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# Institutional Factors Influencing African-American Male Involvement In Undergraduate Student Organizations

John Mark Davenport

*Illinois State University*, [jmdaven@ilstu.edu](mailto:jmdaven@ilstu.edu)

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INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE  
INVOLVEMENT IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT  
ORGANIZATIONS

John M. Davenport

157 Pages

Students attending colleges and universities who have purposeful opportunities to interact with peers and faculty about educational matters and who are challenged with consistent encouragement report higher levels of satisfaction with their collegiate experience and have higher persistence rates than students who do not receive these opportunities (Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). In higher education, African-American males are neither retained from admission through graduation at a rate comparable to majority students nor African-American women (AASCU, 1988; ACE, 2008; Harper, 2012). In this study I set out to determine which institutional factors influence African-American males to become more engaged with educationally purposeful activities, specifically those delivered by student affairs practitioners. Through data gathered from individual interviews and from observations in social and organizational settings with African-American male student leaders, a rich pool of data emerged. The data was organized according to the principles of grounded theory and analyzed using the constant comparative model. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

serves as the theoretical lens by which the emerging themes were analyzed in order to provide a minority perspective on the experiences of the African-American male within the confines of a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) (Bell, 1980; Lawrence 1987).

The findings of this research yield insights into the lived experiences of African-American male student leaders at a PWI, specifically that the recognition from high-status African-American male peers in conjunction with a shadow system of direct mentoring from those peers is what is most likely to get non-involved men to participate in campus leadership positions. Additionally, the reason that some African-American males are perceived as high-status is found to be the visibility of certain organizations and the strong kinship ties attributed to those organizations. Finally, low pre-college involvement rates were found to be a consistent factor among the sample group and the specific group of skills which the men found to be the primary benefits of involvement are outlined and discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** African American males, Involvement, Institutional factors

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE  
INVOLVEMENT IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT  
ORGANIZATIONS

JOHN M. DAVENPORT

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2015

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INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE  
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JOHN M. DAVENPORT

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Stacy Otto, Chair

Diane Dean

Beth Hatt

Mohamed Nur-Awaleh

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Companions whom I love, and still do love  
Tell them my song...

–Richard I

J. M. D.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

The difficulties facing African-American males in American society have been well documented. A significant amount of research on several aspects of the African-American male experience, most notably research on African American male youth culture as it pertains to crime and violence (Sulton, 1994), works detailing the high numbers of African-American males within the correctional system (Gordon, 2002; Mays 1997) and studies detailing the challenges faced by this population within American K-12 public education (Fashola, 2005; Harris & Duhon, 1999; Hopkins, 1997). These studies shed light on certain areas of the African-American male experience, but primarily from a deficit perspective, emphasizing what is wrong and the ways in which African-American males are not succeeding. When much of the literature on African-American men over the past several decades is reviewed as a collective body, the African-American man is viewed as a problem with seemingly few redeeming qualities or hope for betterment (Gordon, Gordon & Nembhard, 1994; Brown 2011). While the discourse around African-American males has come primarily from a deficit perspective, there has been a growing body of literature in higher education aimed at identifying why college attrition rates for this population remain high despite the large amount of intellectual energy directed towards the problem. Exploration of familial factors (Freeman, 2005), cultural factors (Fleming, 1981; Hale, 1986) and institutional actions (Guthrie, 1999; Harper 2008) have all done very little to positively affect the retention rates of African-American male

students (Harper, 2012). One area of higher education that has been shown to provide demonstrable success with regards to retention is student engagement (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Studies in this area have proven that if students are engaged in educationally purposeful activities on campus they are more likely to be retained (Jones, 2002; Lang & Ford, 1992). Student affairs is the arm of higher education responsible for creating educationally purposeful activities outside the classroom on college and university campuses. The student affairs field originated from the need to have administrative coordination of the activities that sprang up in the extracurricular life of students (Thelin 2004). Student affairs practitioners can support the retention efforts of African-American men by working to increase the levels to which these men become engaged in leadership roles in college (Guiffrida, 2003). The engagement literature focusing on improving the numbers of African-American males in collegiate leadership roles provides guidance on how the differences between this group and majority students might be understood and factored in to the design of programs and services aim (Beil et al., 2000; Clewell & Ficklen, 1986; Cuyjet, 1997). In this study I explore the lives of African-American male student leaders so that their experiences are central to the proposed solutions and their successes are revealed and shared.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research studies suggest that on predominantly white college and university campuses in the United States, African-American undergraduate males face higher degrees of environmental incongruence when compared to both white men at predominantly white institutions and Black men at historically Black institutions (Huebner, 1980; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). The dearth of African-American males in

campus leadership positions is a major concern for student affairs administrators because engagement has been proven to be a contributing factor to desirable academic outcomes of the collegiate experience (Astin, 1975, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1993; Moore, Lovell, McGann, & Wyrick, 1998; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). Because engagement can affect retention and progress to graduation (Jones, 2002; Lang & Ford, 1992; Person & Christensen, 1996), the deficit must be analyzed and strategies to rectify the problem(s) created, so African-American men who do attend college have the added benefit of student involvement to aid them in graduating from college. Success in higher education is vital because education is the most effective way to span the socio-economic divide between “haves” and “have-nots” in the U.S. (Atwell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2007; Haveman & Smeeding 2006). Clifton Wharton states the feeling of many minoritized populations when he writes:

Minorities in particular have been ardent believers in education as central to the uniquely American belief in bettering ones lot in life. That it was once a criminal offense to teach a Mississippi slave to read and write was no accident. Nor was it a coincidence that so many [B]lack heroes during slavery were heroes of literacy, such as Frederick Douglass. They realized that freeing their minds was the first and most important step toward freeing their people. (*Minorities in Public Higher Education*, 1988)

In terms of career earning potential, in the U.S. a Bachelor’s degree translates to twice the earning potential of a high school diploma (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Educational benefits specific to African-American males have been documented by the Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS) at Northeastern University. CLMS data from 2004–2005 shows the median annual wage earned by Black males with a high school diploma or G.E.D. was \$11,823, whereas Black males with a Bachelor’s degree, earned a median annual income of \$29,537 (Andrew, Ishwar, Joseph, & Paulo, 2007). Even with

the socioeconomic benefits of education widely known, levels of educational attainment in the largest U.S. minoritized communities are far below that of the majority group.

Over the years there have been steady, incremental increases in participation of African-American males in higher education but even with those increases, men of color still lag significantly behind males who belong to the majority group. The American Council on Education (2008) reports while 46% of White males attend college, only 37% of African-American males attend. And getting to college is by no means a guarantee of success, as the difference between African-American men who complete a degree within 6 years is only 35% as compared to a 59% graduation rate for White men. Given the size of the higher education deficit, there has been a robust amount of research put forward on recruitment and retention by higher education researchers.

This research has taken place within the context of a rapidly evolving U.S. society. It is important to note that while higher education in this country dates back to the 1600s, until the 1960s the vast majority of African-Americans could only attend colleges and universities designated for Blacks. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) did an excellent job of educating people of color, but as long as the country operated under a separate-but-equal doctrine, African-Americans were not truly participatory citizens. While full-scale integration did not truly occur until the 1960s, John Thelin (2004) writes that even then, Blacks were not well received; “The desegregation efforts of state legislatures and state universities during the 1960s were largely a matter of half-hearted token compliance” (p. 304). Given it took a U.S. Supreme Court mandate and often U.S. National Guard support, African-Americans have been only legally involved in the total higher education enterprise for less than 50 years.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to establish a continuum across factors that promote and hinder African-American males' participation in student leadership organizations. It is my intent to use this study to strengthen student affairs practice in regards to the African-American male population in higher education. My reasons for doing so are: (a) the purpose of student affairs is the development and growth of students' interpersonal and life skills (ACE, 2004); (b) student-focused activities provide opportunity for more intensive interpersonal time with students than any other aspect of collegiate life (Schroeder, Mable & Associates, 1994); and (c) demographic data shows the number of African-American males enrolling in higher education will plateau in coming years and increasing enrollments of the past several years have failed to yield proportionally increasing levels of engagement and graduation, so it stands to reason fewer students will lead to decreasing levels of engagement and retention. In addition to these professional reasons I cite, there are factors inherent in my own personal and professional life which led me to this course of study.

In my experience as a student at two public institutions of higher education and as a staff member at three different predominantly white institutions, I have come to identify several consistent themes. One is a shortage of African-American males in student leadership roles. At Florida A&M, an Historically Black University (HBCU) where I began my collegiate career, the largest campus organizations had male participants, but the majority of the leadership, and in fact the majority of the college enrollment, was female. At the University of Illinois, with the exception of the fraternities, there were few African-American males in prominent student leadership roles (with the exception of



athletics). As an undergraduate, this imbalance did not directly affect me until I served as the liaison for my fraternity on Interfraternity Council. It was when I sat in a meeting of 30 or more fraternity leaders and was the only person of color that I began to pay attention. During practicum work in my Master's program, I advised Black Greek Council, and it was then that I noticed how reluctant many of the males of color were to engage in activities outside of their cultural groups. In two professional roles it was a job expectation that all staff mentor students of color into leadership positions in residential life and on campus at large. In those roles, the multi-cultural organizations (Black Student Union, Asian-Pacific Association, Association of Latin American Students) were the best place to find young men who had some limited involvement, so the challenge then became building upon their skills so they would assume leadership positions in the multicultural organizations and then take on roles in campus-wide organizations, therefore involving them in leadership with a larger scope (Student Government, Resident Assistants, Orientation Leaders). In work with those young men the same refrain was espoused. The men voiced to me and my peers they did not feel much was to be gained by assuming leadership roles, because those roles were "not meant for them."

To answer the research questions I pose in this study, it becomes necessary to delve into the area of student retention. Although the focus of this study is much more heavily weighted toward student engagement, it must be acknowledged the concept of student engagement and, through student engagement, student affairs work finds support primarily since studies document a link between student engagement to retention (Astin, 1982; Braxton, 2000; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Therefore, in order to contextualize my study on the African-American male experience within the context of

student leadership, I examine key writings on retention and engagement as foundations.

### **Research Objectives/Questions**

Studies suggest an increased level of student engagement among African-American males can lead to improved retention and improved academic performance (Bean, 1992; Harper, 2004, 2005). However, there are few published books, articles or manuals that propose specific actions or best practices. While findings from this study will not reflect an algorithm, I anticipate outcomes with which I may construct a way of student engagement that might serve as a skeleton to which layers can be added depending upon the institution. My research question is: According to African-American males, what factors influence, promote, or hinder their leadership participation in campus student organizations?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The goal of this study is to provide a venue in which African-American males are offered an opportunity to voice their perceptions of campus climate as it fosters inclusion and involvement. Since my intent is to provide a non-majority group an opportunity to have their perspective heard and validated, in this study I draw upon Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995) as my theoretical frame. Critical race theory as used in this study has the potential to provide important, candid minority context to predominantly white institutions of higher education. In addition, by representing the first-account experiences of a minority group to formulate solutions to improve the conditions of that group, this study employs an emancipatory frame (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Important elements of critical race theory manifest in this study are the use of participant narrative to provide exposition, analysis of the historical context of higher education and student affairs, and

the examination of how structures put in place to encourage and support student involvement serve to perpetuate inequity (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Delgado and Stefancic (1995) argue that the stories of people of color are contextualized by the racism experienced as part of their lives. Racism frames family bonds, social relationships, and interactions with all institutions of society. Racism creates a context so fundamentally different from life experienced by majority culture that minority stories often appear foreign and unfathomable to those in the majority. The result of this vast difference in experience and its representation is that minority stories are first perceived as irrelevant and subsequently invalidated.

Analyzing the history and evolution of U.S. higher education using CRT provides a way to explain how the campus environment has long been and remains a place where many African-American males feel unwelcome. A racially hostile campus climate does not necessarily involve overt racism. Subtle hostilities perpetrated on the minoritized populations by the majority, known as micro-aggressions, are far more common and therefore must be examined to determine their origin. Micro-aggressions are constantly occurring behaviors, images, and policies that serve to perpetuate the superiority of the majority culture and make campus life unwelcoming and hostile to minority groups and individuals such as African-American males (Solorzana, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). I anticipate my data will yield stories replete with the subtleties of racism.

Because campus climate is the realm of student affairs, this campus division specifically must be examined to explain how a profession created to support students by encouraging involvement and promoting diversity of activities might actually perpetuate a system which excludes and minimizes the leadership roles of African-American males

and works contrary to the stated goal of development and engagement. Critical Race Theory provides a lens through which student affairs practices, policies, and procedures may be viewed from the perspective of African-American males allowing their needs to be cast into dramatic relief.

Throughout this study I utilize several terms consistently. *African American* is used to describe U.S. citizens of African descent. *Campus culture* encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors passed from one generation of students, faculty, and staff to the next. Placement of this study within the field of Student Affairs is central to my work and represents the audience I intend this work to affect. For the purposes of this study, *student affairs* is used to describe the organizational structure, division, or unit within institutions of higher education responsible for students out of class life and learning (Winston, Creamer, & Miller 2001). Understanding the importance of student engagement and student involvement within the realm of higher education is necessary in framing the study's key research questions. The term *student engagement* represents students' involvement in activities and conditions linked with high-quality learning. A key assumption inherent within this definition is learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their own knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate student involvement (Astin, 1984). *Student involvement* is defined as "the amount of psychological and physical energy that college students devote to collegiate activities such as studying, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in campus clubs and organizations, and spending time on campus" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). I utilize the term *student leadership*

*development* frequently. It represents the process of involving students in meaningful ways beyond the classroom, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their talents, skills, and interests while continuing to develop new skills (Owen, 2012). As participants in this study have been selected because of their leadership positions, *student leadership positions* are defined as positions within university-recognized, campus organizations. When referring to minority populations, I use the term *minoritized* in place of minority or underrepresented. I use *minoritized*, to make explicit the social construction of race by the dominant culture and how this social construction serves as tool to subjugate subordinate groups (Harper, 2012)

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

As an interpretivist, I do not come to this study with any claim to objectivity. As an African-American male, I had the opportunity to attend both an Historically Black College and a Predominantly White Institution. I hail from a demographically middle-class home with some elements of privilege, and my pre-college preparation was completed on a college-prep track. Despite my advantages, I was academically dismissed from college. The assistance of staff mentors who I met through involvement in student organizations helped me re-enroll and successfully complete college. In my current role as a student affairs administrator, I work to develop better methods to prevent African-American males from experiencing some of the difficulties and challenges I faced. There are several factors to this study that, while making this study unique, also serve to prevent the findings of this study being automatically applicable for all African-American males. One is its focus on African-American male participants attending the same Predominantly White Institution (PWI). African-American males attending larger

institutions or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) might provide different findings if participating in an identically designed study. Another area where my subjectivity influences this study is the choice to interview African-American men who have become involved in extracurricular university social and academic activities. The same battery of questions, if posed to African-American men who have chosen to not to become involved in any academic clubs, student organizations or leadership opportunities, might yield different findings. A third area where my researcher subjectivity comes into play is investigating African-American males—their experiences, perspectives and opinions on what factors encourage their involvement—qualitatively. This specific focus and the epistemological and ontological stance of qualitative inquiry means my findings are not generalizable, but my own belief in the value of critical theory and employing an emancipatory worldview to conduct research means my findings should speak in depth to my intended audience. This study draws upon the knowledge and experience of my participants. The experiences of my participants themselves will allow the creation of a study that others might find useful and with some modifications, applicable to individualized situations.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it provides practitioners in the field of student affairs at predominantly white institutions a greater understanding of ways to involve African-American males in programs and services and the value of African-American males' involvement in leadership roles. Researchers and practitioners in student affairs know engaging minoritized students is a proven way to increase retention and provide direct support to the academic mission of colleges and universities. Engaging minoritized

males is directly tied to the moral imperative of higher education. All student populations recruited into higher education must be provided the opportunity to achieve their goals in an environment that supports them, in and out of the classroom, and provides an atmosphere that is not only welcoming and inclusive, but provides an authentic environment in which all can be challenged to grow and thrive, especially those who research shows as less likely to persist to graduation. With an increased call for accountability from higher education consumers and shrinking funding sources for higher education, it is imperative that successful and cost-effective measures to engage populations with high attrition rates be developed and utilized. The findings of this research will provide information that will help with the engagement and retention efforts of African-American males.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **The African-American Experience in American Society**

As the only minority group in the U.S. involuntarily brought to this country as slaves, African Americans have neither shared equality nor equity with those of the predominant, white culture (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). The institution of slavery began a process of dehumanizing African Americans, but even with its abolition, African Americans continue to be victims to the entrenched effects of racism. I define racism as systemic discrimination against or exclusion and oppression of a collection of people (Daniels, 1996). The racism practiced against African Americans involves an attempt to destroy or replace language, family structure, and religion—all of the institutions, traditions, and practices that give a people identity (Green, 1975). The end of slavery, the legislative advances of the civil rights movement and the elevation of some African Americans to political office have not served to ameliorate racism because its roots are so deeply, profoundly intertwined within the fabric of our country (West, 2001) through all its social systems. The power and ferocity of racism allows African Americans to continue to be considered outsiders to mainstream society and is constructed with a scaffolding of supposed inferiority, so even within institutions allegedly open to all, such as U.S. colleges and universities, African Americans continue to be mistreated or ignored (Ellison, 1970).



### **African-American Males in American Society**

Gibbs (1988) asserts due to the pervasiveness of institutionalized racism in U.S. society, African-American males should be considered an endangered species. Several scholars have brought to light aspects of these young men's lives that, when viewed cumulatively, paint a descriptive picture of the state of African-American males today.

There is a large body of work in the literature surrounding the lives of African-American families that purports critically to examine the societal issues these families face, but in reality perpetuates widely held negative opinions and beliefs about African Americans which fall into the category of deficit thinking. In the area of family, Merrick (2001) examines how the "welfare queen" stereotype of the young, single mother works to marginalize Black women and their children, when what they need is support and access to educational and community resources to help break the cycle of poverty. Connor and White (2006) detail the negative effect of infrequent or altogether absent fathering on the development of African-American men as their identity is shaped. Stewart (1991) presents historical issues that have shaped the African-American family and discusses African-American men in the context of fatherhood and as husbands.

In the area of achievement within the U.S. educational system, researchers engage in discourse challenging the ways educational systems fail to account for social and cultural factors vital to the success of African-American males. In the area of schooling, Harry and Klingner (2006) question the large proportion of African-American males in special education and examine the role race plays in academic achievement. King (2005) brings light to the racial and cultural biases inherent in the educational system and the contributors to this book propose practices that embrace rather than ignore the culture of

African-American students. Hale-Benson (1986) brings forth specific aspects of the African-American cultural heritage and posits it is only by understanding and taking into account these cultural factors that African-American boys can receive the most effective educational experience.

In addition to the literature interrogating family structures and educational practices affecting the lives African-American males, modern popular culture is another realm in which those negative stereotypes created and perpetuated by the majority culture create obstacles to the success of this group. Sharpley-Whiting (2007) examines the role hip-hop culture has on the development of misogynist attitudes towards women in general and African-American women in particular. The stereotype of the hyper-sexualized, well-endowed, athletic man is analyzed from the perspective of an African-American man who himself fits none of those labels and is considered a success story because of or in spite of those attributes (Poulson-Bryant, 2005). Brown describes the numerous contradictions African-American males face from family, peers, and society as they try to construct their own identity in a society all-too-ready to fit them into a preconceived role (Brown, 2006). Moving from broader societal and structural challenges, in the next section I delve specifically into the literature that examines African-American males in U.S. higher education.

### **African-American Males in Higher Education**

When historically minoritized populations began enrolling in substantial numbers in PWIs, their integration was not smooth. Research exploring struggles around the integration of these groups offers important grounding for the connection between student affairs and how African-American males experience higher education today.

Much of the early research regarding minoritized students in higher education focuses on the overall difficulty with which students of color adapt to predominantly white campus environments. Brisbane (1974) examines the growth of Black student populations and the role of student activism in the 1960s, using the civil rights movement as the backdrop. Edwards views the militancy of students in the 1960s as a reaction to the inability of white institutions to integrate Black students into campus life. Willie and McCord (1972) write of Black students' perceptions of racism on campuses and how racism prevented Black students from becoming a part of the campus culture. Instead, Black students withdrew into separate student groups and organizations and in some cases committed overt acts of defiance towards the campus. Crossland (1971) analyzes demographic information to provide a snapshot of just how proportionally underrepresented Black students are in higher education as compared with the number of Blacks in the population at large. From this underrepresentation, Crossland identifies educational background, lack of financial resources, geography and motivation to attend as significant barriers to Black students participating in higher education. Altman and Snyder (1970) call for a re-envisioning of the higher education enterprise, with a more pronounced emphasis on the humanistic aspect of college. The pair also writes on the role of several student affairs units in assisting with the recruitment and retention of Black students. Pitts (1975) also looks at pre-college factors such as community support, family structure, and developmental issues such as Black students' search for meaning at a PWI. Harper (1975) provides one of the earliest comprehensive reviews of the literature pertaining to Black students attending PWIs and he uses case studies and observation to examine barriers to Black students fitting in effectively. Harper's finding with the most relevance to my study

is many Black males use student organizations to develop leadership skills, but they choose to do so only with Black student groups, making a conscious decision to not participate in organizations that serve the entire campus. Peterson et al. (1978) study the effect the increasing number of Black students enrolling at PWIs is having on higher education, placing the influx of Black students into higher education in context with similar surges of enrollment among female, veteran, and Jewish populations. Peterson et al detail how various institutions respond to increasing Black enrollments and from these responses, how institutions position themselves to prepare for increasing populations in the future. The beginnings of current-day trends in African-American male involvement can be seen in this early research in the ways students from underrepresented groups sought to establish safe spaces at PWIs.

