've had memory loss a lot. Um, so it's a lot of stuff that's going on up there. So, when I came into this, I was like, you know, "there's going to be a lot of people who try to make fun of me." Um, they kind of rewarded me for that because they're like, "You're very strong. You're one of our strongest brothers."

Phillip held that the fraternity had prioritized his needs because of his disability, and he valued their support and care. The members' acknowledgment of Phillip's disability is significant because they considered the multiple dimensions of his identity.

Joseph suggested that all the brothers supported each other as a way to support the organization as a whole: "I'm not just out here supporting my White bros, I'm out here supporting my Black bros as well... We're all trying to get to the next level." Cole echoed similar ideas, sharing that the fraternity members always worked together to build up the organization.

Though most of the participants focused on the familial bonds within the fraternity, Jamal disagreed. Jamal held the opinion that BGLOs have stronger familial bonds than White fraternities. Jamal supposed this lack of bond was due to racial differences:

I would assume that like most of the people who are in like the Black fraternities... I want to say they feel connected, maybe it's because of being Black and those kinds of things, that that's why I feel like Black fraternities, like brotherhood are more like bonded and like more family-like than White fraternities.

Jamal's perception of the fraternal bonds aligns with the concept of Black students being both an insider and an outsider in White organizations.

Emmanuel surmised the brotherhood among White and Black men in his chapter would be stronger if the fraternity had a more diverse membership: "We all work together as a brotherhood, so it's not, uh, a bad thing in my opinion. I just feel like there could be more of us." Similarly, Cole stated, "I'm a different skin color than the people in my fraternity, than most of them. There could be more of us, but like it's alright. They're still accepting of me and still treat me like they would treat anybody else." Joseph also called for increased diversity: "Whenever I go to an event, usually I'm the only Black guy there. It would be cool not to be, in a frame or sense, like a needle in a haystack, but it just is the way it is." Several participants articulated the call for increased representation; however, they dismissed the organizations' lack of diversity.

“I'm representing [the fraternity] as a whole”: Accountability

Although Jamal indicated his organization did not seem as bonded as Black fraternities, he discussed the loyalty of his organization and how members were a collective, representing the fraternity as a whole. He explained,

I feel like you have to be loyal to the fraternity or nothing matters at all... You're all brothers now. You're all like a collective group, so if someone says something about one person, they're kind of talking about all of you.

Mark underscored the concept that fraternity men are always mindful of their actions because of their fraternity's unified representation. He stated,

The way I represent myself because anywhere I go in [town] I understand I'm representing more than myself; I'm representing [the fraternity] as a whole. Like, everybody does. So, I wear my t-shirts out or um, I just don't go out and make a fool out of myself because then I know I'm giving my fraternity a bad name, as well as myself.

The participants' perception of always representing their organization demonstrates Black men's hypervisibility in predominantly White organizations. As one of a few Black men in predominantly White fraternities, other students, staff, and community members easily identify the men as members of their organizations. In contrast, community members do not identify White members as effortlessly. Several other participants discussed how their fraternities felt unified and held their members accountable to high standards.

Because of the fraternities' collective unity, the participants identified an increased sense of accountability. Jamal shared, “whatever I do, it's going to reflect this

whole group of people. And, so you try like to make as little mistakes as possible.”

Similarly, Joseph felt obligated to follow fraternity standards because of his membership:

I'm still the same person, I just wear the letters of the fraternity now. But, like, in some points, it's not, "hey, you're just wearing the letters of the fraternity." It's, "hey, you're now a member, and you're now being held accountable to what the fraternity standards are."

Jamal's and Joseph's experiences further demonstrate the hypervisibility of Black men in predominantly White fraternities. They are easily identifiable as one of the few Black men in predominantly White fraternities; therefore, there is added oversight of their actions and behaviors. Jamal described the hypervisibility he experienced: “Being the only Black guy in a fraternity put a spotlight on me, like, ‘he's the different one’.”

Several participants shared an understanding that it was necessary to demonstrate their loyalty to their organization through their actions. Mark discussed how the fraternity's reputation influenced his behavior; specifically, it helped him mature:

So, I didn't want our reputation to be damaged. I didn't want to be seen as like the lazy person or an immature person, so I kind of just, uh, grew up in the moment, decided that it's time for a change, and that I need to start taking everything more serious. And I'm honoring my obligation to school and the fraternity.

Joseph stated, “a fraternity is not just like family, but it's an accountability thing... you're going to look out for me to make sure I'm not after doing anything stupid.” Jamal echoed the accountability as significant to guiding member behavior: “one of our better things that we do is holding each other accountable. Whenever somebody does anything... we try not to feel like we're attacking them and more of like we're trying to help them do

better.” Participants continued to discuss accountability and fraternity standards when considering the ways the fraternity contributed to their personal growth.

“Made me a better man”: Personal Growth

I asked the participants about the leadership positions they held in their organization. Two participants had previously served in one of their chapter’s highest leadership roles on the executive council. Only one of the participants had not served in any leadership role for their organization. Though I asked the participants about formal leadership roles, all of the participants discussed ways the fraternity had shaped them into leaders and aided in their personal growth. Emmanuel described the way the fraternity helped him see himself as a future leader:

Membership in my fraternity makes me see myself as you know, uh, a future leader, somebody that people can come to and talk to... for guidance or if they just need someone to talk to have an ear to listen because I've always been there to listen to somebody if they need me to... It makes me see myself as a better man... a better student, you know staying up on my grades, and... staying focused on the task at hand. And it also helps me perceive that I can achieve what I want and what I put my mind to.

The way Emmanuel discussed the value of the fraternity for his future demonstrated how membership in predominantly White organizations might give Black students access to resources and power otherwise unavailable. Outside of leadership skills, all of the participants articulated various ways the fraternity aided in their personal growth.

Joseph explained that his organization positively impacted his college experience by requiring him to “focus on what is really important.” Emmanuel claimed that the

fraternity helped him grow as a person and develop his character. After joining his fraternity, he felt more thoughtful, deliberate in decision making, and had improved interpersonal skills. Michael also attributed personal growth and character development to his fraternity.

Cole attributed the development of his communication skills and confidence to his fraternity. He expanded on this idea sharing,

Well, I guess looking back, I have changed a lot. I became more confident in myself. I'm better at speaking to you know whoever I want to... I haven't really gotten a huge like leadership position in [the fraternity], but you know the positions that I have had... they taught me to stick with a lot of things and just to keep going no matter what and to always give your best. I think just overall made me a better man and prepared me for the future.

Mark attributed his academic success and growth to the fraternity's standards. He reported that his parents also saw the way the fraternity helped him grow:

When I first got here, my GPA wasn't too good like first semester. Second semester wasn't the best. Third semester got a little better but then like after that everything started picking up and I started making you know good grades like I'm supposed to, but I would say it's like a year setback. So, I mean, my parents, they see that, and they see that it's kind of like maturing me as a person because I have a couple leadership positions now [the fraternity], so I have a lot of responsibility and it's kind of maturing me.

Jamal attributed his interpersonal skill development to his fraternity membership:

It's been a great time of me, you know, learning who I am, um, seeing how other people deal with things, being able to be a part of like, I guess I want to say like kind of a change in that way that people even see me.

A few participants attributed their success to their organizations, as though they would not be as successful without their membership in the fraternity. Overall, all participants recounted positive experiences. Digging deeper into the participants' lived experiences may reveal a different perspective.

“I've just always naturally adapted to White culture”: Navigating Whiteness

Six of the seven participants spent time in predominantly White communities for most of their life. As they talked about their understanding of race and their identity, many discussed how Whiteness saturates their life. Cole explained,

Well, my whole life I've really grown up around like White people, so I've just always naturally adapted to White culture more than Black culture even though I've had Black friends and stuff but, I've just always like naturally adapted to White culture, so like all these stuff that I've named are White culture-wise that are implemented into my life, I'd say every day.

The idea of Whiteness as natural to the participants is significant for understanding their racial identity development. Joseph reported that he spent his entire life involved with the “predominantly White side of things” outside of his family. Mark's experience was similar because he had primarily White neighborhood and high school friends. As I will discuss more in Chapter V, Mark's experience demonstrated how in the pre-encounter stage of Cross's (1991, 1995) theory Black men are more often associated with White people because of race neutrality, low racial salience, and anti-Black attitudes.

Like Mark, most of Jamal's closest friends were White. Jamal explained that he experienced more profound connections with White peers than Black peers: "I think I always connected a lot more with the White side." He attributed his connection with White peers to acceptance and being comfortable in White communities. Emmanuel also acknowledged that he had more robust relationships with White peers than with Black peers, including in his fraternity:

I've always had like a more, a better relationship forming with Whites because I've always been like around them throughout high school... I still have a bond with [Black fraternity brothers]. It may not be as close with certain people, but it's still there. It's not like I'm treating them any different, because I mean, one, they're just like me, a minority. So, I understand what things are like. I just might not be like as close as I would with other people.

The participants' relationships with the White community further provide context for understanding their racial identity development. As discussed in Chapter II, Black people are more likely to be associated with White people in the pre-encounter stage of Cross's (1991, 1995) Black racial identity development. I will discuss the White community's influence on racial identity more in Chapter V.

Several of the participants recalled their fraternity choice as stemming from their experience in the White community. Cole implied that the White surroundings of his childhood and early adulthood guided him to his fraternity choice. He shared, "I couldn't see myself being any other thing because you know that's just how I've grown up and it just fits me more." I will discuss the idea of fit as it relates to assimilation in Chapter V.

While half of the participants normalized their involvement in predominantly White fraternities, Phillip elucidated the tension of being a member of the White fraternity and a member of the Black community. He suspected his decision to attend a PWI and join a predominantly White fraternity led White people to question his racial identity. "It's always the joke, or the sense of, 'You're not Black,' 'You're more White than I am,' Or 'you're the Whitest Black person I've ever seen.'"

Several participants explained that their lack of involvement in the Black community resulted from their experiences in predominantly White environments. Emmanuel shared,

I'm used to being on a predominantly White campus, being in high school and stuff, but this is much different because there's way more people here... You would expect more of us, to actually see more of us around. I see a pretty decent amount of Black people, but the thing is like I'm not associated with them, because like they're mainly on the sports teams. The basketball and football teams are the main ones I see around.

Cole also admitted that he was not strongly involved in the Black community aside from family and a few close friends. Jamal recalled that since coming to SRU, he only spent time with White peers since he did not feel connected with the Black community:

I don't think I act as Black as other Black people I guess if you want to say in a way. Um, but that's not even really because of [SRU]. It's kinda like how I grew up, that kind of thing. Like, I feel like I never really fit in with other Black people even though I was always around them. Um. I always felt like I felt differently about everything than other people.

Most participants distanced themselves from the Black community and differentiated themselves from Black peers. The differences they articulated deemphasized their race as they expressed anti-Black attitudes and demonstrated low racial salience.

Michael was the only participant who acknowledged his lack of involvement in the Black community but did so with positivity: “In terms of personal African American life, it's not necessarily that I see it often, but I know I'm fully supported by it.” Through these experiences in White communities, the participants discussed how their identity was influenced and perceived by others. I identified two subcategories: (a) acting, talking, and dressing White and (b) race and anti-Black racism.

“People don't see me as like a true Black man”: Acting, Talking, and Dressing White

The participants shared experiences during which they felt judged when peers considered their behaviors and mannerisms White and when peers questioned their racial identity. Cole stated that his brother joked about his decision to join a White fraternity: “He’s like, ‘You nerd. You joined a White fraternity’ ... But I know he's just joking.” He also assumed Black peers judged his decision to join a predominantly White fraternity. “My fellow Black people, they might judge because I joined a predominantly White fraternity... They could see me being in a White fraternity and they might judge me and think I should've went to a Black fraternity.”

Emmanuel also thought some peers judged his decision to join a White fraternity. Emmanuel explained his peers would view his decision to join his fraternity as him acting White to avoid insults:

They would just view it as a way for me to act White and to... be with them
[White people] all the time to where, uh, I don't have to worry about um, being

subjected to the insults or uh, being belittled... I joined a predominantly White fraternity so I'm already in with the White crowd... I don't know if that makes sense. Um, to where I'm not always being subjected to... insults, being the outcast, being felt like I'm different you know, um, just because I joined a predominantly White fraternity.

Emmanuel felt White peers perceived his decision to join a White fraternity as self-protection. He believed some people would perceive his decision to join his organization as an attempt to “fit in” and “act White.”

Most participants articulated ways people perceived their behaviors as White.

Jamal described how peers perceived him as White because of his self-expression:

I think other people may find me a little bit more White-ish of a Black person rather than like, uh, Blacker... I don't think it's because I am White-ish, I think it's more because I don't...express myself as other Black people. But I think in like Black culture, they think of like not expressing yourself as White-ish.

The peer perceptions Emmanuel and Jamal articulated may demonstrate how Black men are only accepted in White organizations when they assimilate to Whiteness, at least in the context of the fraternities at SRU. Mark claimed that when he did not assimilate to Whiteness, his fraternity brothers made “it seem like I am missing out or something just because we have different tastes... like, they don't try to make me feel ashamed for being Black... I just hope that we can respect each other's interests and everything.” Mark explained that White fraternity brothers mostly make him feel this way at organization events based on how he dresses, his food choices, and his music preferences.