Researchers in the 1980s sought to identify factors having a negative effect on the educational success of African-American men so these factors could be mitigated. Parham and McDavis (1987), in a study that examines counseling practices with Black male clients purport Black men, more so than any other minority population, are most at risk of not succeeding in higher education. This premise is based on employment, educational attainment, and law enforcement data that shows Black males poorly represented in higher education along with disproportionately high numbers of unemployed and incarcerated. Although this research was still grounded in a deficit perspective, the identification of roadblocks to success was vital because it led to the search for and documentation of environments where African-American males were succeeding. Fleming (1984) seeks to compare levels of success of Black students at PWIs and HBCUs. Fleming attempts empirically to analyze the impact of the two college

environments. Her study finds more benefits to Black students at HBCUs vs. PWIs, and these benefits hold especially true for Black men. Exploration of positive factors which might influence African-American males' success became somewhat more prevalent in subsequent years.

In the 1990s a specific focus on Black males in higher education began to appear in print. As opposed to regurgitating tired tropes about why African-American males were not succeeding in higher education, attention was turning to pockets of the academy where successes were occurring so that deeper exploration of those successes might be explored and documented. The groups identified as having most success in getting Black males involved are Black fraternities (Hughes & Winston, 1987). Kimbrough (1995) finds the majority of men in these organizations view themselves as leaders and feels leadership development is an important skill to gain. Taking this information, Sutton and Terrell (1997) challenge student affairs administrators to find ways to encourage Black men to exercise leadership skills in not just fraternities, but in campus-wide groups. In 1997, Cuyjet edited a compilation of articles aimed at describing, analyzing, and improving the status of Black men, with regard to college/university attendance and completion. This volume examines all facets of the collegiate experience from academic to athletics through student activities and describes mentoring initiatives that have had some success. Schwartz and Washington (2002) study cognitive and non-cognitive factors in an attempt to determine what things have the most direct effect on African-American male retention. This research reports high school GPA and class rank to be the best predictors of collegiate academic performance. Harper (2004, 2006) studies academically high-achieving African-American males and finds engagement in co-

curricular activities has a positive impact on the success of his sample. Cuyjet and Associates (2006) published a volume which brings together in one work many issues relevant to Black males in college: spirituality, leadership, sexuality, athletic participation, and fraternity participation. This work also profiles several programs designed to increase African-American male retention. Harper and Quaye (2007) identify ways student organizations allow for the expression of identity and growth of Black males. Their research yields two major themes: African-American males participate in organizations predominantly for the purpose of uplifting the African-American community and the skill most of these students list as the most relevant is cross-cultural communication. Strayhorn (2009) seeks to answer whether diverse social group interaction can affect African-American men's sense of belonging in higher education. The study reports becoming acquainted with peers of a different race does lead to higher levels of belonging. In a different study, Strayhorn (2008) finds supportive relationships lead to higher levels of satisfaction with the college experience, but these supportive relationships do not have any effect on levels of academic achievement.

From the preceding review of the literature, it is apparent that while research exists which attempts to define and measure the effect of student involvement among minoritized populations, outlines how best to retain these students and define how institutions can best incorporate minoritized students into the larger student body, there is a gap in the area particularly addressing African-American men and campus student involvement, particularly in the area of what motivates Black men to join organizations and identifying and explicating which practices best draw Black students. These are gaps I attempt to address with my dissertation research.

## **Historical Overview of Student Affairs**

To understand better student affairs and its position within the broader context of higher education, in this section I provide a brief history of the evolution of student affairs work. The organizational structure of most universities contains two large areas within which the majority of student services fit. One of these areas is Academic Affairs. Central to the existence of the higher education enterprise, Academic Affairs traces much of its structure, nomenclature, and process to the earliest European models from which the U.S. higher educational system is derived. Academic Affairs consists of faculty hiring and promotion, the majority of classroom instruction, and the creation and certification of the course curricula in the various academic colleges. The second area is student affairs.

Student affairs work has been a part of U.S. higher education since the founding of the first colonial college, however the field was named and defined only within the last century. In fact, student affairs as it exists today is a distinctly U.S. field that has developed and evolved in sync with adaptations made within higher education institutions as higher education became more central to the U.S. way of life (Miller & Prince, 1976). The fact student affairs now occupies its current place on most U.S. campuses is a byproduct of the societal glorification of the college experience and the idea that the partying and fun that supposedly happen during college are a rite of passage to be undertaken as the last years of condoned irresponsibility before beginning a job in the “real world”. These beliefs have made the collegiate years a highly symbolic time period in which students must transition from youth to adulthood, formally separate from parents and family, while choosing a career (Thompson, 1990).

The concept of student affairs is central to this study because unlike academic affairs, which is tasked with rigidly defining the progression of students through the undergraduate process (through course selection, degree requirements, and grades), student affairs has multiple options to serve students and the academic mission of the university. Research demonstrates it is not one critical incident or experience that directly leads to a student's successful completion of college, rather a cumulative effect of multiple experiences (Manning, 1997). Pascarella and Terenzi (1991) write a "majority of important changes that occur during college are probably the cumulative result of a set of interrelated experiences sustained over an extended period of time" (p. 610). Student affairs exists today as a substantive part of the higher education enterprise, due to the fact that the majority of student life outside the classroom is the working realm of student affairs professionals. The opportunity to interact with students in frequent and varied ways places student affairs staff in the best position to affect the development of students (Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999).

Most colleges and universities are staffed by a sizeable number of administrative professionals whose purpose is to assist with the development of students in ways other than classroom instruction (Woodard, Love, & Komives, 2000). The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) describes the wide ranging work of those in the student affairs field as those who:

...work in a variety of settings on college and university campuses, from financial aid, orientation, and residence life to athletics, international services, and student activities. They provide services and develop programs that affect all aspects of students' lives inside and outside of the classroom. Some of the things student affairs professionals do in their day-to-day jobs include: enhancing student learning; helping students make academic and career decisions; mentoring students and helping them develop their leadership skills; and meeting students'



needs by providing a range of housing, dining, health services, and recreational facilities. (NASPA, 2008)

U.S. colleges and universities have created and recreated curricula, pedagogy, and administration to accommodate changing attitudes and beliefs held by the societal majority. The early colonial colleges were extensions of the ideals and beliefs of the colonies in which they were founded (Vine, 1976). As prevailing ideologies changed, so too did colleges. An example of the societal shift undergone in higher education is that the strong religious and moral tenets of the early colonial colleges present at their inception prove a far cry from the progressive attitudes towards sex, marriage, and religion that exist on those campuses today. The training for leadership at Hampton and Tuskegee during the 21<sup>st</sup> century is notably different from the type of education provided for African-American students enrolled in the first graduating classes of those institutions. Change of such magnitude does not happen simply due to the advancement of knowledge. While scientific and technological advances have contributed to the growth of higher education, just as important have been the shifts in what U.S. citizens have viewed as acceptable and desirable. Using the example of the historically Black colleges cited earlier, it is important to note that educating African-Americans was unheard of by large segments of U.S. inhabitants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it was only through a slow change in national culture (helped along by the Civil War) that African-Americans began to be thought of as capable of learning and eventually provided the opportunity to attend college, first in segregated and then in integrated institutions.

The student affairs that exists on college campuses in the U.S. today has evolved to reflect societal changes. To demonstrate the change students affairs has undergone I

have, through the use of secondary sources, identified four distinct periods. These periods are: *in loco parentis*, customer service, student development, and student learning (Newman & Davenport, 2003).

### ***In Loco Parentis***

The colonial college tried as much as possible to model themselves after their British predecessors, notably Oxford and Cambridge. At those British institutions, student life focused not just on classes, but around libraries, meals, and dormitories. This system was possible largely because at elite institutions like Oxford and Cambridge institutional endowments made possible the creation of quadrangles with academic buildings, dining halls, libraries, and living quarters. These universities also had the benefit of staff to administer and coordinate meals, laundry service, room cleaning, and supervision. The faculty at these institutions had only to worry with classroom instruction. This freedom from extracurricular responsibility allowed faculty to establish informal social relationships with students. In the case of British universities, faculty established relationships with students because they wanted to, not because they had any responsibility or obligation (Schroeder, Mable, & Associates, 1994). The colonial colleges, without the benefit of the revenue streams of their English counterparts, could neither afford to build large campuses, nor could they afford large networks of servants or support staff. In the colonies, faculty bore full responsibility for classroom instruction and extracurricular supervision. Faculty found the best way to establish and maintain order was to exert control on the same level as parents. The key socioeconomic frame of higher education at this time was those young men fortunate enough to experience higher education were being prepared for religious and civic leadership. To quote Thelin (2004),

“Clearly, a main purpose of the colleges was to identify and ratify a colonial elite. The college was a conservative institution that was essential to transmitting a relatively fixed social order” (p. 25). Society was willing to cede the inculcation of their culture to college leaders because there was a sense that the changes in society occurring at this time were weakening the fabric of the family and rendering parents, particularly mothers, incapable of providing the stern disciplinary hand needed properly to raise boys to men (Vine, 1976).

The student affairs functions of the early colonial period most equivalent to our structure today were judicial. College faculty took the role of “acting parent” seriously and they created extensive systems of rules and codes of conduct. Punishments ranged from fines to floggings and public admissions of wrongdoing before college assemblies (Miller, Winston, & Mendenhall, 1983). During this time period, there were no administratively delivered extracurricular programs. Today on college campuses there exist hundreds of registered student organizations, established so students can come together to share interests in areas such as photography, juggling, and watching *The Simpsons*. In the early colonial period there were no student organizations. The earliest development of a student activities function grew around the traditional class structure.

The class system was a direct import from Britain. Freshmen socialized with freshmen, sophomores with sophomores and so on. Fagging came from this English tradition. Fagging was a system whereby younger students acted as servants and errand boys for the older students. This originated in the English public school system and was continued at University. Fagging was generally viewed as a negative behavior abhorred by most faculty, however there were some who viewed it as vital tradition. Ezra Stiles, a

president at Yale was known to dismiss freshmen who came to him complaining of being taken advantage of (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). Fagging was eventually banned, but in its place arose another, more generalized activity that remains with us today: hazing. After the banning of fagging rivalries between the class groups took the form of sophomores initiating incoming freshmen to college life through hazing that was accepted and, like fagging, sometimes condoned by the faculty. These activities were athletic competitions pitting class against class and if freshmen won enough events, they were accorded campus privileges not otherwise open to them. From these quasi-sanctioned activities grew the first organized student activity: the literary societies.

Literary societies provide opportunities for students to polish oratorical skills, debate “hot-button” issues of the day, and discuss the merits of various writers and poets (Brubacher, 1962). These societies gained ardent support from members and rivalries were formed on campuses as multiple literary societies sprung up with members passionate supporting their groups in organized debates and in the publishing of competing literary magazines. The extracurricular activities of this time were created by students for students, with the primary role of the faculty being teaching and maintaining discipline among the student body.

The first phase of the *in loco parentis* era lasted from 1636 until the early 1800s. In the early 1800s a reform movement grew out of women’s demand for higher education. Mary Wollstonecraft was a prominent women’s rights crusader who argued women possessed the same mental capacity as men, that it was only social ideas that were holding women back. Wollstonecraft demanded equal access to education, political affairs and jobs (Wollstonecraft, 1993). Some success on this front was achieved when

the Wesleyan Female College of Macon, Georgia opened in 1836 as the first U.S. educational institution to offer degrees to women. Even as more institutions for women were opening throughout the North and South there was strong societal backlash. Many in the country, in both the North and South, feared women were too delicate for extensive education. Another fear was women with too much education might forsake their duties as homemakers (Solomon, 1985). Despite the feelings of many in society, colleges for women became successful as women took advantage of the opportunity to study and join in a community of their peers in what one author called an “Adamless Eden” (Palmieri, 1995).

The effect the demands for change by women placed on society, along with the Civil War and subsequent westward expansion had an effect on higher education. Western lands newly claimed provided the means for the Morrill Act of 1862 establishing land grant colleges and in these new colleges women were given equal admissions access (Johnson, 1981). Westward expansion had a tremendous social effect, because it opened a new frontier to those in the East and South seeking better opportunities and an opportunity to break free of socially confining roles (Gordon, 1990). As populations grew in the West and educational institutions opened, it was more practical to educate men and women in the same place as opposed to stretching funds to open separate colleges for women (Matalene & Reynolds, 2001). Student activities expanded as Greek-lettered organizations and secret societies began to replace literary societies as the preferred social outlet. *In loco parentis* still held sway, but that philosophy now affected women and men (Thelin, 2004).

As the U.S. neared the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, college life began to be elevated in status. No longer just a means of confirming a place in society as it had in colonial society, a college degree in the 1890s began to mean increased earning potential, a way to gain social status and much-desired social mobility. The college man and woman became the darling of U.S. media as society became fascinated with the image of the college students as evidence of the country's intellectual growth (Thelin, 2004). This heightened status, in addition to the growing number of colleges led to a steady enrollment growth. This enrollment growth led to a wider variety of students on campuses and these students sought activities that strengthened their ties to their institution and occupied their time out of the classroom. Athletics became a huge part of campus life, with students taking the lead in organizing their teams and schedules. As extracurricular activities gained prominence there was practically no input by institutional faculty and administrators as most events were student- or alumni-funded and coordinated.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, university administrators recognized the need to coordinate some services and activities of students. Student housing, which previously consisted of students living in small community buildings or rooming with local families, now moved to large residence hall structures to accommodate the growing number of students of each gender.

Organized health services became a necessity as more knowledge was gained about the importance of preventative care and the need to guard against epidemics of influenza and other infectious diseases. Career service functions became necessary as the growing numbers of graduates flooded the job market looking for work. With growing enrollments, and the need to provide more and more services, it became apparent to

faculty and educational administrators the existing structure of faculty supervising students in and outside of the classroom was no longer feasible. To staff the offices of these new administrative services, the first formal educational program in the field of student affairs began at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1916 (McClellan, Stringer, & Barr, 2009).

When participation in higher education became more desirable for large numbers of youth in the U.S. and as more had the means to attend, colleges' and universities' enrollments grew. With expanded enrollments came the need for services and staff to coordinate services. Faculty did not have the time to perform these duties and so a new era of administration was born (Hamrick et al., 2002). It is important to note this new level of administration was not designed with the purpose of assisting students with degree completion. Initially the role of these new administrators was to manage the students in activities taking place outside the classroom not central to the university's academic mission. This distinction is key because student affairs work was established from its beginning as work tangential to the core role of higher education.

### **The Student Personnel Point of View**

In 1937, the American Council on Education, which recognized the need for a separate body to provide necessary services for students outside of the classroom setting, drafted the *Student Personnel Point of View*. This was the first written document which explicitly mandated the need for a body of administrators to work with students in the extracurricular realm to develop them socially and emotionally. The *Student Personnel Point of View* also called for students to be prepared to contribute to democracy and be educated to grasp international affairs as well as domestic social issues. The initial draft,

along with a 1949 revision, laid the groundwork for creation of a student affairs profession. The *Student Personnel Point of View* marked the beginning of the development of distinct faculty and student affairs cultures guided by different values, beliefs and assumptions (Kuh & Others, 1987). To most effectively demonstrate the evolution of student affairs practice from its inception to the present, the different eras of student affairs practice are identified, defined, and placed within the societal context of their respective time period. In addition, the primary foci of student affairs practitioners in each era is defined and illuminated to provide context for its relation to the core mission of higher education.

### **The Customer Service Era**

Between the initial drafting of the *Student Personnel Point of View* and the revision and update in 1947, the newly established profession was still in its infancy and, as such, there were no major changes to the *status quo*. Administrators who had been Deans of Students, residence life staff, and job counselors continued in their roles. The post-WWII period was a time of tremendous growth. The Serviceman's Readjustment Act, or the G.I. Bill, provided educational opportunity for war veterans. Most pundits assumed small numbers of soldiers would opt for higher education, with the majority of them seeking to return to full-time employment. But the lure of higher education was far stronger than many experts assumed because, to the surprise of most politicians and educators, millions of veterans used the funds provided by the Bill to enter higher education. The cultural shift brought about by the war itself and the return home of veterans was significant, especially in higher education. From the inception of colonial colleges to the late 1940s, the majority of college students had been the country's youth:



young men and women on the cusp of adulthood. With the large influx of veterans, colleges and universities were now filled with soldiers who had witnessed the horrors of war. The idea of *in loco parentis* was no longer feasible, because these men did not need parental supervision. The students of this time were far more mature, self-governing in their behaviors, and aware of their rights.

Administrators were also keenly aware of the large sums of money these students were bringing to higher education, and they wanted to make sure this revenue stream was not interrupted. The needs of this new student body and the desire of higher education leaders to keep the coffers full led to a change in the way student affairs services were delivered (Hart, 1982). Gone was the paternalistic, authoritative dynamic that had existed previously. The 1950s and early 1960s ushered in an era of customer service. The universities viewed the student body as income generators who could positively grow the bottom line if kept satisfied (Whyte, 1956). The prevalent model of this time was a theory espoused by social scientist Abram Maslow. Maslow identified what he called a “hierarchy of human needs.” His hierarchy started with safety and security, went next to belonging, moved to self-esteem and, at the pinnacle, was the concept of self-actualization. In this era, student affairs practitioners supported the mission of higher education by focusing on the safety, security, self-esteem, and belonging aspects of Maslow’s hierarchy. University housing offices constructed new residence halls with modern cafeterias. Student activities worked on the belonging aspect of this hierarchy by creating orientation programs to welcome new students to campuses and help them adjust to college life. Social organizations and clubs advised by student affairs staff supported self-esteem by allowing students to come together with like-minded peers and form

friendships and social bonds (Newman & Davenport, 2003). The Customer Service era is defined by the shift to a student's value as paying customer. Student affairs practitioners worked to keep students happy through living arrangements and transformed campuses so students would be more likely to remain on campus and continue paying tuition and fees until graduation.

### **The Student Development Era**

As funding from the G.I. Bill along with new money from government-sponsored research and development allowed higher education institutions' continued growth, the student affairs field sought a theoretical foundation on which to solidify its place as a viable profession. Student development theory was that foundation. Three major schools of thought form the basis of student development theory: cognitive theories that deal with intellectual and moral development, psychosocial theories that focus on personal and life-cycle development, and person-environmental interaction theories that view the interaction with students and their environment (Miller, Winston, & Mendenhall, 1983). The student development era reflected a time when U.S. society was embracing a new level of research and advances in medicine and aeronautics were leading to expanded graduate and professional schools (Thelin, 2004). Theoretical underpinnings were not just window-dressing; student affairs needed this demonstrable theoretical framework to be viewed as viable component within the field of higher education. This conceptual framework provided the means by which student affairs professionals were able to claim a seat at the table of academics and other university-wide administrators. This seat, usually via a vice-presidential-level appointment, gave student affairs a role in the governance of colleges and universities and this role could be used to help shape the

university enterprise in a way that accounted for the needs and concerns of students (Corson, 1960).

Student development theories helped student affairs professionals take the lead in some of the most volatile times in the history of U.S. higher education. I am referring to the political uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1960s, there was a political awakening on campuses nationwide. Students who led comfortable lives began to question the power elite in society and the rampant racial and gender inequities prevalent in such a wealthy country (Brienes, 2001). During this time many advances fought and won by students, such as multicultural student unions, diversity offices, and administrative programs that specifically served the needs of minoritized students and other marginalized groups, were usually administered by student affairs. By the 1970s, student affairs was entrenched in higher education and widely acknowledged as the area where student concerns can be addressed and the voice of students can be heard loudest. In this era student affairs practitioners utilized theoretical frameworks to provide an academic foundation for the field. This theoretical base, along with the roles of student affairs practitioners in helping to provide outlets for students' demands for a voice in administration, allowed student affairs a more prominent seat at the table of college and university governance. It was in this era that student affairs became intertwined with minoritized student groups in their fight for safe spaces and dedicated services on college campuses.

### **The Student Learning Era**

While the student development era focused on the creation of a theoretical model by which student affairs should operate and finding ways by which student affairs

professionals could help address the political and social demands of students, research was also being conducted to determine what impact student affairs functions had on students' academic success. Arthur Chickering found in a 1974 study that students who lived in residence halls or other campus housing were retained at a higher rate than students who lived off campus or in fraternity houses. This study would take a decade to resonate within student affairs circles, but when it did it would lead to an era in which the focus switched from the individual development of students to the ways in which student affairs could more intentionally align with the academic mission and goals of colleges and universities. From its inception, the student affairs profession was viewed as operating parallel with college and university academic goals. The mindset of many university administrators, faculty, and even some student affairs professionals was that what went on in the student affairs area was supplemental, not essential, to the academic success of students (Schroeder, Mable, & Associates 1994). Research by student affairs scholars such as George Kuh, Arthur Chickering, and Charles Schroeder definitively linked positive educational outcomes with student affairs functions (Kuh et al., 1991; Schroeder & Belmonte, 1979; Chickering 1974). Such research ushered in the current period of student affairs, the era of student learning. Student learning is based on the idea all members of the university community need to collaborate to provide a positive learning experience for students (Newman & Davenport, 2003). Key components of this period are continuous assessment of student needs along with the educational outcomes of student affairs initiatives and ongoing outreach with academic affairs and other university support services to create academic and co-curricular experiences that enhance the student's educational growth by providing learning opportunities inside and outside

the classroom. This era reflects the desire for accountability prevalent in contemporary society. As the cost of higher education escalates, legislators and consumers seek verification their money is well spent (St. Johns & Parsons, 2004). Student learning does not necessarily call for new programs or services; rather it calls for student affairs to assess current initiatives and if new programs are necessary, then those programs should be a result of collaboration between academic and student affairs (AAHE et al., 1998).

Of the historical periods detailed here, the timeframe with particular significance to the present study is the 1960s through the 1970s. It was during this time period student affairs assumed the role of advocate for minoritized student groups on many campuses. This advocate role is made manifest by professionals who act as advisors to ethnic campus organizations which provide resources and guidance to students as they articulate the voice of their population on predominantly white campuses. The guiding purpose of this study is to provide practitioners with a set of best practices to aid them in their work. There is research which supports the importance of African-American male involvement on retention and academic success (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper & Quaye, 2007), but few resources which detail specific steps that should be taken to create a campus atmosphere which removes policies and practices perceived as barriers to African-American males and providing directions on how to reach these young men and draw them into student organizations. Addressing those deficiencies is the purpose of this study.

### **Student Engagement**

The second part of my research question deals with student involvement. Astin (1984) describes student involvement as:

The amount of psychological and physical energy that college students devote to collegiate activities such as studying, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in campus clubs and organizations and spending time on campus. (p. 287)

The table was set for the work of student involvement and student-learning scholars such as Astin, Schuh, and Tinto with the proliferation of student development theory. The social relevance of these theories had much to do with the end of *in loco parentis*. In exercising the rights of *in loco parentis*, colleges and universities dictated much of the structure and activities of student life. This all radically changed when legislation lobbied for by student activists in the 1970s led to students gaining adult rights, which meant colleges and universities could no longer exert as much control over the personal lives of students (Thelin, 2004).

Ironically, student activism, which was not something desired by the administrations of most colleges and universities (Gitlin, 1987), was the type of participatory action many student affairs professionals felt indicated students were progressing to higher levels in their personal development. The student activism that led to the end of *in loco parentis* is perceived by some to be among the most fundamental types of student involvement (Chambers & Phelps, 1993).

As *in loco parentis* was swept away, the focus on college campuses turned to making sure students were engaged with their surroundings and active participants in their collegiate experience (Kuh, 1993). Following on Astin's earlier work (1975, 1993), which demonstrates the positive effect student involvement had on retention, researchers began to conduct studies more thoroughly explaining the relationship between being involved and being successful in college and beyond. Schuh and Laverty (1983)

conducted a longitudinal study attempting to link undergraduate student involvement with post-collegiate experiences in order to demonstrate student involvement not only helps undergraduates persist, but also teaches students valuable skills that would help them throughout their adult lives, particularly if students participate in student organizations such as student government, fraternities and sororities, and academic honor societies.

Early research on student involvement was focused primarily on majority students (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Iffert, 1957; Marsh, 1966; Meyer, 1970) with retention in mind. More recent studies became more nuanced and analyzed student engagement through the lens of cognitive and psychosocial development (Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Moore, Lovell, McGann & Wyrick 1998). As the idea of engagement as a means to retain students of color came to the forefront, researchers began to delve into student involvement from the minoritized student perspective. Astin published *Minorities in American Higher Education* in 1982, examining personal and institutional factors influencing minoritized students in higher education. Early writing in this area looked at the experience of minoritized students within multicultural organizations (Peterson & Davenport, 1978). Early involvement in multicultural organizations came from minoritized students coming together to create safe environments by supporting one another in fraternities, sororities, and cultural groups from which minoritized students could draw support and in which they might feel comfortable because all members were like them (Anderson, 2002; Williamson, 1999).

Since the early study of multicultural organizations involved students on both predominantly white and historically black campuses, there was a gap in understanding

how minoritized students on predominantly white campuses interfaced with white organizations. Desousa and King (1992) set out to determine if there was any difference between levels of participation among various racial groups when it came to student involvement, or if all students were just as likely to become involved in any campus activity. They found individual factors played the largest part in whether a student would get involved. Mitchell and Dell (1992) approached the issue from the perspective of identity development. Using Parham's racial identity model (Parham & Helms, 1985), they determined the more comfortable students were with their own ethnicity, the more likely they were to expand their social network beyond students of their race. Harper, in another dissertation (2004), examines a group of African-American males with high academic credentials and documented their perceptions of student involvement and what it meant to them in terms of engagement and development. This study examines how involvement opportunities can have a positive impact on all college students, regardless of socio-economic status or race. Research demonstrates students of color appear to have an "all or nothing" relationship with engagement; these students will either be highly involved or not involved at all (Hoffman, 2002).

A final area of student engagement scholarship is leadership. Developing students for leadership is a core component of the student affairs ideal of developing the whole student (Manning 1997; Miller & Jones, 1981; Murray, 1994). Researchers sought to distinguish basic participation in student organizations from taking a more active and central role as an organizational leader (Cress et al., 2001; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 1990). From early work in this area, an examination of leadership specific to minoritized students sprang forth with researchers working to determine if



minoritized students view leadership in the same way as do white students (Armino et al., 2000; Murray, 1994). In his doctoral dissertation, Mcghee (2000) examines how black students perceive leadership and if their racial background leads them to look at leadership development differently from the way it is constructed by the majority race. This is important, because if minoritized students do not view leadership in the ways leadership is defined within the predominantly white college environment, then that would signify disconnection between the environment and the individual, however Mcghee finds race does not play a large role in how students view leadership (2000). Research in the area of student leadership is important because it supports the idea students who have the opportunity to lead benefit whether they lead in organizations comprised of primarily minoritized or majority students. This means African-American males can reap the same positive outcomes from leadership opportunities even if they choose to remain in groups composed of those most like themselves, among whom they feel most comfortable and understood. This knowledge allows student affairs practitioners to focus on meeting African-American males within the organizations that the men find safe and supportive as well as within groups with majority population membership.

### **Minoritized Student Retention**

As I began to delve into this research, I uncovered two distinct schools of thought. I do not mean to imply these are competing ideologies; researchers simply differ on how they approach the problem. The first school has sought to deal with the issue of minoritized student retention by looking at factors specific to the individual student. William Harvey (2002) describes this argument:

The participation and success level of African-American students, particularly males, in post secondary education environments certainly manifest themselves at a lower level than their White and Asian counterparts. There is no argument there—the data make this point loudly and clearly. But the presumption that is often posited along with this observation is that the blame for this situation lies exclusively with the students, and that it can be resolved in a satisfactory manner if, and only if, they change their attitudes, habits and practices. (p. 15)

While Harvey addresses the negative perspective of this view, researchers of both races have sought to address the problem of minoritized student retention through an examination of the factors surrounding individuals. Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) identify multiple independent factors that influence persistence and achievement. Some of these factors are aptitude, content knowledge, attitude toward learning, study skills, critical thinking ability, technological ability, learning skills, and time management. While these factors are wide-ranging, they all relate to individual circumstance. The primary concept is learning at the collegiate level is strongly influenced by academic preparation occurring prior to the student arriving on the college campus (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Garibaldi, 1992; Polite & Davis, 1999). While this is a logical assumption, academic readiness is not the only component of college life just as reading, writing, and mathematics are part of the higher education experience, not the entire experience. Evidence has shown a very strong socialization component ties into student retention. In *Preventing Students from Dropping Out*, Astin (1975) is one of the first scholars to address non-cognitive factors which could have an impact on retention. Among these factors are religion, geographic location, and race.

As scholars followed the example of Astin and began to examine non-cognitive factors, acute attention was paid to factors pertaining to minoritized students (Abraham &

Jacobs, 1990; D'Souza, 1991; Pouncey, 1993; & Watson & Kuh, 1996). With this turn in the research, the conversation on minoritized student retention was beginning to be framed, specifically with an eye toward the differences between racial groups and the differing ways identity development occurs (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999).

An early racial identity model, created specifically to explain African-American identity development, is the Cross Model of Psychological Nigresence (1971). This was a staged model positing African-Americans move from an early-stage, non-Afrocentric identity, to an Afrocentric, then finally a multicultural identity. Movement through the stages is marked first by initial ignorance of race, to solely embracing an African-American culture, to finally realizing the value and importance of the multiple cultures that make up society.

Another noted theory of non-cognitive racial identity was that of Thomas Parham (Parham & Helms, 1985). Parham's theory gained support because it describes the attitudes of African-Americans as bi-cultural, meaning the majority culture has an impact on how African-Americans perceive their own racial identity. Parham conceptualized a cyclical model of identity development that evolves as an African-Americans move from an unconscious to conscious understanding of racial identity as the person interacts with white culture and has positive and negative experiences. According to Parham, where a person is in their racial identity development determines whether they will be able to assimilate in predominantly white institutions (1985). His theory ties the social, cultural, and racial identities of Black students to their academic success.

Sedlacek (1983) identifies non-cognitive factors that had a high level of influence on African-American student persistence. A positive self-concept, understanding and

dealing with racism, realistic self-appraisal, the preference of long-range goals to immediate needs, availability of support people, successful leadership experiences, demonstrated community services, and nontraditional knowledge. The students who possessed most or all of these factors were more likely to persist in higher education. Verification of the power of specific non-cognitive variables on educational attainment allows educators, armed with an awareness of these variables, to construct experiences and create networks that can bolster African-American males' strengths in these areas, thereby increasing the likelihood of academic success.

The second school of thought in regard to retention and persistence of African-American students shifts the focus from students' individual cognitive and social attributes to the institution students attend (Allen, 1992; Hopkins, 1997; Nettles, Theony, & Gosman, 1986). James Moore (2001) articulates a view held by some researchers when he writes in *Retaining African-Americans in Higher Education*, "An overview of the literature indicates that most programs and retention initiatives focus on African-American students rather than the racism harbored on PWI campuses" (p. 85). In this argument, it is not only about students not adequately prepared to succeed in college, but the problem is that the institutions themselves are not environments conducive to students' well-being. Oris Griffin, writing in *Strategies for Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education* (Ford & Lang, 1992), details the effect specific programs set up by educational institution to support minoritized students could have on retention of this population. He argues if institutions take concerted steps to create welcoming, inclusive environments, they would see higher retention numbers. Astin (1993) very explicitly outlines environmental factors he demonstrates have significant impact on retaining

students in a university setting. Some factors that affect retention are physical structure of campuses, course offerings, student-faculty ratio, university expenditures for student service divisions, personalized education programs, and average faculty salary.

A campus' physical structures have a part to play in the type of messages transmitted to students as well. Hormuth writes about the power physical artifacts have in transmitting culture because those artifacts are the created objects of the culture (1990). Guthrie, in his doctoral dissertation, determines African-American students who live in residence halls on college campuses are most satisfied with their collegiate experience (1999). Kuh and Witt (1988) summarize the effect physical artifacts can have on culture when they write the implicit messages of campus buildings and layout "...are just below the surface of conscious thought, are manifested in observable forms or artifacts" (p. 16).

In addition to the effect specific facilities and programs can directly have on retention, the culture of a campus has also been found to affect retention. Early researchers who studied colleges and universities discovered a distinct collegiate culture on campuses handed down from one generation of students to the next (Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004). This culture includes how students dressed, socialized, and what campus activities became embedded traditions (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Newcomb, 1943). Study of this culture was initially limited to white students; however, as the number of students of color attending predominantly white institutions grew (Fleming, 1984; Leach 1987), some study of minoritized student culture became warranted. Research in this area shows that, within the larger campus culture, minoritized groups (specifically African-Americans), tend to view the dominant campus culture as adversarial or non-welcoming (Ancis, Mohr, & Sedlacek, 2000).

In addition to orienting and adapting to the new environment, incoming minoritized students must often deal with those adjustments with little support from people who look like them or share similar cultural backgrounds (Freeman, 2005). At PWIs, residence hall assignments disperse minoritized students across campus, placing them on floors among few other faces of color. When African Americans eat meals in the cafeteria, sit in class, or walk across campus, their racial isolation is reinforced (Watson, Terrell, Wright, & Associates, 2002). In addition to the sense of isolation, many minoritized students view institutions of higher education as displaying an outright hostile environment (Nasagawa & Wong, 1999). Such hostility stems from policies, procedures, and programs designed using the perspective of majority students with little or no consideration to the perspectives and experiences of minoritized students, effectively creating the perception the institution does not care about the adjustment and well-being of minoritized students (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986).

To combat the sense of isolation, some minoritized students seek out and congregate with other minoritized students. These clusters of students form distinct and separate subcultures from the campus majority, often with their own organizations, events, and designated social spaces (Person & Christensen, 1996). The positive integration of minoritized students into campus culture, even minoritized subcultures, is important because it can have a positive influence on their college experience (Antonio, 2001; Eimers & Pike, 1997). Integration into these subcultures however is often viewed by the majority students and institutional administration as self-segregation (Munro, Munro, & Whiting, 1981). The literature currently does not differentiate the effects of participation in minoritized organizations vs. campus-wide organizations at PWIs, so the

data that demonstrates the positive affect of student involvement on retention (Mutter, 1992; Tinto, 1975) is incomplete. This is a gap I explore within this study.

In order to highlight and understand the factors that most strongly contribute to African-American male involvement in higher education, it is important to understand several factors. Understanding the historical context of the African-American experience in the U.S. is one factor. These experiences include the familial, educational and cultural perceptions, stereotypes and myths that shape how African-American males interface with U.S. society. A second factor is the development of the system of higher education in the U.S. and how it has changed from its colonial roots to the system that exists today. The development of higher education efforts to engage and retain African-American males provides the backdrop of the larger tapestry upon which the process I am researching unfolds. The third factor is the evolution of student affairs practice within the larger realm of higher education. The changing landscape of U.S. higher education created student affairs and, in order for higher education to meet the changing desires and needs of society, student affairs practitioners have had to define their practice, refine the purpose of student affairs work, and adapt to the needs of the changing populations attending colleges and universities. By reviewing the literature in these three areas, a picture forms of how these forces interact and affect the ability of African-American males effectively to become engaged on campuses today.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilized in this study is critical ethnographic methodology. This methodology refers to “the detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy” (Usher, 1996, p. 22). I conducted this research study from inside the perspective of the African-American male participants in an attempt to ground the data in their experience and context. This emic approach allows for data more nuanced than an observer-neutral, etic perspective (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). Homogenous and convenience sampling methods were used to generate participant pools for interviews.

#### **Participants**

Study participants were African-American male undergraduate students who currently or in the past semester have been active members of organizations that purport to have leadership training/preparation/development as an intended outcome of membership. This includes volunteer organizations (campus mentors, Black Student Union), organizations with restricted membership (fraternities, honor societies), and organizations that provide participants with some type of stipend or compensation (student government, resident assistants). I call these paid positions, yet the amount these individuals receive in compensation for their involvement is well below the amount the work these positions should bring, in both time and resources. This salary equation makes assuming these leadership roles a very difficult decision for undergraduate students.



Data from the institution's office of Planning and Institutional Research places the African-American male undergraduate population at 3% of the total undergraduate population at the time of this study (H.U. Office of Planning & Institutional Research). This number is small proportionally, and the ramifications of this are apparent in the visibility or lack thereof when observing students in formal campus locations such as classrooms and administrative offices. In some numbers, African-American males are similar to the white population; both groups enroll predominantly as traditionally-aged freshmen (71%), but other metrics display differences among this group and the larger population. African-American males' composite ACT score averages 18.76 compared to 20.46. The average African-American male GPA is 2.47 vs. 3.01, and 57% of this population comes to the university from the same county, which is outside the county where the university is located. The students in the majority population are in the state, whereas students in the majority population came to H.U. from a wider dispersion of counties in the state.

### **Collection of Data**

Participants in this study were asked to respond to the questions formulated specifically by the author and designed to elicit responses that would assist in the answering of my research question: According to African-American males, what factors influence, promote, or hinder their leadership participation in campus student organizations? The open-ended interview questions encompass four categories: Defining Involvement, Institutional Factors, Peer Influences, and Perceived Benefits. Questions in the "Defining Involvement" category were designed to allow participants to share their definition of involvement and probe the origins of their definition. The "Institutional

Factors” section of questions allowed participants to disclose what role the institution played in decisions to become involved and roadblocks the institution might place in the way of involvement. “Peer Influences” are designed to allow the researcher to understand the African-American male perspective on peer interactions around and about the subject of participation in extracurricular activities. The final section, “Perceived Benefits”, probes the rewards, tangible and intangible, academic and social that participants derive from being involved.

Data collection involved conducting (and then verbatim transcribing) one-on-one interviews, observation in multiple settings, and the collection of artifacts particular to the research site/institution. Homogeneous and convenience sampling was used to collect data. Homogeneous sampling was utilized because African-American males involved in leadership organizations on a predominantly white campus are the targeted subgroup. My goal was to seek out the population in question and record and represent their voices to offer individual stories and the story of their subgroup. Student organization rosters provided names of students, and cross-referencing of those names with a list of African-American males provided the population from which I derived my participant pool.

The most recent data from the campus office of Planning and Institutional Research places the African-American male population at 400 out of a total undergraduate population of 11,966. Athletes and students not involved in campus leadership positions were not targets of this study because of the nature of my research question, and research in this area indicates the largest number of African-American males are not involved in campus leadership positions (Cuyjet, 2006; Desousa & King 1992; Mitchell & Dell, 1992). Achieving data saturation was the objective when

determining the research population. Literature on the subject of qualitative research calls for theoretical saturation as the determinant of sufficient sample size, the term saturation however is not clearly defined (Bluff, 1997; Byrne, 2001; Fossey et al., 2002). Morse defines saturation as “data adequacy” (1995), while others advocate for simply continuing to conduct interviews until there is no new data (Douglas, 2003; Goulding, 2002; Locke, 2001). The one study, which studied saturation in individual interviews, found that 12 interviews is the point at which data saturation occurs (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), yet the foundational literature in the field indicates that there is no set number at which saturation can be said to occur (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Considering these factors, I calculated that of the 400 African-American males at the H.U., approximately 100 met the level of involvement required to participate in this study. Initial study participants were student leaders recommended by H.U. administrators. I expanded this list through snowball sampling techniques by asking for referrals from those I interviewed and interactions with leaders during my observation of group meetings and campus life. At the point in data collection where the pool of data was robust enough for the necessary analysis and the concepts emerging as central to the study were being consistently repeated, I ceased conducting interviews. In total, 29 men were interviewed.

### **Method of Analyzing and Coding Data**

The data used in this study was gathered using the grounded theory approach, in which I gathered the lived experiences and stories of African-American males to seek an explanation of what factors motivated them to become involved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I initially analyzed data throughout the interview process with the understanding

that the most compelling qualitative data is often mined while within the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). I listened to digital copies of each interview the night after the interview sessions occurred and took notes highlighting consistent and pervasive themes that were repeated within and between interviews. Interview data was also examined alongside participant observations as I listened to digitally recorded sessions while observing locations and interactions described in interviews. This formative analysis allowed me the opportunity to gather field notes while observing participants I had not yet interviewed engaging in peer interactions and then listen as they described their perceptions of those interactions during our later interview session. At the end of data collection and transcription of the interviews, I began the summative analysis of the data continuing to use the constant comparative methodological approach so the emerging narrative of the research participants was most effectively shared. The constant comparative method is the process by which data collected from one source is compared against data collected from another source and from the juxtaposition categories make themselves known and themes emerge (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). I coded themes overtly stated from interviews, group conversations I was given access to by the students, and events I witnessed. I initially highlighted themes and mapped categories directly onto interview transcripts and field notes. After examining my data from one round of transcript review, I transferred the themes to index cards and began the process of arranging the cards into categories. From the categories I continued the process until I had a set of themes; the data within which I then analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings 2000). Data most closely spoke to four theoretical concepts within CRT, and by reanalyzing my data through the CRT lens, I

was able to bring forth findings and implications that speak to a broader audience than my localized participants and their institution.