Phillip held a similar sentiment: “I’m a Black man, but I feel like a lot of people don't see me as like a true Black man because I don't listen to same music. I don't act the same way. I don't sound the same.” Phillip believed that society expected Black men to be aggressive, loud, and masculine. Phillip felt that people perceived him as not Black enough because he liked pop music, his voice was not deep, and he regularly showed emotion. Other participants similarly shared that some individuals perceived their behaviors as not Black enough. Michael articulated this perception stating, “I guess looking back, maybe it's not stuff they were saying I acted White. I didn't act stereotypically Black.”

Phillip was the only participant who expressed concern and addressed how the Black community would perceive his actions around White peers. He shared,

It makes it hard for me to do a lot of stuff, cause I always have to question... would the other Black community be okay with me doing this? Like, that pops into my head all the time. As if a Black person saw me doing this, will they like laugh at me? Would they like point at me or like call me like an Uncle Tom or something like that. Like Uncle Tom is a reference to, um, how Black men are perceived as-like, how they act White. They call them Uncle Tom's. Um. So, I always got that racing through my mind.

Phillip’s feelings expose the tension Black men in the study may experience navigating involvement in both the White and Black communities.

Several participants discussed how they considered their dress White. Jamal described his dress as different because it was less “show-offy” than his Black peers. He explained that how he dressed allowed him to blend into the background. Cole also

discussed how his dress allowed him to blend in, and specifically the clothing brands associated with White fraternities:

It's more like Columbia, like Patagonia and like North Face like shirts... Then, like the shorts... they're called an Omni-Shade. They're like Columbia, PFG shorts... Then I guess for like shoes, like either New Balances or Chacos, which I wear Chacos all the time.

Jamal and Cole perceived their dress as White. The self-perception of the participants revealed race neutrality and low salience of their racial identity.

Some participants further recalled the ways their dress changed because of the influence of their White peers. Joseph detailed how his attire changed when he attended a predominantly White high school: "I stopped wearing a lot of baggy clothes. I started wearing, you know, khaki shorts, um, buttoned down shirts." He further added that after joining his fraternity, "it just got to the point where, you know, I was like, well, it has to say Vineyard Vines. It has to say that. It has to be, um, Southern Marsh. It has to be all that." Mark also specified how his attire changed after joining his fraternity, particularly after living in the fraternity house: "I do have a pair of duck boots now... I just wear those and khaki pant, so I don't feel too out of place." Phillip indicated his Black peers noticed the change in his dress after Phillip joined his fraternity:

I decided to wear khaki shorts, my brown loafers, a nice teal shirt, and a gray, um, cardigan. This is like last year, and I saw my Black friends who I came into college with because, my freshman year... And I walked over to them and they're like, "Who are you?" I was like, "What do you mean?" They said, "What have you done with [Phillip]" I'm like, "What are you talking about?" Because when I

was in my freshman year, only thing I really wore was basketball shorts and, um, jogger sweatpants and, um, Nike shoes and like a nice shirt, and that was it.

It is critical to acknowledge the changes the participants continued to describe in their attire. I will discuss these changes as they relate to normalized Whiteness in Chapter V. In addition to behaviors and dress, four of the participants discussed another perception others had: they talked White.

Cole suggested that the men in his fraternity, including himself, all talked White because they have shared accents. “White culture is like in the way we talk. A lot of us all got a little country to us and uh, we all talk kinda the same.” He also felt the fraternity used White slang words, such as “dude” and “bro,” frequently. Michael attributed his speech to the White environment he was raised in, stating he was “a product of [his] surroundings.” He recognized that the more time he spent with White people, the more he acted and spoke like them. While Cole and Michael normalized their speech as White, Phillip and Mark felt frustrated with the perception.

Phillip and Mark expressed concern with the notion that speech can be White or Black. Phillip felt confused by the concept of talking White since he perceived his language to be proper rather than White. He explained, “they always told me I talked like a White person... To me, I was talking in a proper sense. To them, it was like, ‘Why are you talking White?’ That's what they said. And it always confused me.”

Mark also demonstrated confusion that others perceived his speech as talking White:

They say I talk White, but I don't really know if that's a thing... that's just the way I learned to talk, I don't know. It's just how I learned, but I mean, everybody kind

of says that I talk White, but that's only with the Black friends, just how I talk White, I don't really get that, though.

Mark and Phillip's frustration showed how they refuted the stereotypical expectations White peers hold for Black students.

Joseph exhibited contentment with how he presented his racial identity: "I don't just do everything all Black, you know, but at the same time, I don't just do everything all White and I'm okay with that. It's just who I am." Likewise, Emmanuel stated that he tried to show up the same in all environments: "I try my best to like keep it to where I'm interacting the same way, so people don't like think I'm acting different or, um, trying to like impress the others." Although maintaining the same interactions in all environments was a goal for Emmanuel, he noted that his speech changed around brothers in his fraternity, specifically that his "words and vocabulary" changed.

White and Black peers questioned the identity of the participants because peers perceived that the participants acted White, dressed White, and talked White. Michael recalled peers from his hometown calling him names, such as "Oreo" and "White Chocolate," when they questioned his racial identity. Phillip described similar feelings when he shared,

It's a lot of ways that people can try to, like, try to question your Blackness or whatever. Like there's information that you're supposed to know as a Black man that you might not. It's like, it just gets to you sometimes.

Phillip identified musical artists and songs, movies, and historical events as categories he was ill-informed about when peers questioned his Blackness. Phillip felt frustrated when

peers questioned his racial identity and that these incidents resulted in him questioning his own racial identity at times.

Mark revealed that it was not until late in high school that he started to understand and accepted his identity as a Black man:

I was groomed to be like a White guy, but that's not who I am. I would say that I had to find my own identity and that took me a while... Not until senior year did I really understand that there is a difference between us. There really is. We're not going to live the same lives by any means. We're going to go through completely different experiences in every way, shape, and form.

Like Mark, Michael discussed finding pride in his racial identity, which he felt blended Whiteness and Black culture:

The thing I've noticed is most of my actions are White, but there are still sides of me that I've noticed that are similar to African American culture. It's not a complete separation. I've still got that in me, and I don't hate it. I enjoy it.

The participants' varying experiences and understanding of their identities show that each participant has a different lived experience and further signifies how the participants make meaning of their racial identity.

“I didn't really see racism”: Race and anti-Black Racism

During the interviews, participants discussed race and anti-Black racism in the context of their high school experiences and collegiate fraternity experiences. Although all of the participants recalled others questioning their racial identity, six of the seven participants communicated that their race did not impact how they acted around White fraternity members or how White fraternity members treated them. Emmanuel shared,

“My race may be a difference too, but it’s not a big difference to where it's just like we don't get along. Um. It doesn't really matter to them [fraternity brothers]. Like, we all view this the same.”

Participants discussed anti-Black racism as incidents, sharing how they felt less impacted by racism due to limited direct incidents of anti-Black racism. Cole asserted, I haven't experienced like too much racism in my life... I've been accustomed to the fact that, yes, I am like a different skin tone but it doesn't matter, really. And, like being in [fraternity] has helped that because... they don't treat me as like different, they treat me the same.

It is significant to note Cole’s and other participants’ minimization of racism, which I will discuss more in Chapter V.

Emmanuel alleged that by not experiencing much racism, he was more prepared to handle any possible future experiences with anti-Black racism:

I personally am not like one of the ones that, uh, like have to deal with the heavy amounts of racism and being excluded or heavily made fun of or felt like an outcast due to my skin color. Um, it has made me feel like as a Black man that-that I can interact with these people and not, uh, be seen as below them or like degraded... Even if I did come across somebody like that, that I'm not going to be like very enraged about it and uh, lash out about it.

Joseph used the word “strange” to describe his lack of experience with racism. Jamal felt he had not been “judged for being Black” because he surrounded himself with caring people. The lack of identified race-related experiences influenced the participants’ racial salience. Racial salience, which I will discuss more in Chapter V, is the degree to which

race is significant to one's self-concept during a particular situation or moment in time (Sellers et al., 1998).

Mark acknowledged racism as a systemic issue; however, when he thought about his own experience, he could not identify a time he was a target of anti-Black racism. Mark's understanding of racism changed when coming to college because of the sociopolitical climate:

I was honestly like ignorant at the time to everything else going around. Just not really understanding what truly makes you an African American in America today. I really didn't understand it. I just thought everybody was the same. I didn't really see racism, so I didn't really believe in it. I didn't really experience it or anything like that, so I just didn't think much of it.

Mark's previous denial of and current understanding of anti-Black racism depicts how he has made meaning of race because of the sociopolitical context of the United States.

Michael also separated his lived experiences from systemic racism: "I've had very little racism experiences personally, but I know they've happened constantly around the world." Unlike the other participants, Phillip thought about racism in terms of individual racist people. Phillip claimed that he did not understand racists and further asserted that he did not know any racist person.

When asked about their experiences with racism and racial discrimination in their fraternities, participants focused the conversation on how they felt their fraternity brothers treated them equally to White peers. Emmanuel concluded that his White peers treated him the same as other new members during his pledge process. He remarked, "I had no issues at all with my race in there."

Participants discussed race as insignificant to their fraternity experience. Michael declared that his fraternity did not see race: “When we get together, we don't necessarily see Black or White, we see our brothers.” Phillip insisted that his fraternity did not care about anyone’s skin color, but rather, they cared about their character. Joseph posited that his fraternity did not care about race, ethnicity, or sexuality. The participants’ perception of their racial identities not mattering to the organization, or its members, failed to consider the multiple dimensions of identities that influence the members’ lived experiences.

Michael suggested that although brothers’ racial identities differed, their shared ideas mattered most to the fraternity: “There is a Black brother here, he’s a brother. There’s a White brother here, okay, he’s a brother. I can see that they’re Black and White, but at their heart, they share similar ideas, at least in the fraternity.” Joseph also felt race did not matter in his fraternity because the fraternity members supported each other. The ways the participants described race in their organization depict a color-blind frame. A color-blind outlook believes that race is insignificant and everyone is treated equally (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As the participants minimized their experiences with racial injustice in their fraternity, they also highlighted how they attempted to defy racial stereotypes.

“I’m not one of the general stereotypes that people have for a Black man”: Defying Racial Stereotypes

As participants shared their stories, they differentiated themselves from other Black people. Joseph, Michael, Cole, and Phillip explained that the stereotype of Black children growing up fatherless was sometimes accurate, although that was not their own

experience. Jamal upheld the stereotype of Black men as “ghetto or being more loud and ratchet,” and he further clarified that he could not relate with those stereotypes. Phillip, Joseph, Jamal, Cole, and Mark described how their hobbies, music tastes, and dress differed from most Black people.

A few participants explained how they felt accepted by White peers because they defied racial stereotypes. Emmanuel recalled his first conversations with White peers at a fraternity recruitment event where he felt acceptance when they recognized he was different from the stereotypes. He said,

I talked to them, and then I got the feeling that, "Okay, they think I'm okay, that I'm normal. I'm like not like all those stereotypes," which is what I am. I'm not like what you would consider as the general type of Black person always getting into trouble, being rowdy... doing all sorts of nonsense and all that... I know what I'm doing. I know how carry myself and how to act in public.

Phillip discussed the balance of defying stereotypes while also maintaining Black culture: “I don’t want to be stereotypical as a Black man, but I don’t want to be seen as not having Black culture.” He added, “I don’t want to be stereotypical to the bad things of Black culture.” The participants recalled racial stereotypes as truth, which may indicate anti-Black attitudes.

Participants discussed how the stereotypes of Black men influenced their behaviors, decision-making, and their identity. Joseph explained that as a Black student, he had to “be a role model when nobody looks at you to be a role model,” because Black students had to do more for White people to perceive them as “presentable and accountable.” Participants centered their actions around avoiding negative stereotypes.

Mark proclaimed that he did what he was supposed to do to maintain a good reputation. Phillip described how he monitored his tone and language to avoid “the stereotype of the hostile Black man.” Emmanuel shared that he stayed out of trouble and focused on school to prove that “I’m not one of the general stereotypes that people have for a Black man.” Michael also professed that he was mindful of his actions to defy racial stereotypes and “represent the Black community to the best of my ability.”

Phillip explained how stereotypes of Black people as criminals from low-socioeconomic class made him realize how society portrayed him. He proclaimed, “This is how people see us... that’s not how it’s supposed to be. I’m a Black man. I’m not that. I’m none of those.” Emmanuel stated the stereotype that Black men are criminals made him feel “that I’ve got something to prove. That I’m not going to end up like that. That I’m going to be better than that.” He elaborated that by choosing to go to college and earning a degree, he was “beating the stereotype that everybody has set for Black men in this country.” Phillip also indicated a strong desire to defy stereotypes:

I've proven a lot of people wrong... I like being not a stereotype. That's like one of my biggest like qualities about me is just I hate being stereotypical... I have no problem with being a Black man, but I don't want you to already put me in a box of what I should be.

Jamal also signified Black achievement as contingent on defying stereotypes:

“Stereotypes can make it seem like the Black community is not supposed to succeed as much as the White community.” Considering how the participants described ways they defied racial stereotypes, I identified two subcategories: (a) working harder and (b) unique self.