### **Institutional Context**

In this section I provide a brief profile of the research institution, which I refer to by the pseudonym, Humble University (H.U.). The institution's geographic location within a Midwestern state, the physical layout of the campus and the history of African-American recruitment and retention are factors which provide context to the research.

H.U. is a comprehensive, predominantly white, state institution in the Midwest. The university is located in a town of approximately 10,000 and although there are some medical, industrial and manufacturing jobs in the area, the largest employer and central economic force in the town is the university. The campus sits along the main street and is surrounded by restaurants, bars, modest-sized apartment complexes and houses. University enrollment is approximately 11,966, with 90% of the students pursuing undergraduate degrees. The student population is primarily traditionally college-aged, and the campus is residential, with university housing and privately managed apartment complexes providing housing for the vast majority of students. University policy mandates first-year students reside in university-owned housing. The campus is bounded on the north by the oldest campus structures and on the south by residence halls and university-owned apartments.

These residence halls, where the large majority of all new students live, feature several design elements which facilitate high levels of student interaction. Each residence hall contains a dining center; students with a campus meal plan may eat in any dining center for any meal. Residence halls have large lobbies with couches, tables, televisions,

and desks, so lobby spaces are ideal for meeting, studying, or recreational activities.

Finally, each residence hall was designed with outdoor seating space near entrances and along the sides of buildings so, when the weather permits, students have seating in spaces designed to socialize outdoors.

Connecting the north and south sides of campus is a large quadrangle, bisected in two places by a large academic building and the university library. This quadrangle, or quad, consists of large sections of verdant spring grass, intercut with walkways allowing travel in any of the four directions. On the east and west sides of the quad are academic and administrative buildings. The campus recreation building is located adjacent to the football stadium, outdoor track facility, and basketball arena just west of the quad. The architecture of the campus is a mix of the gothic style among the buildings original to the university along with Art Deco and Brutalist style buildings erected in the 1970s and 1980s. Modern design elements are represented in renovations, building additions, and newer multi-use facilities throughout campus. The layout of the campus is compact and economical, so that walking is the most effective way to move between all points on campus.

Data was collected late in 2010 when temperatures were in the 60s and 70s, providing the opportunity to view many student interactions outside on the quad as students moved to and from class, traveled to extracurricular meetings, or simply hung out. While outdoor spaces served as places for much informal interaction, the student union, a large structure on the east side of the quad, is the main building in and around which the majority of student organization meetings occur. The union consists of two large buildings connected by an enclosed walkway which also contains seating and a

study area. One building contains the campus bookstore, a coffee shop, a restaurant, a study room with a vending machine area, several meeting rooms, a large ballroom, and several retail operations, which provide services such as a printing, copying, faxing, and shipping. The adjoining building houses several other administrative offices, a smaller ballroom, and a large food court. The centralized location on this campus of study areas, food service, meeting spaces, retail operations, and administrative support locations is a fairly common design practice on many other U.S. college campuses. It is beneficial to concentrate services at a place to which students have daytime access before, between, or after classes if they do not wish to return to their residence halls to eat, study, or socialize. The Union also provides faculty and staff a place to gather, dine, and make classroom materials available to students without having to leave campus. The Student Union's uses are juxtaposed against the campus library, which also provides meeting spaces and study areas, but is much more restrictive in terms of noise and the ability to eat and drink and, therefore, lends itself mostly to the purpose of studying or conducting research.

The food court is the largest informal gathering space within the Student Union. Entering this space from inside the building places a person on a cobblestone path running from the entryway and splitting into two paths: one path leads directly to the seated areas while the other leads through the food vendor area which is the point of central focus for the space. This large, cafeteria-styled area is surrounded by a wall of green fencing, which allows people on either side to view one another. The vending area features five national-branded serving counters, so customers can select options from one or all of the servers. This path then leads past cash registers and beverage coolers, out of the food area, into a large open room with seating for several hundred people in a variety

of configurations. There are small, round tables for two people, square tables for four, booths that can seat up to six, large tables that can seat eight, and chairs that can be moved to increase or decrease seating capacity at the tables. The seating areas are carpeted in the university's colors, which serves somewhat to deaden the sound of hundreds of students walking through and the constant shuffle of chairs and tables. There are steps through a door on the wall opposite the interior entrance leading to the quad so students can take their food outside or simply interact with people entering or leaving the building.

The Student Union, or simply "the Union" as it is referred to by students, houses the staff who support student organizations, the conference rooms in which the majority of the meetings occur, and the space where larger organizations have their offices. The majority of student meetings take place in the Union, and the bulk of my group observations took place in this building.

The conference rooms' use varies depending on the size of the organization. There are two large rooms and a room for smaller organizational meetings. During my observations, the large rooms were configured to hold 84 people with 72 chairs organized in rows facing the front of the room. The tables and chairs at the front of the room were for the organization executive board members. Behind the executive board members is a screen which could be lowered to display images from a ceiling mounted multimedia projector which hung from the ceiling. The rooms are decorated in a way to remind those using the space of the identity of this college campus while attempting to evoke a collaborative and hopeful tone. This collaborative and hopeful tone is reflected through framed and mounted pictures of various aspects of campus life such as crowd shots from



university sporting events, scenes from commencement ceremonies, and aerial views of campus landmarks. The walls are also decorated with framed motivational posters from the “Successories” store. These posters extoll the virtues of teamwork, persistence, and leadership. Windows on the south side of the building provide natural light into the rooms, with heavy blinds available should there be a need to darken the room to view the projector screen. The smaller conference room, in which I observed a meeting, has the same multimedia set-up and is configured in the same way as the large conference room, but this room only has 30 audience style chairs and at the front to the room there is only one rectangular table with six chairs behind it. This room also has a chalkboard on the wall at the front. Overall these conference rooms strike a balance between functionality, possessing all of the amenities needed to conduct meetings of various sizes and types, and strong sense of school spirit. The colors of the university are the dominant color scheme and images of students are prominently displayed. These rooms strongly promoted the centrality of student life on this campus.

I conducted one group meeting and several individual interviews in a fraternity house. The nature of this house and several others like it are something that serves to make this particular campus unique. Most college campuses do not provide fraternity and sorority houses. If Greek-lettered organizations exist, they are independent from the university and their houses are considered off-campus housing. This campus builds and maintains multiple structures for many fraternity and sorority chapters, and these houses are staffed by university personnel. These support structures increase accountability, while providing the organizations direct access to live-in support staff. This relationship also gives the organizations the benefit of university maintenance of the homes so, on the

days I was there, the lawn surrounding the structure was freshly mowed, the hedges were neatly trimmed, and the exterior of the house was well-painted and clean, none of which could be said to be typical of fraternity houses on most college campuses. The house I visited was a single-story structure with a large common area with a door leading to an exterior patio, a kitchen and one hallway leading to a double-sided corridor with four bedrooms on either side. The bedrooms were either double or single occupancy. Every two rooms were connected by a bathroom. There was one single room with its own bathroom. In the common area there was a 55-inch, flat-screen television mounted on one wall. Upright on a table under the television was a large dry-erase board on which was written a calendar of upcoming fraternity events. Around the common area were three couches that could seat 3–4 people, one two-seater couch and five stackable chairs. At the time of the meeting, the furniture was arranged in a rough circle. The walls were bare, with the exception of one, on which there was a 3-foot-tall, wooden paddle with the fraternity's letters and chapter name. The house had windows in every room and the common area had multiple windows as well as two large glass doors which allowed entry into the kitchen and common area from the patio. The carpet and furniture was a reddish-maroon color and, although there were dishes in the kitchen sink, the common areas were, for the most part, neat and tidy. Although the majority of the men in the fraternity lived in the house, several other members did not; as those men arrived, it was obvious they were very familiar and comfortable in the residence, as they came in without knocking (although they did not have keys, which I asked about), moved from room to room greeting the other members, and dropped their backpacks on the floor wherever they wanted. It was apparent that this was a house for all of the members, not just those

whose names were on the lease.

The majority of individual interviews took place in one of the campus residence halls. As I noted earlier, the residence halls are designed to provide students areas in the lobby to socialize and/or study either in groups or individually. In addition to the social and study spaces, the residence halls have offices for building support, supervisory and maintenance staff. I was granted the use of one of these offices for my interviews, which afforded me a location familiar to most students and easy for them to access.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS

In this study I set about to document significant themes arising from a pool of data focused upon African-American men who had chosen to become involved in formal activities on a predominantly white college campus. I bring to bear my familiarity with the geography and demographics of the institution on observations of student groups and in individual interviews. This rich body of data yields major themes from which I have articulated a metaphorical map of African-American men's campus involvement. I go on to analyze these themes through a Critical Race Theory lens in order to extrapolate findings of possible importance beyond the confines of this single campus to other U.S. colleges and universities. It is important to note this metaphorical data map does not chart a strictly linear or sequential course; rather, it illuminates the most common points along the path to defining involvement and determining why and how African-American men choose the level of involvement most beneficial to them. The data points and emergent themes I choose to represent here are not discrete, rather, more often than not, significantly overlap, making it difficult to determine where one ends and the next begins. Such overlapping among themes is consistent with rigorous, interpretivist, qualitative data analysis. The themes I illuminate and evidence incorporate pre-college experiences and expectations for collegiate involvement these men bring with them to campus. Other important themes include the ways in which being involved on campus assists in the transition from high school to these men's new college home. The roles

played by student peers and university professionals also have notable significance, as does the realization that there are tangible and interpersonal benefits that come as the result of certain types of involvement.

In this chapter I share outcomes of the processes used to make meaning from the interviews and observations collected during my time at H.U. I first define the theoretical frame I craft from select concepts drawn from Critical Race Theory, justifying my choice of frame given the population studied. I then examine the data collected through the course of this study first for meaning I intuit in the data, and I then use my theoretical frame to re-analyze the data, focusing on the most salient themes, with supporting examples drawn from study data to support my analytic claims. My re-analysis of themes and the data associated with those themes yields the study's major findings, presented in Chapter V.

### **Critical Race Theory**

To analyze the themes that emerged from my data, I constructed a theoretical lens from select theoretical concepts drawn from Critical Race Theory. Using theory to reinterpret the meaning I drew from my data allowed me to provide a deeper level of analysis, leading to findings that potentially have import for student affairs professionals beyond the walls of this particular institution. I selected CRT as my lens because it aligns with my theoretical perspective, epistemology, and ontology, given how it offers a lens rooted in an activist, emancipatory commitment. CRT is designed powerfully to utilize, examine, and then posit solutions and liberatory action steps to address inadequacies and inequities of the system under study (Delgado & Stefanic, 1995). Critical Race Theorists espouse racism as one of the most fundamental components of life in the United States,

existing as a dominant force found deep within all social systems (Bell, 1980; Lawrence 1987). Racism is central to all social systems—and all lives—in this country, and historically legal and educational practices systematically have restricted and continue to restrict the access of people of minoritized groups to such a degree that simply being white provides privilege on the level of holding property interest (Bell, 1987). CRT theorists propose the majority population's liberal views, namely the majority-held belief U.S. social systems are colorblind and neutral, serve to reinforce injustices perpetuated by design by social systems. These majority-benefiting systems are designed to allow only slow, incremental change, which in practice means no change at all (Crenshaw et. al., 1995), and certainly not liberation or revolution. The system of racism in the U.S. upon which CRT is informed creates an atmosphere in which consistent comments, subtle actions, and pervasive, stereotypical images subtly, yet powerfully, purposefully, and unambiguously reinforce negative stereotypes of people of color. These constantly occurring comments, actions, and images are known as micro-aggressions and they serve the purpose of reinforcing the dominance of the majority culture (Solorzana, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The majority population argues micro-aggressions are benign or even complimentary and so micro-aggressions continue to occur at a rate that creates and perpetuates a state of constant stress, constantly raining messages of inadequacy upon people of color across all levels of society (Solorzana, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

As detailed in the introductory chapters to my study, my initial intent was to pull out the micro-aggressions I assumed the men in my study frequently would detail in order to exhibit the institutional practices of my study site. As I examined the data, however, it became clear the men who participated were offering me a very different story of their

perceptions and experiences on campus. As a result of listening intently to the data they offered, I realized the far-more-relevant theoretical concepts of CRT should be used to analyze my data: Counter-Storytelling and Interest Convergence. In closely observing campus life and documenting the experiences of study participants, the themes that emerged provide powerful examples of ways involvement represents practices and experiences for African-American males that can support institutional goals and aid in retention. Moreover, my analysis yields findings important to reexamining how Student Affairs professionals approach and carry out their work with African-American men. Some of the collected stories illuminate ways Student Affairs practices, while purporting to be designed with the best interests of all students in mind, actually reinforce societal practices marginalizing the African-American male experience and subsume minoritized identities within the predominant narrative of the white student experience. These themes resonate so strongly because this study was undertaken with the presumption that involvement, as promoted and supported by Student Affairs practitioners, is beneficial in acclimatization to, and matriculation through, higher education. The emergence of themes indicating involvement of African-American males might have negative effects calls into question long-held, foundational beliefs about Student Affairs practice. In this study I give voice to the lived experiences of African-American males to illustrate how these men purposefully, systematically, and powerfully craft their own value systems and networks of support outside of the institutional systems and networks put in place by administrators and Student Affairs professionals.

### **Interest Convergence**

Interest convergence refers to the idea that, frequently, progress made by African-Americans in legal, educational, and civil-rights arenas should be viewed as positive societal change because such progress is only gained when it dovetails with the interest of the majority and does not represent a major disruption to the status quo (Bell, 1980).

In any relationship where there exists a dominant and a subordinate power dynamic, a shift towards an egalitarian distribution of power can be accomplished in two ways: the subordinate group can seize power from the dominant group or the dominant group can cede power to the subordinate group. These basic principles were refined by the legal scholar Derek Bell (1980) and applied to race relations and the quest for social justice that defined the civil rights era in the U.S. Bell argues the majority power structure in the U.S. supports legislation or processes that provide some degree of racial justice when that racial justice also serves the majority interest. A prominent example used by Bell is the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, a U.S. Supreme Court decision in which unconstitutional laws establish separate public schools for Black and white students. The *Brown* decision was made as part of the cold war strategy within the context of the U.S. positioning itself as an advocate for human rights to combat the spread of communism. The U.S. jeopardized world-wide credibility as a champion of democracy if it did not begin to address internal human rights injustices within its borders, especially when viewed in comparison with the Soviet Union, which had within the communist framework embraced all men as equal.

The second aspect of the *Brown* decision that represents a convergence of dominant societal benefit with that of the racial minority is how the economic potential of



the U.S. could not be realized with desegregation in place, especially in the southern states. It therefore became imperative that southern states move past antiquated agrarian ideals rooted in racial segregation and began moving towards desegregated industrialization viewed as the economic future. Bell argues the inherent morality of being socially just was not enough; it required serving the interests of those morally opposed to segregation, those experiencing the negative effects of segregation, and powerful financial and political interests to produce the legal end of segregation. Viewed in this light, interest convergence represents the way in which change within a system (in this case specifically U.S. society) is a managed, controlled process by which the dominant culture continually benefits, even as gains are made by subordinate groups.

### **Multidimensionality**

In addition to being relevant in binary relationships between those with power and those without, interest convergence is also a factor in power dynamics within multi-layered systems. The stratified nature of modern U.S. society has created a far more nuanced tableau than simply racial minority vs. racial majority. Socioeconomic status, age, and gender are a few of the factors that intersect and create situations in which interest convergence applies. Viewing the example of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* reveals the resulting ripples felt by poor whites, which sheds light on this phenomenon's multidimensionality. Striking down legal desegregation did not have a proportional effect on white Americans in the 1950s. Poor, rural, southern whites often felt the most significant ramifications resulting from school desegregation and, as the civil rights movement progressed, it was most often lower-class whites who lived the results of civil rights victories. Many poor whites felt betrayed by upper- and middle-

class whites because they believed that it was the duty of those with more resources to insure African Americans never achieved social standing equal to whites (Piven & Cloward, 1977). By virtue of their whiteness, they were part of the dominant class; however, by virtue of their economic status, they had no political influence to wield in this situation except their vote in local and national elections.

### **Counter-Storytelling**

Counter-story telling is the practice of offering a safe space so marginalized groups may share their experiences and have their voices heard and the narrative of the dominant culture can be refuted and critiqued (Matsuda, 1993). Winston Churchill once said, "History is written by the victors." What this quote conveys is the mutability of truth. Stories passed down within the histories, folk tales, and legends of any dominant culture do not necessarily tell an accurate story of the events that transpired but rather express the versions of events the dominant culture wants to take root in the hearts and minds of members so those ideals and values are propagated in future generations in order to maintain hegemony. Critical Race Theorists have named this retelling of history the dominant perspective. Majoritarian Storytelling is the term for narratives offered by members of dominant groups. These narratives convey the values and beliefs that allow dominant groups to justify and maintain their position of power (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002b). U.S. history itself is an example of majoritarian storytelling, reflected in what is contained within school history texts, assignment of holidays, choices of nationwide celebrations, and influencing those recognized as heroes or patriots (Loewen, 2007). Specific stories provide insightful examples of how this practice has marginalized and discredited the experiences of subordinate groups, specifically African Americans.

The realm of U.S. professional sports has often been strategically cloaked in the majoritarian myth a high-powered career in professional sports is one of few true societal meritocracies. If a person, particularly an African-American man, possesses sufficient skills, drive, and determination, those characteristics might allow him to achieve athletic and economic success in professional sports. An example often used to support this narrative is the large number of people from minoritized groups who have, through success in professional sports, achieved celebrity, wealth, and fame. The story of the meritocratic nature of sport is intertwined with the evolution of sport, desegregation, and capitalism, and is bound within the larger narrative of U.S. higher education. Counter-storytelling brings to the forefront the ways in which U.S. professional sports damage the economic fabric of African-American culture and restrict the ability of many men of color to earn a living in professional sport.

A prominent example, the majoritarian story leads U.S. society to believe Jackie Robinson integrated professional baseball in 1947, paving the way for African-American, Native-American, and Latin players to join major league baseball. This story is misrepresentative on multiple levels and totally omits the stories of men from minoritized groups who had played professional baseball in thriving professional leagues since the 1920s (DeLorme & Singer, 2010). The Negro Leagues were formed, as were many institutions in the segregated U.S., at a time when the white majority staunchly denied African Americans access to white leagues. Negro League (NL) support resonated with African Americans who sought entertainment and had become fans of the game of baseball. The Negro League allowed Black people the opportunity to watch games in places where they were free to cheer and enjoy entertainment targeted to the Black

audience, with other Black fans, owned and operated by Black owners, managers, and coaches. The Negro Leagues underwent erratic periods throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but the World War II industrial boom gave African Americans, now relocating to large cities, a much-needed entertainment outlet. Negro League growth was steady during the 1940s with owners recording substantial profits (Lanctot, 2004). It was the recognition of African Americans as viable consumers of baseball with money to spend that motivated major league baseball owners to explore desegregating the game. Effa Manley, a Negro League team owner, states it succinctly in 1948:

Gullible Negro fans who think white owners take on colored players through any altruistic pangs of democracy had better quit kidding themselves. There's a potential two million Negro fans to draw from. Any baseball businessman would be looney not to see that. (Fort & Maxcy, 2001)

This aspect of the majoritarian narrative speaks only to the supposed "leveling of the playing field" that desegregation of major league baseball creates. Although the hardships and struggles the African-American players faced when joining major league teams remains a romanticized part of the desegregation of sport story, what is totally ignored is the disintegration of the Negro Leagues as major league baseball poached the most talented players from Negro League rosters. Although many Negro League teams were realizing profits, their financial resources paled in comparison to the deep pockets of major league baseball. As the best Negro League players left for the larger league, African-American fans moved with them and Negro League teams folded as attendance waned. The desegregation of major league baseball, one of the earliest examples of the idea that in sports, talent wins out over all, is a myth told from a majoritarian perspective. The desegregation of major league baseball is, in reality, an example of how the

dominant majority used superior resources to take what it deemed most useful from a subordinate culture and discarded that which was deemed not useful. A subordinate group rarely or never attains the political or economic power to affect such large-scale change; only the will of the dominant group can be imposed in this manner. It is only when a subordinate group has an opportunity to share counter-stories that another perspective on a majoritarian narrative is shared, and the majoritarian narrative provocatively challenged.

### **Embodiment of Multidimensionality**

It is not enough to say there is an aspect of multidimensionality to counter-story telling. It is more accurate to say counter-story telling is the embodiment of the multidimensional nature of any narrative involving social systems. The history labeled as foundational and passed down through the U.S. education system is the majoritarian story, but in providing a counter to the majoritarian story there is not one singular, opposing view. There are stories of African Americans in the U.S. history of women, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latino Americans, for example. It is important to note that through counter-story telling Critical Race theorists are not purporting counter-story becomes centered as THE actual story or history, but recognized and legitimated as an aspect of the majoritarian story that has been ignored. Counter-stories must be heard and woven in to achieve a more accurate and just societal narrative which reflects the values of all those who contribute to society.