“I’m always going to have a bigger challenge”: Working Harder

To prove stereotypes wrong, most participants recalled their own perseverance and the need to work harder than White peers to succeed. Phillip explained,

The world isn't in favor of me... It's not like a Black man's world... It's a very White man's world. So, I have to have the upper hand in a lot of stuff. I need to try to be the smartest man in the room... If I'm not the smartest one in the room, try to become the smartest in the room.

Joseph revealed that in addition to working twice as hard as White peers, he was always mindful that he faced more severe consequences for negative behaviors than White peers. He emphasized, “[it is] going to hit you twice as hard as it may hit your White buddy.”

The participants’ perspectives depict the systemic oppression of anti-Black racism. Emmanuel shared,

I'm always going to have a bigger challenge compared to, uh, all my friends that are mainly White growing up. Like, getting jobs, or like we're all going out together, getting looked at differently... I'm always going to be at a disadvantage growing up, really about anything. I have to like prove that I'm just the same as them and work twice as hard to get where I need to be and get to do what I want to do.

Michael explained that his parents raised him to work harder than White peers and persist through challenges. He exclaimed, “[My] mother didn't raise a quitter. I'm just going to take it with a smile and keep moving forward. Because that's what I have to do.”

Phillip also described the challenge of working twice as hard as his White peers to defy stereotypes, though he found joy in proving people wrong. Phillip professed, “I like

that I kind of prove people wrong in their judgment, and I like that when they meet me, it's not what they were expecting.” Jamal expounded that stereotypes internally drove him to do whatever it took to succeed: “Even if I have like hard times happening, I’m still going to try to do the best I can to make sure that I succeed so I don’t be a part of those stereotypes.”

Joseph claimed that because Black people are “seen as the lower standard of the world,” he has to do more to prove his worth in White spaces. Similarly, Mark felt the fraternity expected him to have higher academic achievement and more dedication in leadership roles than they expected from White members:

I had to work harder, and just take things a lot more serious, just be a lot more serious. So, I'd just say it's a lot more hard work and you have to earn your respect a lot more intensely. It's a lot harder to earn respect. You have to work a lot harder to achieve goals.

Joseph and Mark illustrated how White fraternities accept Black members. Nevertheless, White members do not see or treat Black members as equal, leading Black men to question their true acceptance into the organizations. Cole echoed the other participants’ experiences of working harder than White peers; however, he shared, “I kind of feel like I like being the minority sometimes because I kind of stand out the way people see me. I guess I just stand out to them in like a positive way.”

“I want to be seen as an individual”: Unique Self

Several participants recounted their experiences as the minority in White spaces with a positive perspective and described themselves as unique and confident. Mark said, “I’m different than most, because I’m not like most Black kids and I’m nothing like the

White kids so. I'm different. I'm unique.” Mark, and other participants, discussed their uniqueness from a perspective of racial difference. Phillip similarly stated, “I am not the basic Black man. I know- I do like a lot of different stuff. I'm very diverse in a lot of stuff.” As the participants narrated their individuality, they separated their personal identity from their race. I will discuss this related to racial centrality, the degree to which a person relates their self-concept to race, more in Chapter V.

Jamal shared that his desire to be a unique individual contributed to his persistence to defy racial stereotypes:

I'm a person that doesn't want to give up, and I'm a person who doesn't want to be seen as just another one of those people in a group of people. I want to be seen as an individual who has their own thoughts, their own beliefs and things of that nature.

Michael felt hesitant being his unique self since he was concerned with how White peers felt: “I don't want to blend in with everybody, but I do want to be my unique self. Though I do try to not make anyone too uncomfortable when I'm around them.” Mark emphasized that although he associated with White fraternity brothers, he understood he was different and “at the end of the day, I'm my own person.”

When the participants discussed their unique selves, most described confidence in their racial identity; however, Jamal recalled some hesitations. He confessed, “I would say I'm like half-way there. Um. I'm confident in who I am. But, um, I still like become nervous sometimes.” Jamal explained that he became nervous around peers who exhibited more confidence and power than himself.

Mark discussed how he was confident in his identity, even if his peers did not know or understand him:

My identity as a Black man is established, especially in [the fraternity]... Yeah, they're all White, but I mean, we're the same but we're different at the same time. Like, I understand my identity. I don't know if it's like just public knowledge. I don't know if everybody understands it, but I understand it for sure.

Cole explained that being at a predominantly White institution and in a predominantly White fraternity contributed to his self-concept: "It made me like realize like that this is who I am and actually like have pride and confidence in that." Phillip similarly revealed, "I joined the fraternity I realized, you know, no matter what I do, I'm still going to be Black at the end of the day. That's not going to change at all. I am not ashamed of the color of my skin. Like, I am me and proud."

"We're not safe": Danger

I conducted the first two interviews with each participant during the first few weeks of May 2020. I conducted the final individual interviews and the focus group interview at the end of May 2020 and the beginning of June 2020. During the first two interviews, participants reflected on safety reminders from their childhood and shared how they felt safe on campus. Between the second individual interviews and the third individual interviews, police murdered George Floyd in Minnesota, leading to months of protests demanding racial justice. Activism and the Black Lives Matter movement shaped the later interviews. In the final individual interviews and the focus group interview, the participants began describing danger rather than safety.

When reflecting on their upbringing in the first interview, the participants described parental reminders to be safe in their communities. Phillip stated that his parents taught him behaviors to avoid as a Black man as a young child. “I can’t have a black hoodie on. Can’t go running in the middle of the night somewhere.” He explained that as a Black man, his parents taught him to consider the consequences of everyday tasks where he knew he had to be more cautious than White peers. Emmanuel remembered how his family taught him to be intentional about what he wore in different environments. Michael remarked that his parents taught him to avoid certain areas of his hometown to remain safe. Mark remembered seeing fliers at a barbershop as a kid that advertised “things to tell your Black son” and “how to act around police officers.”

Though participants prioritized safety in their pre-college environments, several explained they felt safe on campus and in their organizations. Cole stated that the SRU campus had a “safe vibe.” Further, Cole felt safer on campus than in town, though he added, “not that I worry too much even then.” Jamal described the campus as “open and respectful to everyone.” Mark communicated a sense of safety on campus. “I feel very safe on campus. I feel very safe. I feel very protected... I don't really have any problems in [SRU] or in the [SRU] community. Coming home was a lot scarier. I feel safe on campus.” Mark also described his relationship with campus police as “chill and cool.”

Initially, only Emmanuel and Michael reported how they felt unsafe on campus. Michael shared that peers on campus sometimes gave him “weird” looks. He added, “although, I guess, I kind of got used to them.” Emmanuel recalled taking precautions when walking on campus, sharing that he was as careful on campus as off-campus.

In the final individual interviews and the focus group interview, participants discussed an overwhelming feeling of danger. Emmanuel discussed recent incidents of police brutality against Black people. He explained that those incidents “puts fear in African Americans that they like might not make it home when they’re out in public.” Michael worried about danger when he spent time with White fraternity brothers in public because in the event of an issue, “I’m probably going to be hurt the most because of it. That’s just who I am. I’m an African American male. It’s easier for me to get suspect into trouble, easier to get arrested and stuff like that.”

As Joseph recalled the recent deaths of unarmed Black people at the hands of police. He exclaimed,

We’re not safe in our homes cause if somebody breaks in, that’s it. We’re not safe in our vehicles. We get pulled over, that’s it. We’re not safe going to the store and coming back with our hood on with the Skittles and the Sprite on us. We’re not safe.

Even within their organizations, the participants sensed danger. Michael shared, “I wouldn’t call my chapter a safe space.” The change in how safety was discussed from the first interviews and second interviews to the third interviews and focus group is significant when considering racial identity development. I identified two subcategories when considering danger from the participants’ perspective: (a) racial jokes and the n-word and (b) guarded and alert.

“They have whipped jokes at me”: Racial Jokes and the N-word

All seven participants recalled hearing White fraternity brothers tell racial jokes and use the n-word. Cole reported that people joked about the sports he played since it was not football. Joseph described a joke he experienced many times during his life:

If anybody ever cuts off all the lights, they always go, "Hey, where's this guy?" Like, I don't know if anybody else has experienced that, but I have experienced that pretty much, you know, all of my life. Like you just turn off the lights, "Hey, I can't see anybody." Or they say, "Hey, smile." And it's like, "Oh, well, I know where he is."

Mark disclosed that peers made jokes to him about food choices and police. He detailed an incident when campus police pulled a car of brothers over, and the White brothers turned to him and jokingly warned him to be careful. Phillip also recalled White peers who made a joke around police when they told him to “Duck or run. The police are here. So, go hide.”

A few participants recalled White peers using the n-word when singing songs. Emmanuel admitted that he used the n-word to greet White peers sometimes, and they said it back to him: “It’s just one of those things like how I would greet them at one point and then they'd say it back to me and we'd just laugh about it and we would go on about our day.” Phillip recalled that some White peers asked him for “the n-word pass.” He explained to White peers why they could not say the n-word. Phillip also recalled when another predominantly White fraternity screamed the n-word at him when he was walking through Fraternity Circle, the area on campus where the predominantly White fraternities have houses.

Some participants described anger and frustration with racial jokes and White fraternity brothers' use of the n-word; however, others found the jokes humorous or brushed the jokes and the use of the n-word off as insignificant. Emmanuel explained that when a Black person used the n-word around White people, the White people assumed they could also use it. He added that, dependent on the context, he was not always offended by White peers using the n-word. Emmanuel said, "I don't really get that big offended by it as long as they're not just blatantly using it in the context of like to degrade somebody."

Jamal confessed that racial jokes did not trouble him as much as they might trouble others. Emmanuel shared, "I find dad jokes, like the 'Black people, the dad's not around' jokes, those jokes can sometimes be funny." He elaborated that some fraternity brothers took jokes too far. Specifically, Emmanuel identified jokes about slavery as inappropriate.

Michael believed White brothers did not intend harm with their racial jokes, so he laughed with his peers:

They have whipped jokes at me, and like, "Man, you're the Whitest Black guy I've ever seen." But it wasn't from kind of a bullying or harassing standpoint. It was more like, "We're all great brothers. We've all bonded together this much. We're free to roast each other as much as we want." And we just kinda laugh at jokes at each other. And we know they're not intended for harm.

Mark also claimed he did not believe his White fraternity brothers intended harm with racial jokes. He explained that he had talked with White peers who did not know it was inappropriate to use the n-word: "They just thought that that was just a normal word

that everybody said, they didn't see the negative things behind it.” Emmanuel described his fraternity brothers as mindful, and he surmised they only made jokes if they knew others in the space would be comfortable. He added that he did not believe brothers would share jokes if they knew someone would be offended.

Mark understood how others might perceive the jokes as harmful, which is why he understood the seriousness of racial jokes. He cautioned, “race jokes aren't funny. I mean in [my hometown] they were kind of funny, but now that you're in the real world, in college, that's not funny, and it's not anything to joke around with.”

Joseph explained that his brothers liked to joke around; however, he acknowledged that often someone ended up hurt because “somebody takes it too far.” Phillip felt exhaustion because of the racial jokes made by White peers in his fraternity:

There have been jokes made and there are times where I'm just like I can't take this anymore... I'm tired of always, um, defending... my race in this fraternity... That's not what it should be. And that's like one of the hardest parts about joining a White fraternity.

Joseph echoed similar frustration, and he questioned the mindset of peers that share racial jokes. He also felt frustration with the use of the n-word and elucidated, “whenever somebody says it, it just sounds like an attack.” Phillip explained that when White peers made Black jokes, he felt it demonstrated power: “I feel like they only use the joke to hurt you, but actually make it seem like it's a joke. So, it's still kind of ‘you're still beneath me, but I was just kidding, it was just a joke’.” Similarly, Joseph claimed White people used the n-word as power:

You are not my color. So, when you say it, even if you're trying to say it jokingly, even if you just sing it, and this is the one that really gets to me, even if you just singing lyrics to a song... in some form or fashion, you're always thinking, "Hey, I can always use that against them in a negative way. I can always do that."

Mark claimed that he disliked anyone using the n-word. Michael admitted that he often stayed quiet about issues, such as peers using the n-word or making racial jokes, in the fraternity. He stated that he did this "not because I'm scared to show what I believe in. It's just, I have to be careful."

"Keep your friends close and keep your enemies closer": Guarded and Alert

Most participants described being guarded and alert around White peers. Michael appreciated his White peers and enjoyed conversations with them; however, he confessed, "I can't really let my guard down either." Emmanuel explained that he was cautious in how he showed up in certain places: "You don't want to compromise your integrity just to make somebody feel a certain way, but I also don't want to come off too strong for some people."

Phillip detailed the questions he thought of when he spoke in a room full of White people: "Can I say that as a Black man? Do I have that power to say what I want, without repercussions? Do you have to worry about a lot of what you say because you don't want to offend someone?" Similarly, Michael revealed alertness in how he expressed ideas and opinions with his White fraternity brothers:

I know sometimes I do want to state my opinions and sometimes I want to speak out. And then there's the other part of me, that's lived all my life being careful and

try not to be lashed out by the opposition... I stay silent a lot of times, not because I'm scared to show what I believe in. It's just, I have to be careful.

Several participants explained the caution they have on campus in general. Phillip shared, "There's certain stuff that as a Black man, you just can't... You don't know in the back of your mind, but it's just so many instances have come up that have set up barriers for us to know what we can and can't do."