Counter-story telling does not exist separate and distinct from other CRT tenets. Specifically, it is the interconnected nature of the concepts of Interest Convergence and Counter-Story telling that makes them most useful in the present study. If used

independent of one another, Interest Convergence provides a “why” and Counter-Story Telling provides a “how.” To best represent the meaning within my data, however, it is important the relationship between why and how is analyzed, for from that intersection a more robust truth emerges.

### **Counter-Storytelling and the Importance of Positive Perception**

As state and federal funding for higher education diminishes, student enrollment and tuition dollars generated by students become more important to institutions than ever before. To enhance the recruitment of potential students and bolster their perception in the public eye, colleges and universities have invested more heavily than ever before in marketing and branding initiatives (Hardy, 2010). The intent of these efforts is in part to create positive associations in the minds of potential students of university name and brand. The physical manifestation of branding is the university logo and name on display on clothes, backpacks, hats, and other merchandise owned by students. In my observations of campus life, both in public places and organizational meetings, I observed the majority of African-American student clusters had at least one African-American male displaying attire that signified his connection to a distinct group. His attire could be a t-shirt, hoodie, or hat with a date and theme of a particular event or an organization’s name. The aspect of this attire most consistent among men in my study, however, is that it was not associated with university branding, but with the branding of African-American groups and organizations. Of all the ways African-American men self-identified membership, fraternity paraphernalia was by far the easiest to discern. The ease with which membership in these organizations is identified contributes to the perceptions of the groups. The bright colors, numbers, symbols, and Greek letters of fraternity

paraphernalia serve clearly to delineate which men belonged to which group. In addition, it makes it very easy for these men to recognize one another from a distance and hail each other in passing or to join their fraternity brothers in previously existing groups. This is significant because it demonstrates the affiliations which African-American males use to identify and be identified are formal organizations other than the university organization. The fact these groups generate high levels of positive perception means African-American males are being socialized to prioritize the value of belonging to these groups, rather than showing membership in the larger university community.

In situations other than purely social events such as co-ed organizational meetings, at which there was organizational business being transacted, the pattern of socialization was similar. Prior to the meetings men circulated amongst executive officers seated in front of the room and the general assembly, chatting with a group then moving on to share some words with another group until the meeting was brought to order. I noted men did not segregate themselves by organizations in social settings, however within organizational meetings the men did tend to sit together by groups. In social situations members who were eating, talking, and socializing from different groups greeted one another. From my early observations, those men and their movement between groups was the driving social dynamic.

Later, when I asked during interviews what events attract the most African-American men, the answer was consistent: social events hosted by the African-American, Greek-lettered organizations: "I would have to say fraternities, anything dealing with fraternities because that is a popular interest of African-American men on campus" (Auburn, personal communication, April 15, 2010). All of the fraternity activities, from a

full-scale party to a “kick-back,” meaning a casual mixer or a dodgeball tournament, are guaranteed to bring out more African-American men than any other event. One young man put it succinctly: “Fraternities...anything that they do” (Ecrú, personal communication, April 19, 2010). The fact the actions of fraternities are so highly regarded men will attend any type of event they sponsor was both stated by the study participants and echoed in the behaviors I observed. Non-members watched fraternity men openly. In the Student Union food court, groups of non-members would frequently punctuate points of their conversations with nods and gestures in the direction of fraternity groups, often shaking their heads as groups of women congregated around the men outfitted in Greek paraphernalia. Small groups of fraternity men studying in the Union breezeway were constantly interrupted by students coming over to ask what they were doing and to say hello. A common question I often heard asked of fraternity members later in the evening (8–10 pm) was, “Are you guys getting into anything later?” For students of color, the most desirable social activity was fraternities’ events and anything else considered a distant second. There was no disputing this or any attempts to make the case for any other activities, but accepted as fact by students.

Because their role at the apex of the social order tacitly is understood by all, the men in fraternities are keenly aware of their status among their peers. As one fraternity member stated it:

I would have to say the Black fraternities. Definitely. Because everybody is always looking at what’s our next move. Which is very conceited, but they’re always looking. Whether you expect it or not they’re looking. As far as Alpha Phi Alpha, Phi Beta Sigma, and Kappa Alpha Psi, there are always people looking at the next events we’re doing. Socially, we Black men, we need a big event because they’re not too many of us here. Or like community-service-wise, we expect 50 (people) but we get 100 (people). It’s definitely the Black fraternities on this



campus. We pretty much call the shots as a whole. People really look and see what we're doing (Blue, personal communication, April 16, 2010).

The self-awareness this quotation indicates is an interesting aspect of the dynamic driving the role of the African-American fraternities. Here is another place where the multi-dimensional nature of counter-story telling is evident. Collectively, the groups that drive the Black campus social scene are fraternal organizations social in nature, yet the groups do not operate as one, homogenous block. Each organization is separate and distinct and must recruit members to stay active on campus. Although Humble State does not have specific membership quotas for historically African-American fraternities and sororities, the professional staff identifies between five and seven members as a minimum threshold of membership needed for chapters to operate and cites slipping below that number will lead to university intervention in the area of membership recruitment and outreach. The groups also have financial obligations to their national offices in the form of insurance premiums, regional and national chapter dues along with required registrations for regional and national conferences. What this means is these groups do not just need to be popular for solely altruistic purposes; they must distinguish themselves enough to entice young men to seek membership so each group continues to exist. The elevated status these groups enjoy is not an accident; these organizations are working hard to distinguish themselves from one another and be considered the best and therefore most desirable.

Being "the best" is a marker on which student affairs practice and student reality differ radically. In the eyes of student affairs staff, markers of success are factors such as grade point average, number of hours dedicated to philanthropic efforts, and hours dedicated to programs that benefit the overall campus, including African-American

students. Among students, however, a different story—one much more difficult to measure—defines importance. This metric would have once been called “cool” but is usually summed up in the phrase “runnin the yard.” This term is, by turns, part bravado, cultural relevance and historical caché. These qualities are what drive groups’ popularity and they trump any and all benchmarks sought by student affairs professionals. The fraternities possess the “cool” factor, but they constantly vie with one another to have the most at any given time. “Runnin the yard” means that your organization will outdraw any other organization if the groups do similar events or if groups do events on the same night, since then the group “runnin it” will visibly outdraw the other. It is a constant dance with no true winner, but the drive to be on top drives fraternities’ recruitment, programming, and the image they put forth to the campus.

In working to identify what it is about African-American fraternities that make them such a focal point on a predominantly white campus, these groups have two factors working in their favor. The first factor, as mentioned previously, is the ease with which organizational members visually are identified. Over the course of my time on campus, there were several men who I only ever observed wearing some type of fraternity paraphernalia. Of the four oldest historically African-American Greek-lettered fraternities, all are represented on this campus. Those organizations each have symbolic colors schemes that are brightly distinctive and unique. Kappa Alpha Psi member colors are crimson and cream, and men in this organization are known for carrying canes taped up in their colors. Omega Psi Phi members wear purple and gold, and their members can be recognized by the spray-painted gold combat boots and fisherman caps they wear. These are just two examples. On the days I observed campus life there were hats, t-shirts,

sweatshirts, decorated wood items displayed on a chain, canes taped up with their fraternity colors, along with members driving around campus in cars with decals, bumper stickers, and license plate rings with fraternity colors and mottos. These men tell the story of what they value and to whom they belong by literally wearing it on their bodies and covering their most personal, prized possessions with the letters and colors of membership in their group. In addition, each organization has a distinctive “call” or “hail” that members often shout out to one another as a way of greeting or acknowledgment. So the Alpha Phi Alpha calls of “06” and the Phi Beta Sigma “Blue Phi” calls ring out frequently as people move across the quad.

As someone not a member of the H.U. community, I found the fraternity men to be the most easily identifiable group. It is also worth noting these fraternity men were not just highly visible among clusters of African-American students but among the whole sea of the student body. In the Student Union food court and campus dining centers where large groups of students congregate, pockets of African-Americans are noticeable but not remarkable. In contrast with the predominant mass of White bodies around them, however, add to these African-American bodies bright shades of red, blue, gold, and the people, the men in these bright colors, are most definitely noticeable. The African-American men at H.U. highly value being perceived positively, and wearing the distinctive garb of fraternities makes this happen.

The time of the year during which I conducted my field research coincided with when several fraternities initiated new members. These new members were given hearty public congratulations on the quad, at the start of organizational meetings, and at any other places students congregated. These congratulations came from members of their

own fraternities, other fraternities, sorority women, and students with no Greek affiliation. These very public displays serve to reinforce the idea that members of these organizations are very prominent in the community and becoming a member of a fraternity is an achievement worthy of celebration. A study participant summed up why he believes gaining fraternal membership is worthy of interest, saying, "...I guess people see the letters and think of them [fraternity members] as higher than other things and they want to try and see what's going on with them" (Puce, personal communication, April 20, 2010).

To illuminate the weight given to recognition of new fraternity members, I juxtapose this against the public celebrations for accomplishments, such as becoming a resident assistant, being elected to student government, or receiving an honor from an academic honorary. The juxtaposition is simple because those other accomplishments are not publicly celebrated, not in my experience as a student affairs professional or in my time observing at H.U. This discrepancy is an important part of my findings, and a story that runs distinctly counter to the student affairs narrative on involvement, since becoming an RA, being elected to student government, or receiving academic honors are among the accomplishments student affairs professionals hold nearly universally as positive examples of involvement. However, to African-American males, these accomplishments rank much lower as desirable achievements. My data makes clear overall those African-American males studied do not perceive the same accomplishments as do student affairs professionals as positive enough to strive for and, until they do, they will not seek out these experiences in the numbers student affairs practitioners desire.

Perceptions of these interactions are what is most important within this theme in particular and this study as a whole. Flaubert's words, "There is no truth, there is only perception," are most applicable. I posit that for young men on a campus where they are markedly minoritized, far from home and familiar support networks, fraternity members are a group to which to aspire and admire. Even though much of what these organizations represent is not known due to the secrecy in which the groups' initiation procedures and rituals are shrouded, the fact they are a group and share bonds with other members is visible, and outside perceptions of that bond very important. These bonds are not simply verbalized. They are reinforced internally and externally because members initiated together spend noticeably more time together throughout the pledge process and upon becoming fully initiated members. Members live together in houses and apartments, arrive at events, and leave together. The organizations emphasize brotherhood. The ties formed by members of African-American fraternities, which mimic familial relationships, act as fictive kinship ties. Fictive kinship ties are defined as those unrelated by blood or marriage who chose to relate to one another as family (Sussman, 1976). There is a long history of fictive kinship ties among the African-American community, predating the period of slavery in the U.S., reaching back to West-African tribes from which were enslaved and later brought to the U.S. (Guttman, 1976). These ties serve to bind unrelated individuals in a way that facilitates reciprocal support and resource sharing. The importance of creating and maintaining ties that replicate the blood-based bonds of family is an important aspect of culture in the African-American community (Gilroy, 2004; Collins, 1998), and creating and maintaining these bonds in such a visible manner makes groups that do so recognizable to potential members, valuable to present

members, and attractive and visible to those external to African-American fraternal groups. The fictive kinship ties among African-American males in this study also provide an acceptable space for men to express emotional support and positively affirm one another in ways not normally associated with African-American male masculinity outside of athletics (Duneier, 1992; Poulson-Bryant, 2005). Fraternity men at H.U. are commonly seen embracing, vocally encouraging one another, and expressing pride in the fact members belong to their group or even when men have joined another group.

The structure of fraternity organizations also reinforces the bonds. If men need mentors, then fraternities have large networks of alumni, if a member needs assistance finding employment then he can lean on the vast array of professional networks. These groups share as a point of pride how African-American fraternities, unlike White fraternities, are forever, not just through college (even though this, in practice, may not necessarily bear out over time). Perhaps most importantly, African-American fraternities promote the idea that once you become a member you have become a part of a state, national and world-wide organization that will provide support networks for mostly anything you need, and a lifelong sense of belonging.

Another reason positive perception is relevant is because, in undergraduate campus life, social status is important and social status is derived from proximity to those who drive social interactions. Fraternity men are consistently identified in observations and interviews as members of organizations that provide the most popular social opportunities. Social opportunities are important because they bring together the African-American population on a predominantly white campus. Bringing together this population is important because opportunities for it to happen solely for fun are relatively

rare. This is another point at which the story of African-American males differs markedly from the story of engagement as told by student affairs professionals. Functions sponsored by the university are primarily designed to attract all students. A university event featuring or celebrating a specific race, ethnic group, or culture must serve the institutional mission of educating all. The organization of purely social events, away from university officials and the majority population, falls to the students themselves. My African-American male participants take advantage of these social opportunities for several reasons. In some instances organizations become known for using specific DJs or having certain beverages (often alcoholic) some students enjoy so that a certain organization has people who will consistently attend their events: "I think when Greeks throw parties, I think most Greek organizations have a following and then there are people you know are gonna come" (Gold, personal communication, April 19, 2010). For other men, the fact women will be in attendance is the primary motivation: "Fraternity parties. I say that because you've always got a group of girls. At a Union party that's what girls do, dress up and stuff. Guys want to see that. You'll always see guys at Union parties standing around, looking" (Buff, personal communication, April 16, 2010). The fact that whatever these groups do, there will be a crowd reinforces the positive perception of membership. Knowing that campus women view fraternity events as worthy of dressing to look their best provides yet another reason for the status of African-American fraternity men as admired. Consistently drawing women to events serves to reinforce the fact these groups are a powerful center of the social universe, and they bring all others into orbit around them.

Another factor which motivates attendance is men believe maintaining proximity to the group they would like to join is a way of indicating their desire for membership. This behavior is understood by members and non-members alike: "I know for a fact that you get lots of guys at frat-sponsored events. Because a lot of guys are wanting to pursue a certain fraternity so you got to come out to their events" (Buff, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Young men considering joining these organizations are sometimes being exposed to these organizations for the first time and they attend fraternity events to gain a better understanding of the things the groups do and how specific groups are received by others: "You have so many people that want to join them. So they're going to check out and see what they're all about and then you have others who are just about the parties and everything. Especially the parties" (Lilac, personal communication, April 20, 2010).

Whatever the reason might be, it is a fact understood by African-American men on campus that the events most likely to attract other African-American men are events organized by fraternities: "I would have to say fraternity. Whether it's Kappa Alpha Psi, Phi Beta Sigma, or Alpha Pi Alpha. More than likely you will see young Black men coming together. Black fraternity events will definitely draw a mass of Black men" (Blue, personal communication, April 16, 2010). For most African-American students, it does not matter which group is the primary organizer; any of these groups is better than any other university or non-Greek option. "I would say almost anything pertaining to the Black Greeks. If you're not in that circle then there's not really nothing" (Coral, personal communication, April 16, 2010).



This is not to say, however, those African-American men not in fraternities cannot have status on campus or that fraternity members only value others in fraternities. The majority of fraternity members interviewed acknowledged other non-fraternity men as mentors and examples of campus leaders. Those interviewed who were not in fraternities did not express regret over their choices not to affiliate. The larger narrative is that fraternity members know they, through their fraternity involvement, are acknowledged as campus leaders and their responsibility is to serve in this role for the good of all African-Americans on campus. One fraternity member states it clearly: “Being involved is taking an active role in the betterment not only of yourself but your community, the college campus. Seeing what needs to be done and doing it. Being that voice for others” (Bronze, personal communication, April 16, 2010). What I discovered in this study is that while non-members are watching fraternity leaders and looking to them as the primary social outlets, the fraternity men view themselves as responsible not just for providing social activities but leading in all aspects of campus life. These leaders recognize how they are perceived and believe they have a responsibility not just to their organizations but to the campus-wide African-American community. This perception of leadership is important because it speaks to an agency among students that transcends the involvement student affairs professionals seek, most often individual or transactional in nature, and instead points to an involvement driven by the desire to support, uplift, and make visible the entire racial group. Student groups’ exercising such agency combats the co-opting of student affairs practice and places the power of determination into the hands of the students and the groups to which they choose to provide leadership. African-American fraternities, which could be viewed as an oppressed or underrepresented group within the

larger, predominantly white university community, purposefully, thoughtfully shapes the narrative of its members and its organization within the majoritarian structure.

Another organization mentioned frequently in interviews has a prominent role on campus. The story of this group is important because it speaks to another dimension of African-American student narratives at H.U.: an activist component. This organization is the Black Student Union or BSU. The idea of a Black Student Union was first realized in 1960 on the campus of San Francisco State University. Founded during an era of civil rights protest, the purpose of the organization was to provide African-American students a safe and welcoming environment in which the students could share ideas and find peer support during the fight for equality on campus and in society at large (Rogers, 2006). On the H.U. campus, BSU is a co-educational group that serves as the umbrella organization for all African-American groups on campus, particularly in the realm of political activism. BSU is viewed by students as the group responsible for political action, educational programming, and the promotion of peer-to-peer multicultural education. The Black Student Union's mission statement establishes this group as neither solely social in nature nor philanthropically focused, but as focused upon fostering a collaborative relationship between the African-American community, various Afrocentric student groups, and the academic mission of the university:

The Black Student Union will serve as an organization that fosters student development through diversity, academics, and social services. We will commit to establishing partnerships with other Humble University organizations with enthusiasm. Take a proactive role in the development of strong student leadership. (BSU mission statement)

The BSU is viewed more as a political organization, whereas fraternities and sororities are viewed as primarily providers of social opportunities. While Black Student Unions on

university campuses began in the 1960s (Rogers, 2006), at this institution, BSU and NPHC began at approximately the same time, the late 1960s, as a result of increased minoritized student enrollment. Being “born” at the same time has uniquely allowed these organizations to grow and evolve together, each organization with a specific purpose yet through shared membership which grows the broader purpose of serving as a resource for the African-American community. When talking about the organization that has the most African-American male leaders, Black Student Union was mentioned prominently by several men: “I say the Black Student Union. They’re always thinking of ways to get the African-American community involved on campus” (Carrot, personal communication, April 16, 2010). In the case of this student, BSU was named individually, most frequently though BSU and other groups were mentioned: “I would have to say the leaders within BSU, because we have fraternities that are number one, BSU is the second for highest Black male involvement” (Lilac, personal communication, April 20, 2010). The fact that BSU and fraternities are ranked in students’ minds underscores the relational nature of the organizational relationships on this campus. This sentiment is echoed by another student: “Most of these people are in positions like BSU on the exec board, NAACP, or they’re in some type of fraternity” (Ochre, personal communication, April 20, 2010). Since both groups support and serve the same community, there is heavy “cross-pollination.” The influence of fraternity and sorority life is very apparent at the BSU general meeting I attended. New initiates to the NPHC groups are welcomed just as loudly at the BSU meeting as they are on the quad. Fraternity and sorority members sit in groups with members of their own organizations and the NPHC influence is obvious within the executive leadership. The president of

BSU and the majority of the executive board (7 of 12 at the time of my research) are members of fraternities or sororities. At the general assembly meeting I notice an interesting practice. This meeting features nomination and election of executive board candidates for the next academic year. Four of the 12 positions are contested and through the process members accept and decline nominations with Greek affiliation in mind. While watching members stand up and either decline the nominations or state their platform for election, it becomes apparent that several people had first considered running for executive board positions before it became public they were joining a fraternity, and now that their membership is revealed, they do not want to run directly against other members of their fraternity organization. There had obviously been conversations about this among the different organizations in the hallway prior to the BSU meeting. I say obvious because, when nominations are settled, the contested position races are such that no fraternity members run against one another and the largest organizations (by attendance at the meeting) each have a member elected to the position they seek. These BSU nominations are an example of how the powerful groups within the African-American community work to maintain balance and harmony within their “ecosystem,” steps are taken by members within each fraternal organization to share power in such a way as not to create conflict and to insure all African-American groups on campus have representation within the umbrella organization of BSU. This practice represents sophisticated, mutual, cooperative leadership.

African-American men perceived to be leaders are those who are members of the most visible African-American organizations on the campus, NPHC fraternities and the Black Student Union. The men belonging to NPHC groups derive their status from a

combination of factors. In terms of observed interactions, these men literally wear their affiliation on their sleeves for all the campus to see. Their organizational colors and paraphernalia help them stand out, and their sense of brotherhood and mutual support is consistently on display. In addition to high visibility, NPHC groups are the undisputed social center of campus life. Fraternities have parties, and parties are the events that bring students out. This is evident when conversations turn to the events with the highest participation levels among African-American males. One student's quick answer; "A union party" (Ochre, personal communication, April 20, 2010), was echoed by that same answer from another: "Union parties" (Buff, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Other men were more general: "Parties" (Corn, personal communication, April 19, 2010), "I would have to say parties" (Aqua, personal communication, April 15, 2010), and finally one person offers a similar answer with a bit more detail: "I would say the dances, the parties. Everybody's going to show up. Everybody's going to hear about a party first" (Brass, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Because social events are held in such high regard, those who provide these events are viewed as the most involved. Social standing is a large determiner of who is viewed as involved and who is viewed as a leader.

Another aspect to determine social standing is the perception of service not only to campus social life, but in service to the betterment of the community. At both fraternity chapter meetings I attended, in addition to the BSU meeting, planning for community service projects takes place. A telling aspect of this planning is when integrating non-group members into the projects is a definite goal. One part of this is groups need extra hands to make projects successful, but another factor stated explicitly

by both groups is that projects are highly visible, and it is important a positive impression be made to those on the yard. BSU project planning involves discussion about whether BSU members in fraternities and sororities should even wear their letters at the event. Those against the wearing of letters argue if fraternity letters are worn, it will appear to be an NPHC event not a BSU event, and the counter-argument is made that a large number of people in Greek letters will be seen as promoting unity among all African-Americans on campus. Those in favor of wearing letters win the day. The underlying message I infer from these discussions is how service to the community has the dual goal of doing a good thing but is also about being seen and allowing the group to be recognized for doing good things. Positive perception in the eyes of the community is important, because all organizations state principles that place service to the community at the forefront. Although students primarily gravitate towards the groups' social purpose, in conversations with fraternity members and BSU members they state service for the good of the community is their primary focus and the group members seek out that acknowledgement from peers within and outside of their organizations. As one fraternity member puts it:

...we won Black Greek organization of the year last year, and Best Community Service program and most improved GPA. That comes from all types of aspects, the aspect of being social, the aspect of serving humanity and community as well as being able to shine enough that the committee who votes on Black Greek Organization of the year. You got to remember its Black Greek Organization of the year, not Black Fraternity of the Year, so you've got Deltas, Zetas, whoever else is on this board and panel and being selected by them. There's something about that that gives you a feeling of completeness. It's okay when it's somebody a part of your group that says you're doing a great job. That's cool. A pat on the back and they support you. But when you have people from the different areas coming together and saying, "You know what? You guys are this [winners]" That's huge. (Orange, personal communication, April 16, 2010)

Perceptions of those external to the groups within the African-American community are a measure of group success. The men engaged in these organizations receive support from the larger student population through event attendance and the overwhelming positive regard in which these organizations are held. Those, however, are intangible benefits and the men also desire tangible recognition of the work they do. This recognition might come from faculty, staff, and administrators, but because the community with which these groups most interact is their peer group, peer recognition is viewed as most meaningful. The peer recognition alluded to in the previous quotation is also a form of counter-storytelling. The groups take the responsibility of assessing which have done the most positively to contribute to their community and awards are distributed accordingly. The community supports and congratulates its own according to the standards the community finds most worthy. The autonomy exercised through these rewards and acknowledgements takes much of the power from the institution and places it among students themselves, allowing students to dictate who is considered successful and worthy of praise and honor.

### **Counter-Storytelling and Making Belonging**

The discovery that positive perception is an important component of African-American male involvement is a prominent finding of this study. The fact the highest levels of African-American male participation are associated with events spearheaded by campus organizations with the greatest social standing is a logical outcome of that component. H.U. is a Predominantly White institution (PWI). The entire African-American student body makes up approximately 10% of the campus' population. A factor that compliments the high visibility of BSU and the NPHC organizations is how

African-American males actively seek spaces within which and people with whom to establish connection by forging relationships outside the predominantly white space that is the campus as a whole. African-American males are drawn to organizations with predominantly African-American membership because these are spaces in which it is easiest to feel a sense of belonging and within which to forge substitute kinship ties. Additionally, counter story-telling gives these men the opportunity to share how difficult the quest for belonging can be and how powerful it is when a safe and welcoming space is found, and these counter-stories build and cement strong, empathetic ties around what it is like to be a minority on a predominantly white campus.

For many African-American males, the idea of even being involved while at college is not something most thought was an option prior to college. Bronze sums up his thoughts on involvement vs. the thoughts of white students:

I think that involvement for the white student is all they know. They probably grew up just being involved so why wouldn't they? Or they have parents at home saying; the more involved you are the better it looks when you apply for a job. African American students I know don't have that. (personal communication, April 16, 2010).

Although his is a generalization based on a singular experience, it is a view that, if shared more widely, would enable student affairs practitioners to consider the best ways to engage African-American males and aid them in creating plans that take into account the lived experiences of these students and does not generalize from research conducted on the majority population. African-American males I spoke with are well aware of the differences between themselves and white students due to historical differences among the races. A student alludes to this:



I think that we all have opportunities. We all have ways to advance. I think that some of the historical impacts that have been going on with African-American men have stifled our ability to rise above certain situations. I'm the type of person I believe that experiences make you stronger, which they do, but I also believe that sometimes you go through experiences and you get cuts. Those cuts may heal with a scab but the scab can always be torn off again. I believe that certain things African-American men go through, it's hard for them to rebound from. (Auburn, personal communication, April 15, 2010)

This college student is all too aware of the historical burden he struggles against and how that burden makes it difficult for him and his peers to become involved as easily as those who have not borne that burden or continually faced racialized challenges. Cerise describes why he feels it is difficult for many of his African-American male peers to get involved:

I think you get a culture shock coming to the university because African-Americans are the minority on this campus. I also think it's a lack of understanding that essential part of why you need to be involved. I don't think a lot of minorities understand that being involved on campus in these organizations looks good on my résumé. Not only good on my résumé but it helps to enhance skills and help you find those skills that you are harboring on the inside that you don't even know you have. These organizations bring it out of you and I think people just don't understand that concept and I think it takes someone to actually explain it to the minority population on campus. (personal communication, April 19, 2010)

Given that this young man is aware of the difficulties he will experience trying to become involved on his predominantly white campus, he is still taking the steps necessary to become engaged with student organizations. In addition to the lack of experience with becoming involved, there is also blatant push-back from the majority groups. Corn describes some of the negative response he receives:

Like I said, they [whites] have more opportunities to get out there. There are some of them that are more outgoing. Blacks, we're kind of shy so to speak so we're kind of standoffish. Sometimes when I try to be outgoing and go to other ethnicities events they give you crazy looks. They kind of make you want to stand

off and not ask them to come up and explain anything. (personal communication, April 19, 2010)

The negative response Corn describes is a barrier to involvement of which student affairs administrators need to be aware and take pre-emptive steps to counter. Azure describes more negative feedback he received when participating on a diversity committee with a predominantly white group:

There were only three of us [Black students] and when I first came in I was like, oh boy! It was how the others acted towards us. They were nice to our face but behind your back, even in the actual room they would make me so upset. What made me so upset was I remember we were trying to pass a new diversity plan but they wanted to take the diversity part out of it and just wanted to call it a student plan or a senate plan. It seemed as if they didn't really want to be there. They didn't want to join things that we wanted to join. It was very separate, very segregated. What I also didn't like was that white people expect you to join your own groups. I get this all the time. Other than BSU, just because I'm Black doesn't mean I am in BSU! I remember I was on the front page of the student paper because I was on a panel, right there on the front page it said "BSU member," but I was a student government rep at the time! No, I'm in student government and you can't even give me the courtesy of saying I'm in student government. (personal communication, April 15, 2010)

This student felt overt hostility from students in a setting in which work on a university diversity plan was being crafted in a setting in which he should have felt agency and some power, yet he felt as if white students did not want him there. In addition, when identified as a BSU member simply because he is Black, he is made to feel African-American students are not seen as legitimate contributors to larger campus groups or the work of the campus organization.

Given the challenges which face African-Americana males on this and other predominantly white U.S. campuses, the fact they continue to get involved and derive tremendous benefits from the involvement speaks positively to their fortitude and to support networks they have developed. It is important to recognize the stories of those

who have found a way to make a home through involvement at H.U. Blue describes his involvement and the growth he wants to make:

On a scale right now I would probably put myself at a seven. I am very involved but at the same time I feel I could be more involved. There are certain skills I have to build for myself to be more involved. Communication skills, being able to speak in front of a bigger audience, I feel like once I have those skills I will definitely be at a ten. (personal communication, April 16, 2010)

Another student, Beige, describes finding the balance between extracurricular and curricular involvement so as to not compromise his academics:

I think I could be more involved but I'm trying to stay focused academic-wise. I think the organizations I'm involved in I'm heavily involved in. Working for the newspaper you're always at work. Meeting deadlines, you turn in a story and you have to get ready for the next week. Checking budgets and making sure other people are on task too. *Minority Today*, which is the publication and National Association of Black Journalists along with the Society of College Journalists. I think that the organizations I'm involved in I'm pretty heavily involved in. (personal communication, April 15, 2010)

It is important these stories are told so African-American experiences can become part of the fabric of campus life and given the same weight as the stories and experiences of the majority population. Giving these students the opportunity to have their stories heard will also allow these stories to be used in the creation of the programs and services that benefit African-American males.

One man interviewed described deciding with which organizations to become involved:

I feel like white students, once again it's a comfort level to where if they kind of want to be with their own with it being a predominantly white campus they'll have more opportunities. A Black person like me, when I first got there I was like, "I'm choosing BSU cause I know I'm going to fit in." I think that student government, university board and just everything pretty much is kind of like, "should I do it?" I don't see anybody with my face or my color of skin in those groups. It's kind of like a jump-rope thing, do I go in or stay out? (Lilac, personal communication, April 20, 2010)

Another student describes the difficulty with integrating into campus life as a person of color:

With white students you can easily walk out and see another white person. For Blacks, I know my freshman year I was one of three Black guys on my floor. They stayed on the other side and when I walked down I saw white people everywhere. I guess that kind of discourages Black students. (Maroon, personal communication, April 20, 2010)

Large umbrella organizations such as BSU and NPHC, with their highly visible members, extensive history, and large campus presence, provide easily identifiable opportunities for students who are seeking a connecting point to help with their transition to campus. The idea that becoming a part of the community (both campus and local) was a hallmark of those individuals and groups perceived as involved is central to this theme of making belonging. When asked how they defined being involved on campus several men articulated: “What being involved means to me is just find your niche; find your own way of connecting on campus” (Coral, personal communication, April 16, 2010). The men interviewed were aware of what it means to be one of a few in a place where there are many more who are not like them. I maintain that for the men on this campus who are involved, the involvement provides a way to carve out a place of their own with others who are like them. Involvement and belonging are intertwined because African-American males on this campus use involvement initially to connect with others and help make this campus a more comfortable place to live. In the process of finding the group to which they best will fit, they gravitate toward leadership opportunities garnering the most positive perception from their peer group. Once they find a group that best fits them, they join and are connected to campus. In the case of the men with whom I interacted, this connection leads to leadership within the campus community. In this area, the goals of

student affairs practitioners and the underrepresented group converge, if for different reasons. Student Affairs practice, in the quest to demonstrate value to the higher education enterprise, looks to involve students from underrepresented groups as way to retain them to strengthen the financial bottom line and to subsume the groups into the dominant campus culture. It is my goal, as a result of this research, to bring these conflicting goals to light through illuminating the counter-stories of H.U.'s African-American men creating a level of transparency and honesty which might allow student affairs practitioners a genuineness in interactions with African-American males that can lead to more involvement for reasons that benefit students and support the need for cultural connection.

Navigating a space in which they as African-Americans are such a pronounced numerical minority often means being surrounded by people who communicate in ways with which several students interviewed are not as familiar or comfortable. Learning to change speech patterns or behaviors is draining on both mental and physical levels. In one interview a student explained to me why he joined BSU:

They [at BSU] just know how to talk to African-Americans. Like when I first met my co-worker, who as a matter of fact is Caucasian. When I first met her and I would speak slang or whatever, she was like "What does that mean?" It's like you expect [white] people to know what it means but you can't expect that. (Carrot, personal communication, April 16, 2010)

Helping students make belonging is another area where Greek-lettered organizations, in particular the fraternities, hold a key role. It is not accidental that fraternities hold such a place on this campus. The fact is these organizations were founded to serve as a unifying agent for African-American students and have a unifying structure which supports this goal. The majority of traditionally African-American fraternities and sororities trace their

origins back to the early 1900s. These groups were modeled after Greek-lettered social organizations founded and exclusively populated by white men and women, many of which date back to the 1860s (Ross, 2000). When African-American men and women founded these organizations, the groups provided places of academic, social and spiritual support for members trying to navigate higher education at a time when they faced rampant and blatant discrimination both in the academic and extracurricular realm. Fraternity life for African-Americans consists of more than just individual fraternities. These groups are bound by a council that provides governance and direction. The African-American fraternities and sororities came together in 1930 and founded the National Pan-Hellenic Council or NPHC (Ross, 2000). This organization provides a formal vehicle for interaction and cooperative programming for the nine international Greek-lettered organizations. The introduction of the NPHC on college and university campuses helped formalize fraternity and sorority life for Black students. Men and women who were members of the NPHC organizations now had the opportunity to organize structurally in the same way their white counterparts did with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the National Panhellenic Council (NPC), which are the umbrella councils for the predominantly white, Greek-lettered organizations. NPHC is the umbrella organization to which African-American, Greek-lettered organizations on this campus belong. Of the nine international NPHC groups, seven have chapters on this campus, with all fraternities represented. A fraternity member shares how his chapter actively seeks to improve the campus climate for all African-American students:

We [the chapter] always discuss what we need to do to make this campus better and how can we get more people to come out to our events or how we can inspire people to become more involved on campus. We try to think of ideas social-wise,

for community service or academics. (Lime, personal communication, April 20, 2010)

Inside this area of making belonging, the high visibility of fraternities also contributes significantly. The bright organizational colors and distinctive calls of the organizations detailed previously serve as highly visible markers of fraternity membership. The distinctive paraphernalia marks fraternity members on two levels. The first level is that of the individual organizations: the Sigmas wear blue and white, the Omegas wear purple and gold, and so on. The men in these organizations share a very noticeable connection expressed through color schemes. No matter where members are or whom they are with, even without tacit acknowledgement, by colors alone they know they belong to the same group. The second level is that of NPHC organizational membership. An African-American male might be in the red and white of Kappa and another in the brown and gold of Iota, but they know they belong to the African-American Greek community and because of that they share a bond. This bond is not as deep as the one shared with fraternity brothers, but it is a bond nonetheless. These organizations literally wear their belonging on their backs. Individuals who are seeking connections for themselves can witness fraternal bonds without much difficulty. Gold, in his answer describing why Greek men are considered the most involved, sheds light on how being Greek can help form connections and support: “Greek life is like a bigger window to being involved. Once you become a Greek there’s more things for you to be involved in, also there’s your organization behind you, constantly encouraging you every day, encouraging you to stay involved” (personal communication, April 19, 2010).

A sense of comfort, a place to relax and be among those who look like them and are experiencing similar struggles: these are the types of spaces African-American males are looking for, and becoming involved can help make that happen. Buff explains how becoming involved helps establish this campus as a place he belongs:

I feel like there are two people, two types of people that come to college. You have the people who come and they just go here. Then you have people who feel like this is my home, I want to live here for the next 4 years. How am I going to make this as much as my home as possible? Because you don't sit around your house all day and don't interact with anything. (personal communication, April 16, 2010)

This quotation drives to the heart of belonging and proposes a counter-story to the dominant narrative of higher education involvement as the way for students to collect résumé bullet points that certify them for a slot in the workforce. What the African-American men in this study demonstrate is a way to use involvement to make this predominantly white campus a safe space where there is a peer network of support and respite from the daily pressures of being a minority far away from their family of birth and the homes in which they were raised.

My analysis reveals how African-American males who choose involvement on this campus seek a community with which to connect and remain connected. One reason these men are drawn to the groups they are in is because these groups are positively perceived by the campus community. Another factor that can have a strong influence on whether men choose to become involved is interaction with their African-American male peers.



### **Peer Interaction and Interest Convergence**

Through this study I discovered the choice to become involved is influenced by the strong positive perception of the most popular groups and the desire for the men to want to find a place to belong. The factor by which African-American men analyze these factors and then decide to become involved is the peer group. This theme illustrates an area where the interests of Student Affairs practitioners and African-American males at H.U. converge to positive effect for both groups.

Throughout the interviews men share their belief their peers are not very involved at all. When asked to estimate the percentage of African-American men on campus who are involved, the answers ranged from very low, “Two percent” (Lilac, personal communication, April 20, 2010); “Less than five percent” (Ecrú, personal communication, April 19, 2010); “Five percent” (Cerise, personal communication, April 19, 2010) to just low, “I would say about 8%, maybe even lower” (Azure, personal communication, April 15, 2010); and “I would say maybe 10%, that’s kind of high, maybe 9% or 8%” (Carrot, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Men are consistent in the belief that overall their African-American male peers do not participate at a high level, and national involvement data (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper & Hurtado, 2007) supports their assertion. However, throughout my study, I meet involved men who have positive things to say about involvement and the benefits associated with it. Initially I perceived this as a point of incongruity, because if these men are involved and the benefits are so obvious, why are not more of their peers? This question is not new; it has consistently been a question I have posed across my own membership at three institutions and five jobs, and it plagues Student Affairs practitioners nationwide today (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper

& Patton, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007). The answer at H.U. is both simple and complex. I discover involved men have specific and consistent interactions in which involvement is the subject, and they are challenged by their peers not only to participate in activities but to take on positions of leadership. Linen explains how his organizational members challenge him:

I don't want to say competition but it gets the job done. It opens people eyes. Alphas are doing this so we need to step our game up, we need to get more involved and do this and this and this. (personal communication, April 19, 2010)

In his case, competition between organizations emerges as a driving factor. Even though these groups are at the top of the social hierarchy, there is still continual jockeying to be at the absolute pinnacle. The push to attain and stay at the top involves leaders using this desire to drive their organizational members to greater levels of leadership. Corn was even more direct about how his peers motivate one another: "We get real, we get on each other's cases. You need to do this and you need to, like a family, tough it out. Get on them about it" (personal communication, April 19, 2010). The bonds that exist between men who have chosen to be involved are such that they aggressively can challenge one another as a method of encouraging involvement. Gold was unequivocal in how he talks about being involved with his friends: "Always in a positive light because it's just so important, especially for a young black man" (personal communication, April 19, 2010). The men who are involved know one another, so in addition to the positive aspects of involvement, they discuss which other students they see at which events:

There are a lot of people out here who do things for social reasons and not to be informed or things like that. So we [my friends and I] talk about, 'Okay we seen this guy, we seen this girl at the party dancing but did you see them at the informational?' (Ochre, personal communication, April 20, 2010)

What these quotations describe is a culture in which, because of the level of comfort and trust, involved males work within their community to strengthen one another while also scanning and assessing their peers for authenticity of involvement. In this case authenticity represents whether students are participating in events or activities merely to socialize or whether they are at events with the desired purpose of working to better the community. In working to bring their peers into authentic involvement, involved African-American males are achieving one of the core tenets of Student Affairs practice: the facilitation of peer-to-peer learning. Look through programs and services of most any Student Affairs division and you will find at least one peer-leadership program, group of peer mentors or peer-programming team. What is occurring with involved African-American males at H.U. is exactly what student affairs practitioners who work with student groups indicate is the ideal outcome; however, the outcome occurs organically within this group of men who demonstrate remarkable poise and savvy given their youth and lack of formal training in the areas of student development theory and management of group dynamics. Attracting non-involved students to educational or politically focused events is difficult and because of this leaders interviewed often walk a fine line with their peers: using their influence to encourage peers to become participatory, yet not wanting to push too hard, which threatens to drive those they are trying to bring closer away.

Most of it is like when I was at my house and my guys came over we were all on Facebook and you get those little events on Facebook. So we are all like “You going?” and they say, “I don’t know man, I’m going to see how it is, I’m going to see who is saying they are going.” (Ochre, personal communication, April 20, 2010)

Carrot is even more direct: “My friends know that when they’re with me I always try to (get them involved), one of my closest friends said, ‘Man I’d really like to get involved.’”

Well what's stopping you?" (personal communication, April 16, 2010). Beige has worked on a multilevel strategy to bring his peers into the fold in regards to joining organizations:

It's funny you say that because that's been my main goal right now. I never come to them [my friends] on a professional level of "you need to join this organization." I tap into their interests. Then, when I find out what they're interested in I look at the organization and say "Do we have what they're interested in?" Once I find a correlation then I say, "Look man there's an organization out there." (personal communication, April 15, 2010)

Data shows the men I interviewed are aware of the positive perceptions of other involved men on campus and recognize they want to share in that positive regard by being involved. In the process of becoming and staying active, they create a network of other involved men with whom they talk and find support. Peer influence is important to men becoming and remaining involved.

This same data illuminates another point where student affairs practice aligns with the lived experience of involved men in ways different from what practitioners would desire. The idea of staff attempting to use students to recruit other students is nothing new; using peer-recruitment teams is a common strategy across institutions. What makes the behavior displayed by this study's men noteworthy is these students are not receiving training geared towards helping them "sell" a particular program or event. The men in this study are, of their own volition, challenging their peers not to just get involved but to become involved beyond the basic level of simply attending and participating. These men are noting which of their peers are attending which events and determining whether they are achieving an acceptable level of engagement. These men are judging their peers against an internally generated, culturally based set of expectations and daring their peers to lead.