Michael explained that he would go the opposite direction of others on campus when exiting an elevator, even when his destination was the same direction the others walked. Phillip revealed that after White men killed Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, he was afraid to run on campus. He stated, "so, when I'm on campus, I don't run, I walk everywhere." Emmanuel also disclosed that he was careful when he walked on campus.

Mark never heard of White peers disparaging him behind his back but added, "it wouldn't really surprise me if they really made racist remarks." Joseph shared that he knew anything could happen, so he always looked out for himself. He said, "keep your friends close and keep your enemies closer. It's always just make sure that you're always on the lookout because you never know. I would say your greatest comrade could always turn out to be your biggest foe." Phillip explained that he avoided some social environments out of caution:

[I] cut myself off from a lot of stuff that you know other students do. Like regular like fun stuff, like stupid stuff... You're supposed to have fun in high school or college. Like, you're supposed to like you know go to random parties. I just decided not to cause I don't want that to affect me in my future at all, later on.

Although Joseph felt supported by his White fraternity brothers, he was still cautious around them because “socially, anything could happen that would be a threat to me.” Mark also discussed guardedness in social environments because he was always the only Black person at his fraternity social events.

Emmanuel explained that due to the lack of diversity in the fraternities at SRU, he believed that fraternities are racists would remain until they initiate more members of color in their organizations. Cole was the only participant who outright refuted anti-Black racism in predominantly White fraternities. Cole described a feeling of being reassured that he had never heard of any racist incidents in the fraternity and sorority community, nor on campus. He emphasized this further:

Just there’s still a racial statement that goes on around fraternities that you know predominantly White fraternities are racist and all that, and I can just tell you from my experience that they are not and that you know, I get treated equally and everybody I know around me gets treated equally.

Mark questioned anti-Black attitudes and racism among his fraternity membership: “I don’t know what they feel about my people or how they feel about me outside of when they’re not in front of my face.” Phillip mentally divided his fraternity members into two groups, those who cared and those who did not. Joseph shared similar feelings “if you’re just stating ‘well, all lives matter’, how do you actually see me? How do you officially see me behind closed doors? How do you actually feel about me?”

“We're all created equal and should be treated as such”: Black Lives Matter

During the latter half of data collection, widespread Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations occurred. These protests and counter-protests shaped much of the

dialogue with the participants in the final individual interviews and the focus group interview. Additionally, some participants recalled the BLM movement during their middle or high school years. While Black Lives Matter is an organization working to eradicate White supremacy, for this theme, I discuss BLM as both a social movement and an affirmation of the participants' human dignity.

Cole acknowledged that during high school, his understanding of racism transitioned. He learned that racism was a more severe issue than he previously believed because of the demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri, after the murder of Michael Brown. He shared, "my dad like really took that to heart. He would always tell me to be careful everywhere after that." Emmanuel described the guilt he felt in high school for not experiencing overt racism:

Hearing about stuff going on around us, like not specifically in like this area, but like other schools, going on in other states... it kind of like hurt a little bit to know that they're going through all that and that I'm over here, I'm having a good high school experience and they don't get to have that same like nice non, uh, racist high school.

Mark recalled feeling awkward after Black Lives Matter protests occurred following the death of Trayvon Martin:

It was the whole Black Lives Matter thing and everything you seen. A lot of kids were getting shot by cops and everything... I don't remember the exact events but, it would be awkward like in class... the day after something bad happened that was like racial. Like we read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the ninth grade, just super awkward, like having to read that like out loud... Having a White person read

those words out loud it was very awkward. It was very awkward interactions.

Whenever like Trayvon Martin or something like that, it was just really awkward.

Nobody really knew how to react.

Michael explained that he was no longer surprised by the murders of unarmed Black people. He concluded, “we’re getting used to it, which is scary to think about.”

Phillip reported that his White peers dismissed incidents of racial injustice as one-off stand-alone incidents: “What they don't understand is, it's not just like the first time or it's not a- like a small number of Black men being killed. It's a lot of them.” Emmanuel expressed his fear and frustration with the dehumanization of Black people by White supremacists:

These other White supremacists that are going around doing all this other stuff and all these killers and stuff are just completely wrong and it should not be happening. Like, that is morally and truly wrong and does not need to be going on... We are all equal. We're all created equal and should be treated as such.

Mark and Jamal also called for White people to treat them as equals. Mark declared, “we are the same. We all bleed red.”

As the 2020 demonstrations for racial justice swept across the nation, four participants felt uncomfortable discussing the issues with their White fraternity brothers. Joseph emphasized that he would not talk to his fraternity brothers about police brutality because he suspected his White fraternity brothers would try to justify the police action. He further added that conversations considered political always seemed “white-sided.” Mark explained that it would make him and his White brothers uncomfortable to talk about, “so I just kind of avoid those conversations.” Mark further believed his brothers

would disagree with him or “cause a big dispute” if he started a conversation on racial injustice.

Emmanuel struggled to identify the appropriate time to discuss racial injustice and police brutality with his White fraternity brothers. He elaborated, “cause most the time, when I'm hanging out with them or someone, we're always having a good time and laughing and stuff, and you know, you don't want to bring the mood down talking about such stuff like that.” Mark expressed frustration at the lack of awareness his White fraternity brothers had regarding the racial injustice against Black people: “A lot of my White companions in my fraternity just not really understanding what's going on in the community, not understanding why everything has gone on that's going on or they just plain out don't agree with what's going on.”

Joseph and Phillip discussed the need for action to show that their lives matter. Joseph explained that it was too late to talk to White people about anti-Black racism. He warned, “y'all, won't listen to us talk, you won't listen to us talk, you won't listen to us post on our social medias. Well, how about we just go and you know show you because then you'll understand it.” Phillip claimed that some White peers perceived him as an angry Black man for advocating for racial justice. He stated, “it's just we can't talk about it anymore. Let's show you what we're actually going through. We're going to show you how we're feeling on the inside.”

The participants shared what they needed their White fraternity brothers to know for them to feel safe and valued as humans. Mark exclaimed that his White fraternity brothers do not understand their White privilege and acknowledged it was not his “duty to explain to them how they’re privileged. I can wake them up all they want, but at the

end of the day, they're going to do what they want to do." He wished his White fraternity brothers would try to understand how their lives are valued differently because of race:

Your life is seen as more precious and more delicate... My life is just seen as another statistic... We just want to be seen equal in the laws of the eye and the laws of everyone else in the country but we're not.

Michael explained that brothers needed to take action; "the goal isn't to find the right answer, the goal is just to do something that's not nothing." Jamal presumed White brothers needed to change their thoughts to change their actions. Joseph called on his brothers to speak up against racial injustice. Cole emphasized, "the best thing they can do for real is just understand the fact that they'll never truly understand the struggle we go through every day as Black people. And they should just accept us like for truly who we are."

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the lived experiences of seven Black men in predominantly White fraternities. It provided a detailed introduction for each participant, followed by a presentation of the results in the participants' own words. The data analysis process revealed five themes: (a) positive fraternity experiences, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) danger, and (e) Black lives matter. The themes discussed in this chapter will guide the discussion and implications presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the racial identity development of Black men in predominantly White fraternities at a predominantly White public institution in the south. I address the research questions and the findings in the context of Cross's (1991, 1995) theory of Black racial identity development, considering Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of the multiple dimensions of identity and critical race theory. First, I present the discussion of the findings, followed by implications, recommendations, and limitations. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the study.

Discussion

I explored the experiences of seven Black men in predominantly White fraternities at Southern Regional University (SRU) utilizing Seidman's (2019) phenomenological three-interview series as well as a focus group interview. I discuss the five categories I identified from the data in this chapter: (a) normalized Whiteness and assimilation, (b) desensitization to anti-Black racism, (c) color-blindness, (d) sense of belonging, and (e) sociopolitical climate. The five categories will answer both research questions as they relate to the literature and the theoretical frameworks.

Normalized Whiteness and Assimilation

All participants revealed Whiteness as a long-standing influence in their lives. Six of the seven participants grew up in predominantly White hometowns. All of the participants said predominantly White peer groups during high school and in

their lives. Six of the seven participants grew up in predominantly White hometowns. All of the participants reported connection with predominantly White peer groups during high school and in college. Black adolescents choose their peer group based on the racial diversity of their school (Wade & Okesola, 2002). However, adolescents with more diverse friend groups reported increased ethnic-racial identity exploration (Rivas-Drake et al., 2017). Understanding the racial identity of the participants' peer groups provides insight into the participants' racial identity development. The racial identity of one's peer group influences one's own racial identity (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017). Further, the association with a majority White friend group may indicate my participants are in the pre-encounter stage of Black identity development (Cross 1991, 1995; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Wade and Okesola, 2002). The participants indicated a pre-encounter racial identity when they normalized Whiteness by assimilating into the fraternity and differentiated themselves from other Black people while defying racial stereotypes.

The participants normalized Whiteness in their lives. Mark described being "groomed" into Whiteness. Cole claimed he "naturally adapted to White culture." Joseph explained that he was primarily involved in the "predominantly White side of things." The participants' descriptions of their relation to White people and Whiteness connect to the pre-encounter stage of Black identity development where Black men are more likely to be associated with White people (Cross, 1991, 1995). The participants detailed how Whiteness influenced their dress, actions, and language. Phillip, Joseph, Mark, and Cole detailed changes to their appearance due to membership in a predominantly White fraternity. These changes demonstrate a desire to blend in, which Kanter (1977) identified

as one of the typical responses of people who experience tokenization. The participants' experiences align with previous findings that White students expect Black students to shed their Black identity and conform to Whiteness for acceptance (Mills, 2019; Smith et al., 2011). The participants' dress and language changes signify the assimilation required to access their predominantly White fraternities.

Gordon (1964) identified the first stage of assimilation as cultural assimilation, whereby an individual's behaviors and language change to match the dominant society. In the second stage, structural assimilation, minoritized people join the dominant society's organizations, such as joining a WGLO (Gordon, 1964). While my participants gained access to WGLOs, they continued to alter their behaviors to match those of the White members. Gordon (1964) detailed that behavioral assimilation may be gradual. For my participants, this gradual assimilation started with their White peers in primary school and continued into college and their WGLO membership experience. Most of my participants described the behavioral change as a personal preference; however, I classify these changes as assimilation because assimilation may be either forced or voluntary (Gordon, 1964).

Assimilation is one of the identities in the pre-encounter stage of Black racial identity development (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). Vandiver et al. (2002) explained that assimilation identity emphasizes American identity over Black identity. Although my participants did not reference an American identity, they insinuated this identity during data collection. Mark claimed that all fraternity members, regardless of racial identity, "bleed red," and the other participants affirmed this statement during the focus group. Related to assimilation identity is miseducation

identity, also measured in the pre-encounter stage of Black racial identity (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). Black individuals with miseducation identity distance themselves from Black people by defying racial stereotypes they believe are accurate (Vandiver et al., 2002). My participants all articulated the miseducation identity. Recall the participants upheld Black stereotypes regarding family structure, voice tone, interests, and more. Further, they emphasized differences between themselves and other Black people. Several participants used these stated differences as a justification for membership in a WGLO.

Although my participants voluntarily altered their behaviors when they joined a WGLO, an unspoken expectation existed. Hughey (2010) found White people expect Black men to assimilate to Whiteness for acceptance in the WGLO; however, true acceptance is contingent on performing racialized schemas. The racialized schemas were considered natural in WGLOs and included Black members understanding poverty, being placed in positions relevant to community service, and being the token minority (Hughey, 2010). The expected racialized schemas further demonstrate the contradicting experience of Black membership in a WGLO, as White fraternity men expect Black members to both act White and act Black, as it suits White member's needs and preferences (Durkee et al., 2019; Hughey, 2010).

Recall Mark claimed White peers referred to his speech as "talking White," and he admitted changing his attire after joining the fraternity. Yet, his White peers insinuated that he was missing out when his interests did not conform to Whiteness. These tensions of being "too White" or "too Black" were further articulated by my participants who shared White peers expected them to act out racialized schemas, such as using slang and

being interested in rap music and hip hop. This experience aligns with Durkee et al.'s (2019) findings that White people situate music and activities as a style and social preference tied to race. They found that Black people perceived a Black person who enjoys mainstream pop and rock music as White; however, they considered listening to hip hop and rap acting according to their race (Durkee et al., 2019).

Beyond interests, Mark, Phillip, Cole, and Michael shared how White peers called attention to their speech, as the White members perceived the Black members' speech as White and expected them to talk differently. The participants in Durkee et al.'s (2019) study found that speaking properly was considered White and that White people expected Black people to use slang and Ebonics. White fraternity men perceived my participants' speech as *too White*, but their dress was *too Black*; therefore, their White peers expected them to change their attire and interests to conform to Whiteness. Recall several participants described a change in their dress to assimilate into culture in their WGLO (Gordon, 1964). Cole, Jamal, and Phillip explained how White and Black peers questioned their Blackness because they perceive them as exhibiting White behaviors, language, and dress.

The continuous contradictions and tension developing racial identity is a consistent finding I identified and is the essence of the participants' experience in predominantly White fraternities. I will discuss the essence of the results later in this chapter. One such contradiction was that White members seemed to expect Black members to assimilate to Whiteness and simultaneously uphold Black stereotypes. As the participants in the study discussed the contradictions of White peers' expectations, they

used different strategies to overcome the challenges (Durkee et al., 2019; Hughey, 2010; Kanter, 1977).

Michael described the challenge of balancing his Black behaviors and White behaviors when he discussed his desire to simultaneously blend in with White fraternity brothers and be his unique self. Ultimately Michael decided to conform to White peers' expectations to avoid making them uncomfortable. The balance Michael articulated aligns with Hughey's (2010) findings that White peers accept Black members when they only share a limited cultural identity. Phillip described a similar challenge navigating his identity in the WGLO. Phillip felt Black and White peers did not see him as a "true Black man" because of his tone of voice, interests, and hobbies. Phillip experienced cultural invalidation, whereby his White fraternity brothers undermined and insulted his racial identity (Durkee et al., 2019).

Emmanuel code-switched to navigate his White peers' contradicting expectations. Code-switching occurs when a person changes or softens their linguistics in conversations to accommodate the dominant culture (Allen, 2020; Apugo, 2019). Apugo (2019) reported that Black students used code-switching as a coping mechanism at PWIs. Allen (2020) stated that Black men use code-switching as a mechanism to differentiate themselves from Black stereotypes; therefore, Emmanuel's actions align with the miseducation identity of the pre-encounter stage of racial identity development (Vandiver et al., 2002).

Desensitization to Anti-Black Racism

My participants minimized anti-Black racism in their lives yet continually described experiences of anti-Black racism (Bimper, 2015). As discussed in Chapter II,

Black students experience racism in many forms at predominantly White institutions and in predominantly White fraternities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper, 2009; Ross, 2015; Smith et al., 2019; Strunk et al., 2018). Bimper (2015) found that Black people dismissed racism because they did not perceive subtle discrimination as racially motivated. When I asked participants about experiences with racism, a few claimed they only experienced anti-Black racism once in their lives. Kohlu and Solórzano (2012) found that after repeated moments of feeling invisible because of their racial identity, young people of color internalize racial microaggressions. Likewise, when I asked my participants about past experiences with oppression, most of them struggled to answer. The participants likely experienced many microaggressions in the predominantly White environment of their upbringing and have internalized that anti-Black racism, like the participants in Kohlu and Solórzano's (2012) study.

I wondered if the men were reluctant to share their experiences of racism with me because of my identity as a White woman being different than theirs as Black men. I struggled with the idea they articulated that they did not experience anti-Black racism since CRT acknowledges racism as ordinary, noting that Black people experience racism every day (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In the second and third interviews, I observed the participants describing their experiences *with* anti-Black racism yet declining to acknowledge their experiences *as* anti-Black racism. Recall Mark's fraternity offered him membership a week after they offered membership to White men. When Mark learned his fraternity brothers debated his membership because of his racial identity, he dismissed it as inconsequential. Grigg and Manderson (2015) found that people often created excuses for racist behavior. Ross (2015) similarly reported that White students often describe

racist incidents in WGLOs as secular incidents, and they articulate excuses for their behavior, such as youthful ignorance or drunkenness.

Although Mark knew why his fraternity brothers deferred his membership invitation, he did not create an excuse for the organization's behaviors. Mark's response to the fraternity's anti-Black racism in the membership selection process was to dismiss it and avoid the conversation. DeCuir et al. (2020) found that some Black people used maladaptive coping strategies to respond to racism at PWIs, including avoidance. Mark's response to this particular incident was to minimize anti-Black racism through avoidance. DeCuir et al. (2020) included three ways people of color use avoidance as a coping mechanism for experiencing racism: (a) avoiding addressing the issue for fear of repercussions, (b) avoiding addressing the issue because racism will persist no matter what, and (c) avoiding specific people considered responsible for the harm. Mark shared that at the time, he did not recognize the delay as a significant issue. His perception at the time of joining aligned with the second strategy of avoidance DeCuir et al. (2020) described: avoidance because racism will always persist.

The participants demonstrated other coping mechanisms DeCuir et al. (2020) detailed when responding to other forms of microaggressions, specifically in response to racial jokes and slurs. All of the participants experienced White fraternity brothers sharing racial jokes and using the n-word. The racial jokes the participants experienced were microaggressions (Davis & Harris, 2015; Smith et al., 2011). Davis and Harris (2015) described microaggressions as pervasive, yet often disregarded, subtle, as well as covert, everyday acts of racism. Although all of the participants described experiencing anti-Black racism, there was dissonance in understanding racism. Hoyt (2012) discussed

this dissonance whereby some view racism as a *system* and others view racism as a *person*. My participants articulated this dissonance in their response to White peers' racial jokes and racial slurs.

Emmanuel, Jamal, Cole, Michael, and Mark believed their White fraternity brothers did not intend harm when sharing racial jokes, and therefore the jokes did not concern them. Similarly, Grigg and Manderson (2015) found that both minority and majority groups referred to racist humor as generally acceptable, often minimizing the significance. Accepting the racial jokes as funny is a way for participants to deflect suggestions of anti-Black racism (Gurrentz, 2014). Only two participants, Joseph and Phillip, expressed frustration with racial jokes. They presumed White peers used racial jokes and the n-word to establish power over Black members. Joseph and Phillip's understanding of the racial jokes and racial slurs support Hoyt's (2012) formulation that racism is equal to prejudice plus power. Only four of the seven participants exhibited concern with White peers' use of the n-word. I was surprised that nearly half of the participants accepted the use of the n-word by White peers. King et al. (2018) found that 76% of Black people believed a non-Black person should never use the n-word. Three of my participants thought their White peers did not use the n-word in a hostile manner and demonstrated tolerance with White peers' use of the n-word. This tolerance aligns with O'Dea et al.'s (2014) findings that White people generally believe the n-word was acceptable to be used among friends and was offensive if used in a derogatory manner by a stranger.

Contrarily, the tolerance several participants expressed for White peers use of the n-word conflicts with King et al.'s (2018) finding that most Black people believed that a

White person using the n-word was always or almost always offensive. Although several of my participants' beliefs are contrary to King et al.'s (2018) findings, it is significant to note that King et al. (2018) conducted their study at an HBCU in the south. Referring back to the section above on normalized Whiteness and assimilation, I have established that the diversity of a campus environment and the racial identity of one's peer group influences racial identity development. Therefore, the participants in my study are likely in an earlier stage of their racial identity development than the participant in King et al.'s (2018) study (Cross 1991, 1995; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Wade and Okesola, 2002).

As participants recalled their experiences in White spaces, they also emphasized the differences between themselves and other Black people. This differentiation of their racial identity connects to the miseducation identity of the pre-encounter stage of identity (Vandiver et al., 2002). When the participants differentiated themselves from other Black people, they often shared anti-Black attitudes (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). Recall Phillip disclosed that he did not want to be around the Black peers at his first high school because he felt different from them. Cole, Joseph, Michael, and Phillip accepted the stereotype of fatherless Black children as accurate. Jamal used the words "ghetto" and "ratchet" to describe the stereotypes of most Black men; however, he separated himself from these stereotypes. The participants' determination to defy racial stereotypes relates to Harper's (2015) finding that Black students resist racial stereotypes to represent the Black community positively. Phillip, Mark, Michael, and Emmanuel justified their behaviors to defy stereotypes and better represent the Black community.

The anti-Black attitudes and minimization of anti-Black racism may relate to the pre-encounter stage of Black racial identity development; however, it is also likely the result of desensitization to racism (Ortiz, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018; Vandiver et al., 2002). Ortiz (2019) found that after experiencing racism online, Black participants sought support but experienced ridicule because others did not consider the experiences “real racism.” As a result of the dismissal by peers, the participants in Ortiz’s (2019) study participants reported desensitization to racism after experiencing excessive racism and racial slurs online. Anti-Black racism is ordinary and embedded in American society (Carruthers, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This regular occurrence results in the desensitization to racism (DeCuir et al., 2020; Ortiz, 2019). Recall Emmanuel described his lack of experience addressing anti-Black racism prepared him for his future living in a White community. Emmanuel articulated minimization while also discussing a strategy of desensitization. He believed he would experience workplace and societal racism in the future (Pitcan et al., 2018). My participants’ desensitization to anti-Black racism demonstrates Strunk and associates’ (2018) finding that Black students do not respond to less severe racism. They tended to dismiss microaggressions because they frequently experience racism in a predominantly White society. This finding also aligns with Bimper’s (2015) results showing that Black participants identified overt and obscene incidents as racism, minimizing or dismissing other issues as not racially motivated.

It is essential to recognize the participants’ desensitization to anti-Black racism since only individuals transformed by racism transition to the encounter stage of Black racial identity development (Cross, 1991, 1995); therefore, my participants are likely in the pre-encounter stage. The participants’ minimization of anti-Black racism is also

related to the abundant color-blind thinking in their WGLO. Hughey (2010) reported that people who expressed a color-blind belief also considered racism an issue of the past.

Color-Blindness

The four frames of color-blind racism include abstract liberalism, cultural racism, naturalization of racial matters, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). In addition to my participants minimizing anti-Black racism, as explained above, they naturalized racial matters. Emmanuel and Cole defended the lack of racial diversity in their organization, and others accepted the segregated Greek organizations as natural. The naturalization of racial issues occurs when people describe racialized outcomes as natural occurrences (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). My participants emphasized that anti-Black racism in WGLOs was considered a myth by White peers, and ultimately, they attributed the lack of diversity in their WGLO to this *myth*. This finding is consistent with Joyce's (2016) conclusions that White men believed Black men lacked interest in predominantly White fraternities because of their history of racist behaviors. They upheld this belief because they operated through color-blind ideation, thinking anti-Black racism was no longer an issue and considered segregation natural (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Hughey, 2010).

Bimper (2015) found that Black students naturalized commonplace and covert racism, such as tokenization and lack of diversity. My participants accentuated that they did not believe their racial identity affected their experience in a WGLO yet described experiences with anti-Black racism because they had naturalized the racism they experienced (Bimper, 2015). Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2001) found that Black people

use a color-blind frame less than White people; however, they reported 24% of participants indicated using the naturalization frame of color-blind racism. Similar to other participants, Joseph explained that race did not matter in his organization because the White fraternity brothers accepted his true self. Joseph also discussed White fraternity brothers sharing racial jokes and described being cautious with his behavior around his White peers. This contradiction was similar to the contradictions Cox (2021) discovered, where Black people recognized the role race placed in racialized phenomenon yet continued to explain the phenomenon as natural.

Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2001) reported significantly lower use of color-blind frames among Black people; however, Cox (2021) found Black people closer to Whiteness are more likely to use color-blind frames. As discussed in Chapter IV, my participants describe a lifetime of proximity to Whiteness, and therefore, they are more likely to support color-blind thinking and ideologies because White people forced this ideology onto the participants throughout their lives (Bimper, 2015; Cox, 2021). In addition to articulating their use of color-blind frames, six of my participants discussed the color-blind outlook present among their White fraternity brothers. The White men demonstrated a color-blind frame when they used racial jokes, justified organizational lack of diversity to student choice, and believing everyone was equal because anti-Black racism was a *historical phenomenon* in their minds (Bimper, 2015; Gurrentz, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described color blindness as a belief that race is not significant and that people should treat everyone equally.

Bonilla-Silva (2015) further stated that color-blind racism stems from a post-racialism mindset and preserves a White power structure. My participants' experiences

also confirm Bonilla-Silva et al.'s (2006) finding that misalignment exists between White peoples' espoused beliefs on inclusion and their actual behaviors to include diverse others. The fraternities at SRU proclaimed they were welcoming to men of all races, yet there were only 9 Black members of nearly 300 total fraternity members on campus. White fraternity men say they are comfortable and inclusive of Black people yet have few or no Black friends or Black fraternity brothers (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006)

After learning about the racial diversity of the participants' hometown and high school, I was most surprised by Jamal's views since he was the only participant who did not attend a predominantly White high school. Color-blind thinking is often a result of segregated communities or schools, and White people impose color-blind beliefs on Black people (Cox, 2021; Warikoo & de Novais, 2015). Jamal shared an internalized view of colorblindness and did not articulate a high-racial salience. Racial salience is the significance of being Black to one's self-concept at a given moment or in a specific situation (Sellers et al., 1998). I considered the participants' membership in a predominantly White fraternity as the particular situation for understanding their racial salience. Jamal may have low racial salience because of his other more salient identities. Jamal was the only participant to share that he was gay. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) detailed a similar occurrence: "a young boy may begin adolescence with a Black-centered self-concept, but in gaining full awareness that he is gay may shift his attention to his gay status and away from Blackness issues" (p. 257).

Jamal's experience may be understood using the MMPI (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The MMPI (Jones & McEwen, 2000) illustrated one's self-concept influenced by the various socially constructed identities one holds at varying levels of salience. The

MMDI may demonstrate that my participants have other identities that are more important to their self-concepts, such as Jamal's sexuality, Phillip's disabilities, and the participants' gender identity. CRT acknowledges that people have intersecting identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It is necessary to recognize the participants' intersecting identities since they are individuals with unique lived experiences. Though I identified similar experiences and themes for this study, it is vital to acknowledge the participants as individuals. It is crucial to recognize these differences because their upbringing, other social identities, and unique experiences shape their racial salience and racial identity. Most of my participants described a low racial salience, which suggests that they are in the pre-encounter stage of Cross's (1991, 1995) Black racial identity development because they, along with their White fraternity brothers, supported color-blind frames (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). Though my participants expressed color-blind thinking, White people forced color-blind ideologies on them by upholding and protecting systemic racism and White supremacy, which force Black men to assimilate due to fear or desire to belong.