The fact these men are involved and want their peers to become involved speaks to a sophistication and high level of awareness on the part of student leaders. They understand there is a problem and are willing to utilize various strategies to engage their peers. The benefit for H.U. is a strong, visible cohort of African-American male leaders. Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Enrollment Management indirectly and significantly benefit from the work of these men. It is not my assertion Student Affairs professionals on this campus have nothing to do with student success; however, my research demonstrates how African-American males, in seeking to create an environment of safety, trust and support, are working concurrently toward the same goals as Student Affairs professionals, and this unplanned convergence of interests results in positive gains for both groups.

### **Access to Resources and Interest Convergence**

The final major thematic area represented in my data which influences African-American male participation is the access to resources involvement provides. This area is another point of convergence with Student Affairs practice. Among the primary tools in the Student Affairs tool kit is the wide array of tangible and quantifiable benefits accessible to many students—but of which only those involved are aware and utilize. These vary from things like free meals, personal relationships with high-ranking university administrators, and invitations to meet celebrities who visit campus. There are advantages and benefits to being involved and the participants in this study know and experience those. Arriving at the point where they can take advantage of these benefits, however, requires African-American men first fight through the perception that involvement, though marketed and promoted, is not marketed and promoted specifically

to them. To get specifically at this data, I designed a line of questioning in my interview protocol to determine the perceived difference between African-American men and white men in terms of involvement. The responses indicate the men perceive white students as more involved in organizations that are not just social in nature, and white students have more involvement options because the bulk of membership in all student organizations is, de facto, white. This disconnect perceived in access to involvement forms a cultural barrier which prevents many African-American males from even entertaining the idea the benefits of involvement are attainable. Orange explains why it is hard for some to participate in predominantly white groups and activities:

I don't feel it but I can see how somebody be intimidated being the only Black person in a classroom coming from Morgan Park [a predominantly African-American area of Chicago]. I can see how it would be intimidating to be the only Black swimmer on the swim team. I can see how intimidating it can be when you go out to the bars and it may be a group of you, three or four, but everybody else in the bar is white. I think sometimes people say, "This ain't for me." (personal communication, April, 16, 2010)

One student shares the perception African-American students are primarily involved in social events and organizations: "We get easily influenced by some of the stuff that probably isn't going to get us anywhere, like parties and social events" (Coral, personal communication, April 16, 2010). The role of social events is one I wish to remark upon here. Although parties and social events are not viewed as important, they serve a purpose because they are a fun, comfortable space where these men feel a sense of belonging. These events also provide a forum in which the men who are looking for others to mentor identify familiar faces and begin the process of training for leadership. As mentioned earlier, there are perceived benefits to achieving high social status; however, when compared with opportunities to achieve high social status and tangible

rewards, many African-American males miss out because they do not even attempt to become involved in activities or leadership beyond the social level. One man interviewed states African-American students prefer to stay in predominantly African-American groups: “I would say the involvement for Black students besides Greek is very rare. You don’t see too many besides BSU and NAACP” (Lime, personal communication, April 19, 2010). Study participants attribute some of these differences to marketing, which is pervasive across campus but not often perceived as targeted toward non-whites: “I did touch on it a little bit with the whole idea of certain events, feeling like it’s not marketed toward African-Americans or other [non-white] groups” (Coral, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Another student carries forward the thought that African-American students do not have the same involvement options: “That’s a good question. I feel that the problem is white students have more options. Like they can do this [be involved] if they want to” (Aqua, personal communication, April 15, 2010).

However, even when involvement is perceived as different for white students, the men interviewed articulate they are involved and remain involved because of resources that provide advantages. Cerise lists multiple skills gained from participating in student organizations:

I know how to speak to people better. I have a different kind of perception when I’m doing an interview, when I’m talking to my friends. I learned how to conduct myself as far as time management is concerned, how to be more organized, more efficient. (personal communication, April 19, 2010)

Maroon maintains networking is a key benefit of involvement: “...a lot of networking, a lot of networking. People pass my name along to other people and say, hey, this person is really good, a lot of networking” (personal communication, April 20, 2010). Another

student concurs on the availability of networking opportunities: “Networking and community service. I feel like that fills the void of you getting the job over another person. It’s the networking, who you know” (Blue, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Carrot also finds connections made while being involved are useful:

Another benefit to getting involved is you make different connections. Because of my resident assistant position I’m able to attend the Men and Women of Color which was an eye opener for me. These opportunities wouldn’t be presented to me if I didn’t get involved, if I didn’t know nobody. (personal communication, April 16, 2010)

Ochre describes how his résumé is strengthened by involvement:

The main thing I think is résumé building. After I started getting involved I found you could put these things on your résumé. At first I thought a résumé had to be a job where you get paid this much, this much and this much. When I actually learned how to make a résumé I just put everything I’m involved in on it. (personal communication, April 20, 2010)

In addition to networking and résumé building, the participants are made aware of funding opportunities they otherwise might not have known about: “I’ve had lots of scholarship opportunities, that’s how I got my internship, through involvement” (Bronze, personal communication, April 16, 2010). Orange was made aware of funding opportunities to support his academics: “I learned about the TSA scholarship, I learned about a Grant in Aid scholarship from \$1,700–\$2,300. That’s what you find out about when you get involved” (personal communication, April 16, 2010).

Through involvement, the men have direct access to funding and positions that shape the campus experiences of their fellow students. As a Resident Assistant, a student staff member who receives compensation to live on a floor to counsel and mentor residents, Carrot has access to funds from the Housing Office to create educational programs for students on his floor and in his residence hall. Orange serves as an



executive on the University Program Board, a group charged with allocating tens of thousands of dollars to bring educational, cultural and entertaining acts to the entire campus. Carrot has the freedom to determine what topics his programs cover and what campus and community resources are introduced to his residents. Ecrú is in a leadership position at the campus television station and, because of that, he directly influences the types of stories covered, the students spotlighted on the regular programs and the weekly features that air. Ochre is a PROWL leader. PROWL is a mandatory program for all new university students that spans the first 6 weeks of the fall semester. This program connects new students to the local community, academic resources, and campus traditions. As a leader in this program, he helps determine to which resources new students will be exposed in the time most crucial to campus acclimation.

The participants in this study were asked if involvement opportunities played any role in selection of this institution. The answer in every case but one was, “no.” In their pre-college experiences a large majority of participants were members of sports teams but had no other type of involvement. Many African-American men are at a marked deficit when it comes to knowing the opportunities available and benefits of involvement. Bridging this knowledge gap, in the case of the men in this study, took place after their peers encouraged and supported their involvement. I posit that Student Affairs professionals all too often do not take steps to acknowledge this gap or provide the extra connections needed to help African-American males close that gap. At H.U., African-American males are making one another explicitly aware of involvement and its benefits and, as a result, interest convergence occurs and both groups benefit.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When I began this study, it was with the intent of discovering which institutional factors were most important in promoting involvement among African-American males. My purpose was to create a set of best practices that could be used by Student Affairs professionals better to engage and involve African-American males. In researching the history of U.S. higher education and Student Affairs practice, I learned a great deal about the field's origins and how many of the organizational structures that exist today came to be. Synthesizing historical perspectives with data gathered from the men who gave their time to participate in this study created a rich deposit of information and experiences that I examine through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Through my analysis, I uncovered and revealed perspectives on the experience of attending college at Humble U. unique to African-American male students that enabled me to offer findings, implications and recommendations for further research.

#### **Findings**

In this section I articulate six major findings that emerged from my research at H.U. These findings represent pervasive, salient conclusions drawn from my analysis of the data. I have chosen to present herein these six ideas best to represent the outcomes of my study. As I detail my findings, I position them within the context of existing scholarship best to illustrate their significance. My primary discovery is the factor that most affects whether African-American men become involved: the notice and influence

of African-American male peers perceived to have the campus' highest social status. My second finding builds upon the first, revealing the reason the most positively perceived organizations are viewed favorably is due to the high visibility and desirability of kinship ties formed by the men in those groups. Surprisingly, I find the level of pre-college involvement among the study's men outside athletics to be low. In my fourth finding I reveal the effectiveness of H.U.'s marketing efforts in raising awareness of involvement opportunities among African-American males. I then find and articulate the group of skills the study's men explicitly reveal to be the primary benefits of involvement. Finally, I uncover a parallel system of support for African-American males, finding an unplanned, but effective collaboration in which the men's informal system works in tandem with institutional structures promoting campus involvement and leadership opportunities.

### **The Power of Peer Influence**

The factor that men in this study share as having the biggest effect on whether they are involved in campus activities or leadership opportunities is the notice and influence of their most positively perceived peers. When inquiring as to why their peers' influence was such an important factor in being in becoming involved, Carrot also shares a most insightful answer: "I come from an area in Chicago that was a really low-income area. There's a lack of leadership, especially Black male leadership" (personal communication, April 16, 2010). This speaks to the role mentors, especially mentors who are perceived to share similar characteristics, play in motivating African-American males to participate in campus organizations and activities. I infer African-American males who are visible in a community and promote becoming actively involved in that community serve as a motivating factor for young African-American men to become involved. My

finding echoes earlier, cited research which set about to determine factors leading to African-American male retention in higher education (Hughes & Winston, 1987; Strayhorn, 2008). The difference between my findings at H.U. and previous studies is that, while involvement is previously listed as factor that affects retention, little exploration has been done to determine why African-American males choose to become involved, in either high-school or college. My study uniquely contributes to extant literature because it begins the work of documenting why African-American males become involved. The men in my study report overwhelmingly that those African-American men involved with certain organizations possess the most status within the campus community. My study's participants had either been befriended or mentored by involved men at some point in their time at H.U., and that influence helped shape previously uninvolved men's desire to become involved. Once these men were noticed, drawn in, mentored, and had taken on the leadership mantle passed down to them by their own mentors, they in turn reached back to notice, approach, befriend, and mentor the generation of students coming behind them. In this systematic way those perceived as leaders fulfill their destiny to lead: by using their visibility and power to pass on the knowledge and experience amassed through their own relationships with mentors. While this system works well for those who break into and attain the mentor/mentee relation, African-American male campus leaders only have so much time between classes, jobs, personal relationships and involvement which leaves them scant time for the highly intensive mentoring required. Even though this system of mentoring is powerful, it is, by its very design, limited in scope and number and, as a result, a large number of African-American males remain uninvolved because there are not enough peer leaders to reach

back for them and bring them along.

### **The Importance of Substitute Kinship Ties**

As stated in the previous finding, my study's data reveals H.U.'s African-American men recognize and value the status of certain of their peers above others. I discover certain organizations are perceived as drivers of campus social interactions and those groups have the highest status. It is largely the lure of those substitute kinship ties established by the organizations' men that make membership so enticing to non-members. The power of fictive kinship ties to unite members of various cultures is well established (Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Halpern, 1958; Hammel, 1968). What is of particular relevance to this study is the intersection of fictive kinship and the U.S. African-American community. The horrendously traumatic ways African-American familial ties have been strained and severed by slavery, Jim Crow laws, lack of disenfranchisement in the past, along with present-day institutionalized racism, repeated micro-aggressions and the gradual repeal of civil rights protections, make substitute kinship ties especially powerful and necessary in African-American communities (Collins, 1998; Fordham, 1986; Johnson & Barer, 1990). Opportunities to form genuine, empathetic, supportive bonds of kinship and support among peers drives African-American men to gravitate towards campus organizations that are formed around and visibly promote these important, supportive, long-lived ties. Whereas some might view the high status accorded groups that typically garner attention for social events and hazing as antithetical to Student Affairs practice, I instead claim the continued social popularity of these groups demonstrates the strong desire for and utility of real bonds of this specific type.

### **The Dearth of Pre-College Involvement**

Prior to conducting this study, it was my understanding likelihood of engaging in college involvement highly correlated with African-American men's participation in high-school-level extracurricular activities. The men I studied challenged and dismantled my assumption. Myrtle describes his high-school involvement: "In high school I wasn't involved in that much, I was just a person who went to school and came home, I really didn't participate in anything the school offered" (personal communication, April 20, 2010). Carrot shares a similar story: "Before college I wasn't really involved in high-school, I don't know why, I was always just the funny guy, real laid back, real chill guy" (personal communication, April 16, 2010). The men in my study generally were not involved in clubs or student organizations prior to college. The exceptions were men who were members of athletic teams: "When I got into high school I was heavily into sports. I played football, basketball, and ran track all four years of high school" (Linen, personal communication, April 19, 2010). High school involvement through sports is a type of involvement that for most is not sustainable once in college. The fact that the skill level necessary to qualify for and participate in collegiate athletics is rare means the men in this study, like the vast majority of college males, do not play on their college's teams. None of the men in this study were recruited to play sport at H.U., and the most consistent response when asked about pre-college involvement is they did not participate in non-sports activities in high school. Participation in organized activities outside sport was not a part of these men's lives prior to college, so the opportunity to be involved was not a consideration when these men considered college choice. This is a critical finding, because the effects of pre-college involvement on involvement in college is a research

area largely unexplored for students overall, and especially unexplored among African-American males. My assertion that men who lead on the collegiate level achieve this status without having the benefit of involvement during high school reaffirms the claim that men from all walks of life, given effective outreach, support, and mentoring can and will become campus organization members and leaders.

### **Effectiveness of Institutional Promotion of Involvement**

The level and kind of university resources dedicated to student organizations and promotion of involvement by university faculty and staff make a difference in whether or not African-American men view involvement as a viable option. When asked, “What role did opportunities for involvement play in selecting this university?” the replies were often short and direct: “They didn’t play a big role at all” (Carrot, personal communication, April 16, 2010), or, “It wasn’t that important to me” (Puce, personal communication, April 20, 2010), and Ochre offers, “I don’t think it did” (personal communication, April 20, 2010). Far and away the most frequently cited reason men chose H.U. was affordability. This is an important finding because it informs Student Affairs and university professionals that, in order to engage these men, some type of outreach is necessary, since these men will not seek opportunities themselves. The path to involvement many men interviewed took supports this assertion. They did not seek out involvement; they personally were encouraged to get involved, and that encouragement was the motivating factor in their eventual participation. Humble U. seeks to encourage participation through highly visible promotion of involvement across multiple mediums. When asked to share what steps taken by the university encourage involvement, the men consistently identify events, staff, and offices there to help those seeking get involved.

Ochre names several university departments:

There are different offices, like Office of Orientation, Student Life, you can go there. That's probably, that's what happened to me. Monica [an H.U. staff member] told me to go over there; they're so friendly and everything that I got sucked into PROWL. (personal communication, April 20, 2010)

The reason the men come to know of these offices is the heavy marketing blitz the university manufactures and delivers to educate students that staff and resources exist, especially to incoming students. Ochre gives the university high marks for outreach to students:

Like on a scale of one to ten I would give them a ten. I get emails every week with a list of events. I know I do but I know it's not personal emails to me, so I know other students get it, too. You get emails every week with a list of events. Even sometimes it's daily events. Like we have this, this, this. There's always something going on. I think they're doing good job of pubbing [publicizing] the events they do have. (personal communication, April 20, 2010)

These men's reflections indicate the amount of effort a university puts into publicizing opportunities for involvement is important. Literature in the areas of campus branding and social media support the need for creative ways to market to students, especially with the rise of social media on mobile platforms (Eaton, Luse & Hodge, 2012; Malesk & Peters, 2012). A student cannot participate in activities of which he or she is unaware. In the age of omnipresent social media, it is not surprising a combination of mass hardcopy publicity and electronic communication reaches those students the university targets to involve (Anctil, 2008). Upon examining the difference between knowledge of events and motivation to attend events, my data indicates institutional outreach is noticed but not necessarily effective in getting African-American men to turn up at events or to get them involved. The one-size-fits-all approach to involvement used by campuses serves only to perpetuate the system that results in so few African-American males becoming



organizational members and leaders. The blanket approach taken by the institution disperses the information to all students equally and, because of this, those who enter college familiar with clubs and organizations from high school are more likely to understand the role involvement can play in terms of establishing social networks. I learned through talking with these men they are neither familiar with nor do they seek involvement initially, so the campus' tactics only leaves them inundated with information about involvement. While noticeable, these tactics do not prompt African-American men to seek out or embrace involvement. This is another research area in which existing literature proves sparse, which makes my study's findings especially important. The rapidly evolving landscape of marketing to college students, due to the proliferation of apps and social media platforms and the omnipresence of electronic devices, means that almost as soon as a targeted marketing strategy is created, the countdown to its obsolescence begins. Given my finding, a campus' electronic, social-media-based marketing should never occupy the centerpiece of efforts designed to increase African-American male participation.

### **Stated Benefits of Involvement**

While each of the men interviewed for this study certainly brought unique experiences and perspectives to share, there were several areas where responses were nearly uniform. This finding represents one such area. Across all interviews, the men are consistent in their perceptions of the primary benefits of being involved: opportunities to meet and connect with faculty, administrators, or peers who work in the fields in which the men seek experience, along with being offered the opportunity to participate in experiences that can be added to a résumé. Networking is the most consistently shared

benefit of involvement. From the perspective of the men in this study, networking encompasses meeting peers who have knowledge of socially and professionally beneficial experiences and opportunities. Another component of networking is meeting faculty and administrators who can steer them to and support their applications for scholarships, campus jobs, additional leadership experiences, and professional contacts. In addition to these benefits, networking also makes it easier to connect with a professional mentor who can give coaching and advice on how to navigate academic life and one's post-collegiate career.

Résumé building is something study participants also perceive as a significant benefit of organizational involvement. Résumé building allows men to amass a longer list of organizations, accomplishments, and honors on their résumé than their collegiate peers while teaching them to articulate what those experiences are and how they were able to learn from them. H.U. has a Career Center, a department similar to those on many college campuses, dedicated to counseling students in the exploration of careers and assisting students in obtaining internships and jobs (Pipkins, Rooney, & Jaunarais, 2014). This finding supports the research literature outlining best practices in the Career Counseling field related to working with African-American male students. Some specific best practices include facilitating connections between African-American males and campus mentors, introducing African-American males to campus resources, and forging ties with African-American male student organizations (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Hobert-Quince, 2010; Wilson, 2000). African-American males, once involved, recognize career-enhancement benefits certain organizations and opportunities provide. Working to create systems within which practitioners in Career Services provide targeted outreach to

African-American male groups while involved males seek such experiences benefits both groups.

### **The Existence of Shadow Systems of Support**

Through the process of distilling data into the findings already outlined, I discovered another finding central to the lives of the study's men. I uncovered the ways in which these African-American men use institutional outreach initiatives and support structures promoting involvement to create a safe space within the confines of a predominantly white student community. Research exploring the ways African-American men successfully have been retained in higher education cites the necessity of men being able to locate peers, administrators, faculty, or organizations and utilize them as connecting points to aid in their retention (Brooks, 2012; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). My findings support the importance of peers and organizations in making belonging, but my findings also illustrate it is not simply the presence of these connecting points that is crucial; moreover, the men must also be encouraged to make contact and engage. At H.U. it is the outreach, mentoring, and challenging by African-American men in high-status positions that close the open loop, actually connecting men with the opportunities they learned about through institutional outreach and were encouraged to join by faculty and administrators. Each step in the outreach, mentoring, and challenge process is performed by the university, with more resources, but the much higher degree of positive regard for other African-American men, particularly men in leadership positions, means African-American males not yet involved can be powerfully, persuasively motivated by their peers. This student-led, parallel process is not a subversion of institutional policies or Student Affairs practice but rather serves as a

shadow system working less visibly beneath the larger system in a more effective way to reach this segment of the student body. African-American male leaders are aware of this power and they apply it strategically in concert with existing H.U. efforts. The result is that for involved African-American men, there exists a second layer of support and possibly rewards (Harper, 2009). The recognition by university faculty and administrators can bring opportunities and rewards in the form of campus jobs, scholarships, networking with senior level administrators, and access to university events. The involved student also is rewarded by high social status among peers and recognition and benefits that come from being perceived as a leader. This shadow system is a powerful tool in recruitment and continued participation for those who benefit from it.

### **Summary**

When viewed collectively, the results do not appear to answer the question I set about to answer at the beginning of this study. Rather than generating a list of institutional factors that influence the organizational and leadership involvement of African-American males, I have instead uncovered the ways in which the African-American males use the institutional outreach initiatives and support structures promoting involvement to create a safe space within the structure of a predominantly white institution. These results speak to a markedly different way of approaching the concept of involvement for Student Affairs professionals. Rather than using our knowledge of student development theory and group dynamics to craft policies and procedure aimed at fostering involvement among African-American males, these results tell us to examine and consider with greater respect and appreciation the social systems that currently exist on our campuses so we can then use our resources and expertise to support, enhance, and

magnify these systems. Once we do so, the pathways to involvement that already exist are widened, expanded, and made more free-flowing for African-American males: a population posing challenges to involvement and retention. Student Affairs professionals can then use the value students place on high-status social organizations to inform which groups we choose to provide the most resources and support. Finally, with this knowledge, Student Affairs professionals can act to leverage the resources our offices provide to bring student groups closer and provide more direct, intrusive advisement, and mentoring so we can magnify the power and effectiveness of peer mentoring and support.

### **Implications**

The farthest-reaching implication arising from this study is that Student Affairs needs to be critically reexamined with an especially tight focus on the ways Student Affairs philosophy has been subsumed by the contemporary emphasis on career preparation versus the ideal of creating more well-rounded critical thinkers. My findings and their specific implications, when viewed collectively, will help paint this picture and provide context for my assertion.

The finding peer influence of high-status individuals offers the most powerful effect in determining whether African-American males become involved is both familiar and foreign in terms of Student Affairs work. The finding is simple because the development and utilization of peer leaders is a core component of Student Affairs efforts to shape co-curricular activities into educationally purposeful experiences (Wooten, Hunt, LeDuc, & Poskus, 2012; Shook & Keup, 2012). The finding is foreign because, despite knowledge of the power of peer leadership, an effective model has yet to be developed that increases levels of African-American male involvement. As a result,

Student Affairs as a practice has either put minimal effort into creating and connecting best practices with the African-American male population until recent years or has run up against an inability to do so. Either lack does not cast the best light on the profession and its ability to serve and retain underrepresented populations.

The importance of substitute kinship ties as demonstrated in this study leads me to two conclusions. The first conclusion is that groups which provide African-American males the opportunity to come together and mutually support one another must be created, maintained, and encouraged. The men positively respond to these groups and from them will come the men who can attract and mentor others, men who develop an ethic of mentorship and are attuned to its needs among the campus' African-American men, and, by extension to the university campus and the broader community. My second conclusion is that the current discourse in popular culture (Ryan, 2014; Flanagan, 2011) and some higher education circles (Kelderman, 2015; New, 2014) to abolish fraternities must not be allowed to conflate African-American fraternities with their white counterparts. It is not my intent to degrade the role of white fraternities, but to make clear that historically African-American fraternities have served a very different role on U.S. campuses. So instead, I call for the deeper study of African-American Greek-letter organizations to discover and fully to document their unique strengths in substitute kinship, mentorship, and retention so Student Affairs professionals may come to understand how the institution can provide additional resources and support for their membership. It is a fact African-American fraternities were founded to serve as safe spaces and places where academic, social and familial support are exchanged between members who are minorities on their college campuses. These needs have not changed

(Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2012), nor should Student Affairs waiver in supporting historically African-American fraternities.

Findings detailing African-American men's lack of non-athletic involvement prior to college and the effectiveness of institutional promotion of involvement are connected by the fact that one serves as a precursor that necessitates the other. If African-American men come to college unfamiliar with involvement, it will take pervasive, targeted marketing to simply make them aware that involvement exists. Knowing it takes marketing in conjunction with mentoring to lead African-American males from awareness to involvement, additional marketing aimed at organizations and current leaders exhorting them to mentor and assist in getting their peers involved so incoming African-American men can have examples and visualize their place in campus organizations will also yield higher levels of involvement.

The existence of shadow systems of support, wherein African-American male leaders provide highly valued recruitment, mentoring and support to their peers is something that must be examined more closely for understanding how and why it works before being replicated and nurtured. My findings demonstrate that often both institutional and informal systems are required to inspire and guide African-American males into leadership roles. Literature in the field of retention informs us of the availability of support networks, and participation in leadership experiences positively affects retention (Allen, 1992; Bean, 1992). Knowing these needs, it is vital Student Affairs practitioners be educated for and prepared to do both to increase the level of involvement for this population.

In the examination of the benefits most recognized by involved men, there are some direct connections along with some potential pitfalls. The direct connection to be made is with Career Services and the programs from that area of the university. The men named networking and résumé building as the most salient benefits. Career Services departments exist to help students develop skills that lead to the acquisition of internships and jobs. At institutions where Career Services units are within a Division of Student Affairs, practitioners should have purposeful outreach practices (Owens et al., 2010) tailored to the needs of African-American males. At institutions where Career Services are outside Student Affairs, collaborative networks should be established between the professional staff across divisions to insure African-American males are aware of and access the services.

The implications I have so far discussed directly correlate to specific findings of this study. As I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section, there is a larger, more multifaceted implication that connects across all findings: that much of Student Affairs work has been co-opted by more capitalistic interests must be acknowledged and examined.

Colleges and universities large or small consist of several core functions: enrollment management, which deals with the recruitment and retention of students; academic affairs units are responsible for the creation and delivery of academic content; finance and planning areas that are responsible for the acquisition and distribution of resources; and Student Affairs, where programs designed to support students in extracurricular life are most often embedded. These functional areas operate as loosely coupled systems that move the institution forward, working cooperatively though with a



high degree of autonomy (Weick, 1976). The nature of these loosely coupled systems is that each functional area of the institution can go about its work the best way it deems fit as long as it results in the core mission of the university remaining at the forefront of operations. In the case of Student Affairs, however, the evolution of U.S. higher education is occurring in such a way that although Student Affairs practice maintains some autonomy, Divisions of Student Affairs operate in ways shaped much more by external forces than other divisions of the university. This co-opting began when large numbers of African Americans began attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the 1960s, the programs created to support the new population often found a home within Student Affairs divisions. In this way student unrest was quelled, allowing institutions to manage the unrest of the changing cultural landscape with minimal disruption to large-scale educational processes. As the growth of African-American students in the '60s and '70s was mirrored by Latino, Asian, and LGBTQA populations in subsequent decades, these newly included student populations also found their way under the reach of student affairs, often under the umbrella term of multicultural student affairs. Multicultural affairs units were and are a natural fit for the student affairs realm because of the focus on the growth and development of students, the creation of safe campus spaces and the coordination of programs that allow these populations to be integrated to the larger campus while celebrating and supporting their unique qualities. When this phenomenon is viewed through a CRT lens however another picture emerges. The inclusion of multicultural groups, while certainly a benefit, has not been done in a way that positions these groups close to the central mission of the university. In placing these populations within Student Affairs support for them was assured but the

institutional relevance of the groups was not. Student Affairs, as detailed earlier in this study, is relatively new to the educational enterprise having only developed recognized scholarship in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The result of this late entry into the educational enterprise is that the field is perceived as non-essential with functions *not* central to the educational purpose of institutions of higher education. The organizational position of student affairs means that groups that make a home within the confines of the discipline are relegated to the same non-essential status. When delving deeper into this phenomenon to examine how African-American males fit specifically, the picture comes more sharply into focus. The push to increase involvement of African-American males has not grown from widely accepted Student Affairs best practices; rather, it is spurred by the desire to retain more students in higher education. Creating a socially just learning environment enhanced by diversity is not the driving force; the impetus is capitalism. Institutions of higher education are facing higher costs and decreasing pools from which to draw students. In order to maximize revenue it becomes important to recruit more students and retain them at higher levels. African-American males have the highest rates of non-completion of all demographic groups (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014), so it stands to reason that increasing the recruitment and retention of this population will lead to improved revenue for higher education. In this scenario, student affairs practice is being co-opted to serve the financial interests of higher education. This co-opting is apparent when looking at the institutional methods by which colleges and universities attempt to engage underrepresented populations, yielding multi-platform marketing strategies in conjunction with copious amounts of promotional items and other material enticements. The use of refined marketing strategies is an ideal way to connect

with a targeted demographic and, in effect, that is what African-American males are in this case: a group that needs to be sold on a product. Social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter have evolved from strictly communication channels to marketing delivery systems that allow organizations direct access to the pockets of students through the ubiquitous smartphone. The majority of freshman college students live in residence halls that are staffed and managed by student affairs staff members. Having access to the facility where the vast majority of new students sleep and connected to the dining centers where the majority of new students eat their meals each day allows social media messages to be augmented with posters, handbills, and marketing on the large, flat-screen monitors scattered throughout the public spaces. In order to support the revenue-generating mission of the institution, African-American males are targeted and marketed under the auspices of student involvement and engagement. African-American male retention efforts masked in Student Affairs rhetoric, yet derived from capitalistic motives, cannot be effective because of the inherent disconnect between the wholly different interests of marketing and retention. Efforts to create places of comfort and inclusion for African-American men on predominantly white campuses will only succeed if we understand the lived experiences of these students and how their experiences are often invalidated and marginalized on our campuses. Student Affairs practitioners must commit to the work of understanding this population while creating activities and experiences that affirm their lives and validate them as members of our campus communities.

It is important to note that even if efforts to retain African-American males are positioned within the realm of Student Affairs, and even if such positioning limits how effective retention efforts can be, it is still better than no efforts at all. With or without

these retention efforts, U.S. higher education will continue to hide poor retention of African-American males behind the smokescreen of high initial enrollment numbers (Aud et al., 2013). These high enrollment numbers provide a deceptive snapshot because, when viewing them, it appears that African-American males are participating in higher education at higher rates than ever. This beginning-of-the-year enrollment means little, however, because these students are not being retained through to degree completion (Harper, 2012). It is the possession of a college degree, not just having spent some time on a college campus, that provides improved access to health care, increases social mobility, and enhances the overall quality of life. I posit that introducing someone to higher education, then not providing the support networks to finish, actually does more to dishearten, demoralize, and disenfranchise individuals than never allowing access at all.

We as practitioners need to determine how much Student Affairs work can be extricated from the financial and political mandates to focus on the work of developing students. Examining the root of current practices tells us whether the work we do is central to the Student Affairs mission. Are we promoting assessment efforts because we seek ways to improve programs for our students? Or are we undertaking assessment solely to provide information for institutional reports required by state agencies? Designing our programs and services in ways that affirm students and help establish connections will assist them as they work to make belonging on our campuses. This belonging prepares these students in a culturally specific way for success in college and beyond. Conversely, experiences in higher education that reinforce the isolation and powerlessness faced by many students of color in other aspects of their lives only perpetuates the overwhelming indefatigability of majority privilege.

## **Recommendations**

In this section I offer specific recommendations that can be undertaken by Student Affairs practitioners to strengthen their ties with African-American male groups and combat the co-opting that threatens to redefine Student Affairs work. These recommendations incorporate my experiences as a Student Affairs practitioner in conjunction with the results of this study.

### **Strengthen Formal Ties with High-status**

#### **African-American Male Organizations**

As Student Affairs practitioners, we know which groups on campus are held in the highest regard by our students and, if we do not know, it is simple enough to discover. Even if these groups do not have a positive perception in our eyes, it is crucial that we identify these groups and create bonds with them, through providing advisement, allowing them to utilize prime meeting and programming space, or providing them access to funds to support group activities that benefit the entire campus. In identifying and formalizing connections with high-status African-American groups, practitioners begin forging bonds with those organizational members who can create connections with incoming men who are most influenced by high-status members. In addition, having well-trained staff members in closer contact with the organizations will allow group members to learn some organizational skills that peers and volunteer advisors may not have the time or ability to teach them.

## **Consider Why African-American Males Might be Intentionally Opting out of Involvement**

Inherent in much of the Student Affairs practice designed to involve students is the belief that the benefits of involvement positively contribute to the student. What has not been explored in depth is the possibility that by making the conscious choice to avoid involvement, African-American males are making a choice that is designed to preserve their emotional and intellectual well-being. Brayboy (2004) has written about how minoritized students in predominantly white environments have chosen to minimize interactions with the white population to avoid the micro-aggressions, othering, and blatant racism that often occurs in higher education. Similar research has not been done to determine if this accounts for some of the low numbers of involvement by African-American males in campus leadership positions. Instead of assuming that a deficit needs to be fixed, further study is needed to determine that, if by keeping to themselves and “flying below the radar” of administration and white classmates, African-American males are actually demonstrating a heightened degree of situational awareness that will allow them to move through higher education with less stress and fewer racist confrontations. What is perceived as a problem might indeed be a much needed survival mechanism.

## **Use Marketing Resources to Promote the Effectiveness of Those African-American Male Groups**

Assisting the groups with promotion of their events, recruitment, and orientation of new members and sharing their successes with the university community and other key constituents will broaden the reach of the organizations among students, faculty, and staff. More students being aware of the positive roles organizations play in the campus,

local, and national communities will help with recruitment. Making faculty and staff aware of the good done by these groups will combat negative stereotypes and engender a more inclusive campus community. This can be done not just through institutional newsletters, emails and social media, but by providing opportunities for staff to interact with students through professional development seminars workshops and university-supported student events.

**Eschew the “Cheerleader” Mentality and Embrace  
a More Hardline Stance on Issues of Social Justice**

In attempts to insure our programs and services reach the widest audiences possible, we dilute programs dealing with issues of social justice and inclusion for fear of alienating some students or beginning difficult conversations centering on race, primarily those in the majority. In the allocation of scarce resources, we focus staffing and programming dollars on a wide variety of programs and services instead of focusing time and funding on those areas where we wish to improve involvement and retention rather than programming designed to benefit campus culture, such as challenging institutional racism. I do not advocate for all resources to be allocated to African-American male initiatives. I do advocate for resource allocation strategy that has us deploy more staff, programming hours, and dollars to bring deficit areas up to par with our areas of strength. If we value diversity and cultural competence yet we know that we have populations that do not participate in experiences that raise their knowledge in these areas and challenge their unfounded beliefs based on things besides interpersonal interactions, our role should be to provide more of that type of program and push them more assertively to all of our students, even those who are made uncomfortable.

To earn the right to call ourselves advocates for African-American males, we must be willing to reallocate our fiscal resources, realign staffing structures, and dedicate more time to meeting these men where they are not where we are comfortable working. If we claim to create and value cultures of inclusion and social justice, then we must insure those ideals are prominently displayed each and every place students access information about the institution. Our imperative must be to make students aware of what behaviors and language are expected in our communities and we must become quick to educate those unfamiliar with the standards, ideals, and customs we set. Student Affairs has the ability to influence students where they live, where they eat, and in their social interactions; Student Affairs must use our unique opportunity with student access to create a culture that will enable all our students to succeed at the institution and beyond.

### **Use Critical Race Theory and/or Other Activist**

### **Frameworks to Critique Student Affairs Work**

Student development theory provides an excellent framework for assisting students in placing their educational, social, and personal growth in the context of a larger world. Student development theory does not, however, provide the most effective lens with which to determine if our work is socially just and best honors the lived experiences of the minoritized groups we serve. Student Affairs work was born and grown in predominantly white settings, and much of the foundational research is based upon white, male participants as its sample. There are developmental models that incorporate the perspectives of women, people of color, and LGBTQA students, but these have gained traction too recently to consider them foundational. In order to insure Student Affairs work is serving all of its students, it must be critiqued from all perspectives and



viewpoints. If Student Affairs is not critiqued in this manner, behavior that is de facto racist will continue under the guise of established best practice. An example of this is the perpetuation of a models of involvement designed to attract, retain, and mentor all students the same way. Though purporting to be the branch of the higher education enterprise which does the most to involve all students, Student Affairs perpetuates a model which reflects a colorblind ideology. This ideology creates situations in which white advisors and white students in organizations are not challenged to recognize the different relationships minoritized students have with both the organizations and campus, because the privilege of whiteness allows them to see the minoritized students as just another student or, if they choose, not at all (Thompson, 1998). In order to create truly inclusive opportunities and experiences, Student Affairs must turn an interrogative eye towards its own long-standing practices and beliefs.

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## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear H.U. Student:

My name is John Davenport and I am inviting you to participate in a research study about understanding African-American male involvement. You were selected as a participant because you are currently enrolled at H.U. and have self-identified as African American. The purpose of this study is to determine institutional factors which influence African-American males to become active in student organizations. I am a doctoral student at Illinois State University in the Educational Administration and Foundations department. This study is my dissertation research. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and not related to any program offered at H.U.

**You are under no obligation to participate in this study**, but I would really appreciate your input. If you decide to participate in this study, I will schedule a 45 minute initial interview with you between (blank as of now). I will then conducting observations of campus groups during organizational and chapter meetings along with 45 minute follow-up interviews. I will audio record the individual meetings. The interviews will take place in an office in Blair Hall or in a place of your choosing.

Your records of this study will be kept private. My published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or any other individuals in this study specifically. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Eastern Illinois University.

If you wish to participate in this study, or have any questions please contact me by replying to this email or calling me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Stacy Otto at 309-438-5505 with any questions or the Institutional Review Board at Illinois State University (309-438-8451). Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

*John Davenport*

John Davenport  
Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX B

### RECRUITMENT SCRIPT AT GROUP MEETINGS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ Group:

Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is John Davenport and I am a doctoral student at Illinois State University in the Educational Administration and Foundations department. I am seeking African-American male participants for a research project pertaining to African-American male student involvement at Humble University. This study is my dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to determine institutional factors which influence African-American males to become active in student organizations. Your participation in this study would be entirely voluntary and not related to any program offered at H.U.

My intent is to use the information I gather to help administrators understand what programs and services are needed to increase African-American male involvement in student organizations. Your personal experiences and insight into this issue will be extremely valuable.

**You are under no obligation to participate in this study**, but I would really appreciate your input. If you decide to participate in this study, I will schedule a 45-minute initial interview with you between (blank as of now). I will then conducting observations of campus groups during organizational and chapter meetings along with 45-minute follow-up interviews. I will audio record the individual meetings. The interviews will take place in an office in Blair Hall or in a place of your choosing.

My records of interview conversations and observations related to this study will be kept private. My published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you are any other individuals in this study specifically. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Humble University.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Stacy Otto at 309-438-5505 with any questions or the Institutional Review Board at Illinois State University (309-438-8451). Thank you for your time.

*John Davenport*  
John Davenport  
Doctoral Student  
Illinois State University

APPENDIX C  
THANK YOU LETTER

Dear Student,

Thank you for participating in the study on African-American male student involvement at Humble University. I know how valuable your time so your willingness to share your personal experiences is greatly appreciated.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions - I can be reached at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Have a Great Day!

Sincerely,

*John Davenport*

John Davenport  
Doctoral Student  
Illinois State University

APPENDIX D  
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR  
TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

I, \_\_\_\_\_, professional transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes, digital audio recordings, and documentation received from John Davenport related to his doctoral study. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by John Davenport;
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to John Davenport in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E

CONSENT LETTER

Dear Participant:

My name is John Davenport and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. I am conducting this research for my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this study is to determine institutional factors which influence African-American males to become active in student organizations

I am requesting your participation, which will involve individual interviews with me that will take place at a location convenient to you and last approximately 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. I will also observe several student organizations one or more of which you may be a participant. I will observe the groups for the duration of the meetings. During observations, I will be writing down information about the content and purpose of the meetings as well as general comments regarding the interaction between group members

**Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.** If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw permission at any time. You may also decline to participate. You will not be penalized for withdrawing or declining. The results of the research study will be published in my doctoral dissertation and may be published or presented, but your name will not be used. I will take all precautions to maintain your confidentiality (your name will not be used, and the transcript from our interview will not be shared with anyone). For example, pseudonyms will be used during the interview and my doctoral dissertation.

If at any time during this study you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,  
John Davenport

Please indicate you wish to participate in this study by checking the statement below and signing your name. Please sign both copies of this consent form and keep one copy.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to participate in the study described above and have read this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please print your name here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-2520 or Dr. Stacy Otto at 309-438-3923 or sotto@ilstu.edu.

APPENDIX F  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR HUMBLE UNIVERSITY  
ADMINISTRATORS

Dear H.U. Administrator/Student Organization Advisor:

My name is John Davenport and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. I am conducting this research for my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this study is to determine institutional factors which influence African-American males to become active in student organizations

I am requesting your help with identifying participants for this research. The study will involve a minimum of two individual interviews with me that will take place either in an office in Blair hall or a location convenient to the student. The interviews will last approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded. I will also observe student organization meetings.

My records of interview conversations and observations related to this study will be kept private. My published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any of your students or individuals in this study specifically. I will thoroughly explain the informed consent process to all student participants and inform them of their rights to refuse participation.

If you are willing to help me identify individuals for this study, or have any questions, please contact me by replying to this email or calling me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Stacy Otto at 309-438-5505 with any questions or the Institutional Review Board at Illinois State University (309-438-8451). Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

*John Davenport*

John Davenport  
Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX G

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Defining Involvement**

How do you define “being involved” on campus?

How did you develop this definition?

Do you consider yourself involved? Why or why not?

In what ways did your life prior to college shape your view of being involved?

How does/has involvement change(d) during your time here the university?

#### **Institutional Factors**

What role did opportunities for involvement play in selecting this university?

In what ways does the university encourage you to get involved?

What resources (university offices, staff) are there to help you become involved?

What things make it difficult to get involved?

#### **Peer Influences**

How do you talk about being involved when you are with your peers?

What activities have the most African-American male involvement? Why is this?

In your opinion, who are the most involved African-American men on campus? Why these men?

How might involvement be different for African-American students than white students? African-American men vs. white men?

What meetings/interactions do they feel would be the best for me to observe in order to better understand why and how African-American males become and stay involved in student organizations?

#### **Perceived Benefits**

What do you perceive are the benefits of being involved?

What are the negative aspects of involvement?

How does involvement affect you academically?

Why or why not is getting involved important for you?

Knowing what you know now about college life, what would you change about your previous levels of involvement?