Sense of Belonging

Although the participants have unique lived experiences, most of them conveyed a sense of belonging in their predominantly White fraternities. Strayhorn (2019) reported a correlation between involvement in campus organizations and perceived support and a sense of belonging. Mark described belonging in his organization because of a sense of support from White fraternity brothers. Michael and Emmanuel explained they belonged in their organization because of their fraternity brothers' love for them. Joseph shared he belonged in his fraternity because his fraternity brothers made him feel at home and

welcomed. Cole and Phillip described belonging in their organization because of the existing brotherly bond. The sense of belonging my participants shared confirms Strayhorn's (2015) report that Black men have an increased sense of belonging when they feel they matter. Museus et al. (2017) explained that campus culture influences minority students' sense of belonging, which may be why Jamal was the only participant to question the level of belonging and connection between White fraternity members and Black fraternity members.

Jamal's perception of the fraternity members' weak connection highlighted whether White men truly accept Black men in predominantly White fraternities calling attention to the existent culture of anti-Black racism in WGLOs. Museus et al. (2017) identified cultural validation as an element strongly correlated with an increased sense of belonging. Durkee et al. (2019) detailed how cultural invalidations undermine the validity of a person's membership within one or more social identities. The cultural invalidation experienced by my participants, specifically White peers questioning their Blackness, lead to a decrease in their sense of belonging (Durkee et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2017). The inconsistency between the participants' espoused sense of belonging and their stories of racialized incidents leads me to believe that White Greek letter organizations are not truly accepting of Black men and the participants have a misconstrued sense of belonging (Hughey, 2010; Durkee et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2015).

While the participants emphasized the positive aspects of their fraternity involvement, they also verbalized contradicting experiences. The contradictions to their described positive fraternity experience and a strong sense of belonging included hypervisibility as Black members (Settles et al., 2018), cautious safeguarding

mechanisms (Allen, 2020; DeCuir et al., 2020), and tensions navigating both the Black and White communities (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Pitcan et al., 2018). Mark and Jamal described a permanent association with their organization, where community members always recognized them as fraternity members (Ray & Rosow, 2012). Additionally, the participants clarified the necessity to always behave appropriately due to their association with the organization (Ray & Rosow, 2012; Pitcan, 2018). The participants' perpetual, easily recognizable association with the organization illuminates their hypervisibility as Black men in predominantly White fraternities. Recall, hypervisibility is the dominant culture's surveillance and scrutiny of people with marginalized identities and cultures (Kanter, 1977). My participants' hypervisibility validates Ray and Rosow's (2012) finding that Black men are held accountable more frequently than White peers. This increased accountability is because they are more visible at predominantly White institutions. My participants used positive language, such as "unity," "accountability," "obligation," and "loyalty," when they recalled the forced representation and hypervisibility, concealing the negativity of this experience.

The participants further contradicted their espoused sense of belonging through the use of cautious safeguarding mechanisms. As presented in Chapter IV, participants guarded their language and behaviors around White fraternity brothers through brevity, code-switching, mindfulness, and alertness (Allen, 2020; DeCuir et al., 2020). They also recalled moments when they questioned their White peers' beliefs, motives, and intentions. Recall Mark and Joseph similarly shared that they were unsure how their White fraternity brothers perceived them and felt about them, especially when they were not in a shared space. Phillip and Emmanuel questioned their authority to speak in a room

of White people. Michael said he stayed silent sometimes to avoid causing conflict. These experiences demonstrate the stress the participants felt navigating a White environment.

Many mechanisms for coping with racial incidents exist, and the avoidance and mental disengagement my participants described are common coping strategies used by Black people (DeCuir et al., 2020; Kawamaki et al., 2020). Another coping mechanism commonly used by my participants was John Henryism (DeCuir et al., 2020; Pitcan et al., 2018). Recall how the participants described constantly doing more than White peers to earn respect through achievement. John Henryism is often a response to sustained stress that leads to overexerting themselves, working harder than others (DeCuir et al., 2020).

Participants sensed danger, used the described coping mechanisms, and took precautions in their WGLO. Black people always experience added scrutiny in traditionally White spaces (Anderson, 2015). Several participants described always being aware of their surroundings and knowing they were never truly safe. Knowing this, they would reposition themselves in their WGLO for safety, including altered behaviors at social events (Allen, 2020). Some participants described constant alertness and articulated a mistrust of White people (Anderson, 2015). The precaution participants took around their White peers aligns with Jagers and Iverson's (2012) finding that Black men felt isolated, criminalized, and stereotyped in predominantly White residence halls. My participants rationalized their safeguarding mechanisms because of the lack of diversity in their organization, acknowledging that they were always at risk of being harmed, mentally or physically (Anderson, 2015). Though participants never heard disparaging remarks from their White fraternity brothers, Joseph, Mark, and Phillip remarked they

would not be surprised if it happened. The mistrust the participants expressed contributes to my conclusion that the participants articulated a misconstrued sense of belonging.

Sociopolitical Climate

The participants' mistrust of White peers worsened in later interviews due to the sociopolitical climate in the United States during data collection as national racial climates tend to influence campus racial climates (George Mwangi et al., 2018). During their first interviews, Cole, Mark, and Michael considered the sociopolitical climate when reflecting on their understanding of race and racism in high school. They recalled racist incidents outside of their communities when I asked them about their experience with anti-Black racism. They identified three separate incidents: (a) the Oklahoma Sigma Alpha Epsilon racist bus chant in 2015, (b) the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, and (c) the murder of Michael Brown in 2014 and subsequent protests in Ferguson, Missouri. Although the participants discussed these incidents, revealing the events caused fear and concern about being in White spaces, the participants still minimized anti-Black racism in their personal lives.

Despite the participants' minimization of anti-Black racism in their first interviews, the way they spoke about racism changed in later interviews. The 2020 nationwide protests for racial justice following the murder of George Floyd began while I conducted this study. In later interviews, during June of 2020, several participants stopped minimizing anti-Black racism and identified anti-Black racism directly impacting their fraternity experience. Phillip, Jamal, Mark, and Joseph explained how White fraternity brothers dismissed their concerns of racism.

As the Black Lives Matter movement called attention to police brutality and racial injustice, the participants also described a yearning for their White fraternity brothers to acknowledge the lived experiences of Black people. Fuller (2016) found White people ignore Black students' concerns of racial injustice to protect White fragility. The participants wanted White fraternity members to make a statement against racial injustice using social media and for the fraternity to understand their experiences and feelings as Black men through open dialogue. I was surprised by the suggestion that White brothers use social media to make a statement because it felt performative; however, George Mwangi et al. (2019) indicated the participants in their study also reported reliance on social media for activism. Clark (2019) discussed White digital allyship and emphasized that White people must acknowledge their White privilege and understand race as a socially constructed identity before engaging in digital activism. My participants described their White peers as lacking this rudimentary awareness; therefore, it would be ingenuine and ill-informed if they chose to engage in digital activism.

The participants emphasized their White peers' lack of awareness when discussing the Black Lives Matter movement in the focus group. They struggled to identify ways to discuss their experiences and feelings as Black men in the toxic racial climate with their White peers (DeCuir et al., 2020). Recall, four participants described a reluctance to discuss racial injustice with White peers and attributed the reluctance to timing, concerns of being invalidated, and fear of retribution. My participants' experiences align with McCabe's (2009) findings of Black students feeling troubled and isolated when discussing race in predominantly White classrooms. My participants felt stress and isolation thinking about having conversations about anti-Black racism with

White fraternity brothers and ultimately avoided speaking up. The participants in Agyemang et al.'s (2010) study felt confident speaking up about racial injustice because they believed that their status as athletes gave them power. I speculate that the lack of power Black men hold in WGLOs, as conveyed through their safeguarding mechanisms, contributed to my participants' reluctance to discuss racial injustice with White peers.

They continued to describe avoidance behaviors, despite detailing intense racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue is a mental and public health crisis that results from sustained psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses to responding to and experiencing racism (Smith et al., 2011). The participants further shared feeling unsupported by White fraternity brothers and the institution when it came to acknowledging and addressing national incidents of anti-Black racism that, although distant, directly impacted the Black students at SRU. This finding is also consistent with Jones and Reddick's (2017) work that Black students must address racially toxic environments without support from White administrators.

It is necessary to understand the influence of the sociopolitical climate in the United States on the participants' Black racial identity development. According to Cross (1991, 1995), a Black person will enter the encounter stage of racial identity development after being forced to acknowledge their Blackness due to racism. I considered if my participants reached the encounter stage due to the sociopolitical climate of 2020 since their perceptions and experiences shared during their earlier interviews indicated a pre-encounter identity, while their later interviews suggested a transformation in perspectives. Since only those transformed by the anti-Black racism enter the encounter stage, the sociopolitical climate of summer 2020, specifically the death of George Floyd and the

subsequent increase in Black Lives Matter protests, likely influenced several of the participants' racial identity development. Rogers et al. (2021) stated Black adolescents reported a more salient racial identity development in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. Rogers et al.'s (2021) findings support my finding that my participants' racial salience increased due to the sociopolitical climate, which ultimately guided their movement in their racial identity development.

The Essence of being a Black Man in a WGLO: Continuous Contradictions

Continuous contradictions and tension developing racial identity is the essence of the participants' experience as Black men in predominantly White fraternities. Essence is the focus of phenomenological research (Vagle, 2018). Essence includes the structure and qualities of a specific phenomenon, learned through the shared experiences of different people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vagle, 2018). The continuous contradictions and tension I identified in the data were prevalent through all participants' shared experiences.

White members expected Black members to conform to Whiteness through dress while simultaneously upholding racial stereotypes (Durkee et al., 2019; Hughey, 2010). The participants described a tension feeling peers perceived them as "too White" or "too Black." In an attempt to be accepted while enduring anti-Black racism, the participants used various strategies and coping mechanisms (Allen, 2020; Apugo, 2019; Ortiz, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018). The most apparent contradictions in the participants' experiences resulted from a coping mechanism: minimization of racism. The participants detailed little experience with anti-Black racism yet discussed anti-Black racism as a daily occurrence. They minimized anti-Black racism and described desensitization to anti-

Black racism and a color-blind ideology (Bimper, 2015; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001; Pitcan et al., 2018; Strunk et al., 2015). Racial dissonance among participants exacerbated their coping mechanisms, some believing racism is a *system*, and others believing racism is a *person* (Hoyt, 2012).

Although there were participants with both perspectives on racism, all participants described positive fraternity experiences despite detailing a toxic racial environment in the WGLO. The articulated sense of belonging, coupled with the extensive experiences with anti-Black racism, highlighted another contradiction in their experience: a strong sense of belonging and persistent danger (Anderson, 2015; Durkee et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2017; Ray & Rosow, 2012). Participants presented themselves as both an insider and an outsider in their WGLO and the Black community (Ray & Rosow, 2012). Participants recounted a lack of involvement in the Black community because of experiences in the White community. Several participants chose to distance themselves from the Black community for fear of Black peers' judgment.

As participants navigated both the Black community and White community, their experienced tension intensified as they attempted to balance dual identities while feeling "too White" or "too Black" (Hughey, 2010; Ray & Rosow, 2012). Recall Phillip discussed the concern with how the Black community would view his behaviors. Cole and Emmanuel felt Black peers judge their decision to join predominantly White fraternities. The tension the participants described aligns with previous research that reported Black students experience added stress holding membership in the Black community and simultaneously holding membership in predominantly White organizations (Jones & Reddick, 2017).

Implications and Recommendations

This section combines implications and recommendations in two sections: (a) implications and recommendations for fraternity and sorority practitioners, and (b) implications and recommendations for undergraduate fraternity members. I approached this study with a CRT lens; therefore, I intended to challenge systems of oppression that protect White supremacy with the implications and recommendations I identified.

Implications and Recommendations for Fraternity and Sorority Practitioners

As the gatekeepers of the fraternity and sorority experience, student affairs practitioners working with fraternity and sorority life bear responsibility for acting on the findings of this study. Fraternity and sorority practitioners must prioritize creating a culturally engaging campus environment that is inclusive of Black students. I provide four specific recommendations for fraternity and sorority practitioners: (a) recognize and address anti-Black racism; (b) increase education and training for self and FSL community; (c) hire and retain Black FSL staff; and (d) develop inclusive marketing strategies.

Recognize and Address Anti-Black Racism

Fraternity and sorority practitioners must immediately begin to recognize and address anti-Black racism. We must acknowledge racism as systemic and address racist incidents against Black people with fraternity and sorority members regardless of the institution's proximity to the incident. Chapter IV presented the participants' thoughts on discussing police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement in their organizations and they explained that White peers did not know the history nor acknowledged the reoccurrences of police brutality.

Fraternity and sorority practitioners must understand the current and historical anti-Blackness, national racial unrest and the ongoing racial injustices perpetrated against Black people. Practitioners must further learn about the histories of Black people and the hundreds of years of harm caused by White people and systemic oppression. Fraternity and sorority practitioners must stay informed of news and culture, specifically by listening to Black people by reading articles or books, listening to podcasts, and watching videos and other content created by Black people. More importantly, White fraternity and sorority practitioners must realize Black peoples' lives are at risk because of the incessant racial injustices committed by White people, which White supremacy protects.

Addressing anti-Black racism is more than an external process; White practitioners must also confront their own anti-Black attitudes and work to become anti-racist. Anti-racist work is a necessity for fraternity and sorority practitioners committed to creating a culturally engaging campus environment. This work starts with education, but fraternity and sorority practitioners need to do more than learn. We must engage in difficult conversations with other Whites around us to disrupt systemic racism. Being an ally is more than understanding racism exists; it is doing something about it, including giving up our power to Black people while using our privilege to elevate, not replace, Black voices. We need to evaluate policies and practices to ensure equity for Black students, which includes rewriting conduct policies and removing barriers to membership such as preferential treatment for legacies and the exorbitant costs of membership. Further, fraternity and sorority practitioners should recognize and address anti-Black racism by prioritizing structural and financial support to students of color, including adding scholarships for membership and designated staff support for BGLOs.

Practitioners also need to acknowledge the impact of the sociopolitical climate on Black students' experiences. When practitioners are aware of Black students' experiences, they can intentionally address racism and systemic oppression. Participants claimed that White fraternity members failed to listen to Black members' concerns about racial injustice. Practitioners should address anti-Black racism and racial injustice by embedding social justice and inclusion into their everyday conversations and work. This process must start immediately with self-education and FSL community-wide education.

Increase Education and Training for Self and FSL Community

To embed social justice and inclusion in our everyday work and conversations, practitioners must educate themselves first. Recall Mark explained how White peers failed to recognize their privilege. White fraternity and sorority practitioners need to identify their implicit biases and privileges. One method to identify inherent bias is using implicit association tests (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). These tests are available through Harvard University's website (Harvard, 2011). Once practitioners realize their implicit biases, they should reflect and consider how implicit biases drive their actions and decisions. We, White fraternity and sorority practitioners, must acknowledge our White identities and privileges. We must intentionally seek out training and conferences centered on dismantling White supremacy, such as participating in White caucus groups (Elliot, 2016) and attending the White Privilege Conference (The Privilege Institute, 2020) or the Social Justice Training Institute (Social Justice Training Institute, 2020). I also recommend mapping our self-identity using the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Abes et al., 2007). When mapping self-identity to understand privilege,

fraternity and sorority practitioners must consider various identities, including race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, citizenship, ability, language, and more.

Although the participants in the study shared a racial identity, I recognize the participants as individuals with unique lived experiences and varying identities. The men claimed different socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, disabilities, body shapes, and family dynamics. Practitioners must understand various facets of identity of Greek students and use this to inform curriculum and educational program development for the FSL community at the institution. FSL practitioners need to prioritize educational programs on racism and other oppressive systemic harm when creating annual or semester program calendars. FSL practitioners who serve as advisors to fraternity or sorority governing councils must challenge student leaders to address inequities and support council programs and initiatives that welcome and respect marginalized students.

Participants normalized a color-blind concept in their fraternities. Practitioners must recognize color blindness as a counterproductive ideology that prevents White students and staff from seeing the additional barriers Black students experience. We, White fraternity and sorority practitioners, should increase dialogue on race and anti-Black racism in the fraternity and sorority community, by hosting White caucus groups (Elliott, 2016) and sponsoring facilitated programs on campus presented by educated and trained professionals. To increase White students' respect for Black students, practitioners must learn and educate others on social justice and inclusion. This education must start immediately and be unceasing.

Hire and Retain Black FSL Staff

Just as prioritizing inclusion in programming and curriculum design is essential, representation is critical in hiring practices and staff retention. Hiring and retaining Black FSL staff should be an immediate priority for all FSL practitioners. Recall the participants expressed discomfort discussing race and anti-Black racism with White peers. This discomfort increases outside friend groups, among White strangers. For practitioners to adequately address race and anti-Black racism, they must engage Black students in conversations about race and anti-Black racism, and this is not realistic if Black students are uncomfortable in White spaces. Hiring Black FSL staff provides Black students necessary representation among decision-makers and offers additional perspectives when considering policy and practice.

Hiring Black FSL is necessary for Black student success in predominantly White fraternities. Fraternity and sorority life staff often serve as advisors, conduct investigators and officers, and policymakers. Cole exclaimed that White people are incapable of fully understanding the experiences of Black people. Suppose an institution's fraternity and sorority life staff are entirely or predominantly White. In that case, Black students are unlikely to report racist incidents and are unlikely to feel welcome working with White fraternity and sorority practitioners. Hiring Black staff ensures Black students feel supported by someone who will understand their experiences.

It is not enough to hire Black FSL staff; instead, White fraternity and sorority practitioners are obliged to support Black employees and prioritize the retention of Black FSL staff. This support includes providing adequate resources but expands to providing ancillary support options considering the added burdens they experience in a racialized

workplace and profession. It is also critical that White fraternity and sorority practitioners not adopt a laissez-faire approach to discussions, education, and training on anti-Black racism and other oppressive systems. Hiring Black FSL staff is not an attempt to tokenize Black professionals; instead, Black professionals must be given power and authority in their work, including outside of racialized issues. By prioritizing the inclusion of Black staff, White practitioners embrace a perspective different than their own when during policy and decision making. When White practitioners hire and retain Black staff, White practitioners demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion and create a better environment for Black students.

Develop Inclusive Marketing Strategies

Fraternity and sorority practitioners are responsible for disseminating information on membership opportunities, including orientation guidebooks, website content, social media content, and recruitment brochures. Practitioners must develop inclusive marketing strategies that include diverse representation and information on all recognized fraternal organizations. Information disseminated should be accessible through various platforms, including print, websites, social media, and be intentionally designed for access by people with varying abilities.

Jamal felt comfortable joining his fraternity because he saw other men of color in the organization. At the time of the study, his fraternity was the only predominantly White fraternity on campus with more than one Black member. An inclusive marketing strategy should include members of color on social media, in printed materials, and during in-person activities, without tokenizing members of color. Although not all

organizations have diverse memberships, it is essential to prioritize marketing space for organizations that value diversity and inclusion.

In addition to ensuring diverse representation, all marketing materials must be accessible to all. Phillip shared about his learning disabilities and several other disabilities. Practitioners should intentionally develop marketing materials considering various disabilities of Greek students. Fraternity and sorority practitioners need to collaborate with practitioners working with disability support services to ensure the material meets the needs of all students. Meeting the needs of all students includes providing materials designed with readability in mind, which include alt text for images, and can be accessed using assistive technology.

An inclusive marketing strategy provides prospective students information on all possible opportunities for involvement. Consider Mark and Joseph's limited awareness of BGLOs during their first semester as students at SRU. Although Mark has several family members in BGLOs, he did not see them advertised until after being initiated in a predominantly White fraternity. Fraternity and sorority practitioners must provide prospective members adequate information on the different fraternal organizations on campus; specifically, they must include all governing councils and fraternity and sorority chapters in all marketing material. The materials should include information on joining processes, cost, membership requirements, and contact information for all recognized fraternities and sororities. Fraternity and sorority practitioners should provide this material to all incoming students at orientation and have additional material available at various campus hubs for upper-class students. An inclusive marketing strategy allows Black students to make well-informed decisions on membership.

Implications and Recommendations for Undergraduate Fraternity Men

My instinctive implication from the findings is that White peers may intentionally or unintentionally harm Black men in WGLOs. I argue here that Black men should not join predominantly White fraternities, given how WGLOs exist and operate today. However, the recommendation for Black men to not join WGLO puts a responsibility on Black students rather than calling on White members to address the structural racism and dismantle White supremacy in their organizations. The onus is on White men in WGLOs to change, not on Black men in WGLOs. I identified three recommendations for White undergraduate fraternity men: (a) recognize and address anti-Black racism within and outside the WGLO; (b) eliminate racial jokes and usage of the n-word; and, (c) change organization membership selection, education, and leadership processes.

Recognize and Address Anti-Black Racism Within and Outside the WGLO

White fraternity men need to recognize and address anti-Black racist incidents and systemic racism. They must be aware of anti-Black racism within and outside of their fraternity. All of my participants heard White fraternity brothers perform racist jokes and Philip, Joseph, and Mark felt exhausted recognizing the harm they incurred from racial jokes.

Black fraternity members need a process for reporting racist incidents in their organization. White fraternities need established procedures to hold White members accountable when reported for racist behaviors and speech. When Jamal described his loyalty to his fraternity, he stated, “if someone says something about one person, they’re kind of talking about all of you.” White fraternity men must use this same unified

representation approach to hold White peers accountable to upholding fraternity standards and valuing the dignity of Black people.

Moreover, White fraternity men must acknowledge and address anti-Black racism outside their organization. All the participants discussed the murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and explained how those incidents impacted their feelings on safety and inclusion. White fraternity men must understand how anti-Black racist incidents across the world impact Black members. When discussing these incidents, participants described hesitation to talk to White fraternity brothers. White fraternity members should discuss these racist incidents when they happen. These discussions must be facilitated by an educated and trained individual. Fraternity headquarters should invest financial resources in hiring and training staff and volunteers for this purpose.

In these discussions, White fraternity members must recognize the impact of the anti-Black racism on Black members and develop a plan of action for their organization. These discussions are critical and cannot be left to ill-prepared and disinterested undergraduate members to navigate alone. Having an individual associated with the organization is key to building trust within the membership and the trained individuals' association with the headquarters makes added accountability possible. Michael expressed hesitations about joining a WGLO because of the Oklahoma Sigma Alpha Epsilon racist bus chant. White fraternity members should address anti-Black racism publicly through official statements, sharing their action plans. If White fraternities publicly recognize and address national incidents of anti-Black racism, prospective Black members might feel safer seeking membership in their fraternity. However, White fraternity men must also work to dismantle the White supremacy and anti-Black racism

within their organizations by eliminating racial epithets and changing organization processes.

Eliminate Racial Jokes and the N-Word

Although participants felt accepted by White peers, Phillip, Joseph, and Michael disclosed experiences when White peers joked about their racial identity. To fully acknowledge and address anti-Black racism, White fraternity men need to turn their gaze inward and evaluate their own behaviors and actions. First, White fraternity men need to accept that racial jokes are never funny. Second, White fraternity men must remove racial jokes from their discourse. Third, White fraternity men must speak out when they hear others sharing racial jokes. Failure to speak out against racial jokes equals complicity in the racist performance.

Further, White fraternity members need to eliminate the n-word from their language immediately. Recall my participants reported White peers using the n-word, and specifically, Phillip recalled a White fraternity brother asking for the “n-word pass.” The White fraternity brother knew the word was harmful and inappropriate; otherwise, they would not have sought Phillip’s consent to use it. Although some participants accepted White peers’ use of the n-word, White fraternity members must recognize the insinuation and history of using the n-word. Some of my participants felt White peers used the n-word to cause harm and demonstrate power. White fraternity men must acknowledge how the use of the n-word harms Black people. Joseph explained that whenever White people use the n-word, it “sounds like an attack” and all the participants described White peers singing the n-word in songs. When White people use the n-word, it is a racist act and we must eliminate from our vocabulary. There are ample articles, podcasts, books,

and films addressing the harm of the n-word. White fraternity men who fail to grasp the connotation of the n-word must immediately educate themselves on the history of and destruction in the n-word. This is another opportunity for an educated and trained fraternity headquarter staff member or volunteer to be involved. Fraternity headquarters should ensure they incorporate training on inclusive language in their leadership training and in their new member education programs and continue to offer support and guidance to chapters beyond annual trainings.

In addition to experiencing racial jokes and epithets, the participants described having to overcome more barriers to succeed and do more to gain respect from White brothers. White undergraduate fraternity men must eliminate color-blind thinking to acknowledge and value race as significant to their members' identities and experiences. Participants desired respect as individuals with unique identities, thoughts, and beliefs. One cannot respect and honor an individual without acknowledging how race impacts their lived experiences. White fraternity men need to consider systemic oppression and barriers of Black members and use this to develop equitable policies and practices.

Change Organization Membership Selection, Education, and Leadership Processes

White undergraduate fraternity men must change their fraternity processes, specifically those associated with membership selection, membership education, and leadership. Recall Mark received his invitation to join his fraternity a week later than his White peers. White fraternity men must remove race as a factor in discussing potential new members. Further, fraternity members must evaluate all membership criteria, ensuring that other selection factors are not associated with race. Several participants described feeling accepted by White peers because of their ability to defy racial

stereotypes. Participants felt welcome in their predominantly White fraternity because they were not like other Black people in speech, dress, or behavior. With the support of headquarter staff and volunteers, White fraternity members should evaluate how current membership recruitment and selection practices standardize Whiteness. The membership recruitment and selection practices need to be evaluated at a national and local level. Each fraternity headquarter should establish a membership diversity and inclusion taskforce that includes members and non-members educated and trained on these matters to evaluate practices and work with the national organization and local chapters to make changes.

Beyond evaluation, White fraternity members should prioritize the recruitment of people with marginalized identities. All of the participants indicated their new member classes had no other Black new members. Emmanuel felt, aside from his organization, the predominantly White fraternities at SRU were racist. He emphasized that he would hold this belief until all of the organizations had diverse memberships. Most participants desired an increase in racial diversity in their membership and Black fraternity men in general may feel more connection and safety in their fraternities if the fraternities are more racially diverse. It is not enough to increase the racial diversity in the fraternity; White undergraduate fraternity men must change their practices to center social justice and inclusion. Mark's fraternity brothers attempted to make him feel like he was missing out when he did not change his dress and interests to conform to the organization. White fraternity men need to accept the difference of their members and appreciate their identity and interests.

All of the participants showed reluctance to discuss race-related concerns with White fraternity brothers. White fraternity men must learn about White privilege and systemic oppression. This learning can happen individually; however, both campus and headquarter fraternity and sorority practitioners must provide support and oversight. After learning for themselves, White fraternity men must prioritize social justice and inclusion in their organizations. We must hold fraternity men accountable to making change by withholding recognition opportunities from organizations who fail to make changes. Moreover, we should reward organizations that are successful in making change whenever possible. If White fraternity members established an environment that prioritized social justice and inclusion, Black members might become comfortable sharing their experiences. Further, Black members should serve in the highest leadership roles in the fraternity, including chapter president. Only two of my participants had served in executive leadership roles for their chapters. At SRU, no Black student has ever served as president of a predominantly White fraternity. White students give authority and power to Black students by electing them to high-level leadership roles. White undergraduate fraternity members should prioritize Black student leadership by electing them to executive board positions, including the role of president. Once elected, the White fraternity members must respect their authority and provide support and resources for them to fulfill the position's responsibilities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

I conducted this study using a phenomenological methodology consisting of interviews and a focus group at one research site. This approach relied on the participants to recall and share their experiences; however, future studies may consider including an

observational approach, where the researcher can collect data of members at organization activities. This study was conducted at one point in time, requiring participants to recall experiences from years ago. The participants were at different points of membership in their fraternities. Of the seven men, two were one year into their membership, one was two years into their membership, and five were three years into their membership. Those with less time in the fraternity had fewer experiences to share. Those with more years in the fraternity had to remember long periods, which may have influenced accuracy. A longitudinal study might include once-a-semester interviews from the point someone joined their fraternity until they ended their membership or graduated college and would provide more comprehensive data.

Future research could replicate this study at additional research sites. The findings of this study imply the sociopolitical climate of the region and the United States influenced the students' experiences and racial identity development. Future research sites might include areas outside the Southeastern United States, private institutions, and public institutions with significantly different enrollment than SRU.

Despite providing important implications for the racial identity development of Black men in White fraternities, the study has several limitations. The research population was limited and only considered predominantly White men's organizations. Future research may consider replicating this study with predominantly White women's organizations or predominantly White co-educational organizations. Another approach to re-shape the study population is to replicate the study with organizations in other multicultural umbrella organizations, such as the National APIDA Panhellenic

Association (NAPA), National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), and the National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC).

Additionally, future research should explore the racial identity development of Black members in WGLO considering the national sociopolitical climate and social justice activism. I interviewed the participants in May and June 2020. On May 5, 2020, a leaked video on news outlets around the United States showed the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia. On May 25, 2020, police murdered George Floyd in Minnesota. On May 28, 2020, a Kentucky mayor released the audio from a 911 call on March 13, 2020. The 911 call was from the partner of Breonna Taylor, who had just been murdered in her sleep by police. The murders of these three Black people ignited months of demonstrations against racial injustice all throughout the nation and the world. The murders, the protests, and the counter-protests influenced the conversations of the later interviews since where the conversations became centered on the Black Lives Matter movement and the participants experiences in light of these incidents.

A final limitation of this study is my race, gender, and professional identity as a White woman serving as the primary fraternity and sorority advisor at SRU. As a White woman studying Black men, I continually reflected on my identity, power, and privilege. My professional identity extended the power relation since the participants knew me from my work and may have demonstrated hesitation when discussing their fraternal experience with me. Although I reminded the participants of the purpose of my research as separate from my role at SRU, the study was ultimately limited by my identities. My intention throughout the research was to center and amplify the experiences of the

participants. I must acknowledge my identity as a limitation because my Whiteness and authority in my position at SRU may have hindered participants' trust.

Conclusions

After identifying a limitation in pre-existing research, I designed this study to explore Black racial identity development and the experiences of Black men in WGLOs used a phenomenological approach to understand the participants' experiences in WGLO at a mid-sized southern regional institution. Data collection included a demographic survey, three interviews (Seidman, 2019), and a focus group.

Through open and axial coding (Creswell & Creswell 2018), I initially coded 62 categories in NVivo. I narrowed and regrouped the data into five themes: (a) positive fraternity experiences, (b) navigating Whiteness, (c) defying racial stereotypes, (d) safety, and (e) Black lives matter. I identified and discussed five categories in the data as it related to the pre-existing literature and the theoretical frameworks: (a) normalized Whiteness and assimilation, (b) desensitization to anti-Black racism, (c) color-blindness, (d) sense of belonging, and (e) sociopolitical climate.

While the results of this study should not be generalized, the findings provide insight into Black men's experiences in WGLOs. I identified continuous contradictions and tension in developing racial identity as the essence of this study. White men may harm Black men if they join predominantly White fraternities. Fraternity and sorority practitioners and White undergraduate fraternity men should make changes to stop anti-Black racism, end White supremacy, and disrupt the systemic oppression of Black fraternity members.

Campus professionals need to: (a) recognize and address anti-Black racism locally and nationally, (b) increase education and training for self and FSL community, (c) hire and retain Black FSL staff, and (d) develop inclusive marketing strategies. When practitioners develop inclusive marketing strategies, incoming Black students can learn of all opportunities for involvement. Inclusive marketing strategies create an environment for a Black student to make a well-informed decision about membership in a fraternity. If practitioners recognize and address anti-Black racism and increase education and training, White practitioners and White fraternity men may realize the challenges and barriers Black students experience in White spaces. By hiring and retaining Black staff, Black students might feel comfortable reporting negative experiences. Further, Black staff can provide a different perspective when determining office priorities and strategic initiatives.

White undergraduate fraternity men should: (a) recognize and address anti-Black racism within and outside the WGLO, (b) eliminate racial jokes and the n-word (c) change organization membership selection, education, and leadership processes. If White undergraduates take intentional steps to address and eliminate anti-Black racism and dismantle White supremacy in their fraternities, Black students may feel safer. If White undergraduates change membership recruitment strategies and education processes, Black students might authentically show up in White fraternities.

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello [Name],

My name is Ashley Christman. You may know me from my role as the Fraternity/Sorority Advisor on campus. In addition to this role, I am doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse. I am conducting my dissertation research on the racialized experiences and racial identity development of Black men in predominantly White fraternities. I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in this study. Results from the study will help fraternity advisors and fraternity members better advise, mentor, and serve Black men in predominantly White Greek letter organizations.

Participation is voluntarily and if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, participate in 3 individual interviews, and participate in a focus group with other participants. The three interviews and the focus group will take place on Zoom, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and state-wide stay at home order. Participation is expected to take a total of 4 to 6 hours, distributed over the course of 4 to 6 weeks. Participants who complete all components of the study will receive a \$75 gift card at the conclusion of the focus group. I would like to audio record the interviews and focus group and then will have the recordings transcribed to analyze.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have questions about the study, please email me or contact me at [CELL PHONE]. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Warm Regards,

Ashley

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Racial Identity Development of Black Men in Predominantly White Fraternities

Principal Investigator: Ashley Christman
[OFFICE LOCATION]
[EMAIL]
[CELL PHONE]

Purpose and Procedure

- The purpose of this study is to explore the racialized experiences and racial identity development of Black men in predominantly White fraternities.
- Your participation will involve completing a demographic survey, participating in three individual interviews (the first regarding your experiences before college, the second regarding your decision to join a fraternity and membership experience, and the third to discuss what it means to be Black on campus and in your fraternity), and participating in one focus group (regarding the campus racial climate and your experiences with racism on campus and in your fraternity).
- The total time requirement is approximately 4 hours, 5 minutes to 6 hours, 5 minutes; including time to complete a demographic survey (~5 minutes), three individual interviews (60-90 minutes each), and one focus group (60-90 minutes).
- Interviews and the focus group will take place via Zoom video software.

Potential Risks

- You may be asked questions that you find unpleasant or upsetting. For instance, you will be asked about experiences with racism at various points in your life.
- Information you share in the focus group may be personal and you are asked to respect the privacy of others in the group and keep the information shared private. Though participants are asked not to share information from the focus group, complete privacy cannot be guaranteed. You may refuse to answer if you become uncomfortable.

Rights & Confidentiality

- Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from this study at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences at any time.
- The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings; however, the real names of participants, organizations, and the institution will not be used in any report or publication.
- All information will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. My data will not be linked with personally identifiable information. The list connecting pseudonyms to actual names, all recordings, and transcriptions will be stored on a locked computer at the researcher's home. To protect the anonymity of the participants, the demographic survey, transcribed interviews and audio recordings

will be saved with the selected pseudonym. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, the lists and recordings will be destroyed.

Potential Benefits

- You will be given a \$75 gift card at the conclusion of the study, if you participate in all components of the study, including completing the demographic survey, 3 individual interviews, and 1 focus group interview.

Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to the principal investigator. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the UW-La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (608-785-8044 or irb@uwlax.edu).

Participant Signature: _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Demographic Survey

1. Please choose your pseudonym (fake first name) to be used during the study:
2. What is your hometown?
3. What is the name of your high school?
4. Your high school was:
 - a. Predominantly White
 - b. Predominantly Black
 - c. Predominantly Other (please describe)
 - d. Equally racially diverse
5. Where do you currently reside?
 - a. In a residence hall on campus
 - b. In a fraternity house on campus
 - c. Off campus
6. Which fraternity are you a member of?
7. When were you initiated into your fraternity (please include semester and year)?

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview One Questions

Prior to asking questions, I will thank the participant, re-explain the purpose of the study, the strategies for ensuring privacy and confidentiality, and confirm the participant is aware the interview will be recorded. I will inform the participant that this first interview will focus on their life experiences prior to attending this college.

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. Can you tell me about when you first became aware of race as a concept? For instance, do you remember a specific experience where you first realized you were Black?
 - a. In addition to race, what other identities are most salient to you?
3. How would you describe the racial diversity of your hometown?
 - a. What did it tell you about your own experiences or identities early in life?
 - b. Can you tell me about your experiences living as a Black man in your hometown?
4. How does your family influence how you see yourself?
 - a. Your home-town community?
 - b. Peers in your high school?
5. Please tell me about your high school experience.
 - a. What was it like to be Black in your high school?
 - b. Please tell me about your interactions with White people in high school, such as other students, teachers, or administrators.
 - c. Please tell me about your interactions with other people of color in high school.

- d. How did racism impact your high school experience?
- 6. How did you decide to attend this university?
- 7. What did you know about fraternity life before coming to college?
- 8. Is there anything more you want to share with me about your life before college?

Interview Two Questions

Before beginning the interview, participants will be reminded of the informed consent agreement and the approaches taken to protect their privacy and confidentiality. I will remind each participant that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. Participants will be informed that this interview will focus on their lived experiences—including behaviors, observations, and feelings—at the institution and in their fraternity.

1. What is it like for you to be Black on this campus?
2. What is it like for you to be a man on this campus?
3. Please tell me about how your other identities influence how you see yourself on campus?
4. Please tell me about your decision to join a fraternity.
 - a. What was it like to go through the fraternity recruitment process?
 - b. Please tell me about your decision to join your fraternity.
 - c. What feedback, if any, did your family and friends have on your decision to join your fraternity? And especially a predominantly White fraternity?
5. Please tell me about your experiences as a Black new member in your fraternity.
6. Please tell me how the relationship between your race and gender influence your fraternity experience?
7. How has your experience been in the fraternity since your initiation?
8. How would you describe your relationship with your White fraternity brothers?
 - a. With your big brother?
 - b. With your pledge-class brothers?
9. How has racism impacted your fraternity experience?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your time here or in your fraternity?

Interview Three Questions

Prior to the interview, I will thank the participant again, review the purpose of the study, remind the participant of the recording, and review the steps taken to protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy. Participants will be informed that this final interview is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. Questions will begin broadly; however, additional questions will be added based on the participants' earlier interviews.

1. Since beginning college, how has your understanding of race and racism has developed or changed?
 - a. Since joining your fraternity?
2. How do your relationships with White people influence your identity?
 - a. Your relationships with other Black people?
 - b. Your relationships with other people of color?
3. How does membership in your fraternity influence how others perceive you?
4. How does membership in your fraternity influence how you see yourself?
 - a. As a man?
 - b. As a Black man?
5. How has participation in this study influenced your racial identity?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions

At the start of the focus group, participants will be thanked for their time and reminded that the incentive for participation will be distributed within two weeks of the focus group meeting. I will remind the participants of the strategies I am taking to protect their privacy and confidentiality and will explain that this cannot be guaranteed in this setting; however, participants will be asked to respect each other by not sharing outside of this space. Finally, participants will be reminded of the recording, transcribing, and data storage.

1. Please share an experience that exemplifies how you feel being Black.
 - a. On campus?
 - b. In your fraternity?
2. What has been your experience on campus with racism?
3. What is the best thing about being in a fraternity here?
 - a. What is the worst thing about being in a fraternity here?
4. How would you describe the racial climate on campus?
 - a. In your fraternity?
5. What does the campus community need to understand or do to address racial inequity and racism on campus?
6. What does your White fraternity brothers need to understand or do to address racial inequity and racism in the organization?
7. Do you have other comments you would like to share about being Black on campus or in a WGLO?