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Black male college students' perspectives on the contribution of black student organizations to their development of soft skills

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BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF BLACK STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS

by

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A Thesis

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Thesis Chair: Andrew S. Tinnin, Ed. D.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the African American community and equity in student development.

Abstract

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BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONTRIBUTION
OF BLACK STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT
SKILLS
2019-2020
Andrew S. Tinnin, Ed.D.
Master of Arts in Higher Education

The following study is an exploration of the views Black male college students have of the soft skills they have developed through participation in a predominately Black student organization. I used a focus group moderator guide with questions, adapted from Stansberry and Burnett (2014) and modified from Evans (2016) and Saraceno (2019) to serve as the instrument for this qualitative study. I gathered data from a focus groups consisting of Black male college students who are enrolled at Rowan University and participate in Black student organizations on campus. The focus group discussion pertained to the participants' experiences with predominantly Black student groups and other student groups on campus and how those experiences relate to the development of soft skills such as interpersonal and communication. Utilizing the data collected from the focus group, I offered an analysis of the relationship between Black student organizations and the soft skills Black males develop while enrolled in college at a predominantly White institution. The analysis of this study provided the foundation for recommendations in the areas of student affairs practice and support for Black male college students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview of the Problem

The idea of a truly diverse student population is beautiful. However, without

proper consideration of the distinct needs of students from various backgrounds, diversity

in higher education is futile. College student populations are in fact becoming more

diverse. However, the desired student outcomes of different racial groups are still

disproportionate (Brown, 2019). Black male college students are reported to have the

highest attrition rates (American Council on Education, 2019). Furthermore, African

American male college students continue to face unique obstacles that negatively

influence their level of success at predominantly White institutions. However, resources

such as predominantly Black student organizations serve as one way to alleviate the

stressors Black students face in college (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

Black student organizations provide outlets for identity expression, as well as

opportunities to advocate and advance the Black community (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010,

Harper, 2007). It is likely that Black student organizations support members in other

ways that support college success as well. Through active participation in a

predominantly Black organization, it is possible Black students are able to gain

knowledge and soft skills that would have been more difficult to gain in an environment

that was not as supportive of their identity development. Although the benefits of Black

student organizations have been previously researched, there is a lack of information

regarding the soft skills developed as a result of being involved in a Black student organization on a college campus.

Statement of the Problem

African American male college students are reported to have the highest attrition rates in comparison to other college students (American Council on Education, 2019). In addition, Black male students face many obstacles such as managing the impact of negative stereotypes and racial battle fatigue (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Mitchell & Boyd, 2018). These challenges may reduce opportunities for Black college students to develop and improve soft skills through social and academic experiences.

Although there is research that indicates Black student organizations can support a positive outlet to cope with these obstacles, little research has focused on the learned soft skills and knowledge resulting from participation in such an organization. For the purpose of this study, I am using Heckman's and Kautz's (2012) definition, explaining that soft skills are traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are intangible and determine abilities to lead and facilitate. The development of soft skills is important to success in college as well as success in the job market (Schulz, 2008; Appleby, 2017). Colleges and universities strive to develop employable graduates. Job recruiters are seeking individuals with soft skills that enable adaption to quickly evolving industries. In addition, recruiters are looking for potential employees with soft skills that will foster the ability to work in a team (Deepa and Seth, 2013). Since colleges aim to prepare students for future employment, curriculum is often designed in a way that requires possession of soft skills for successful degree completion.

Significance of the Problem

Understanding more about the learning outcomes related to participation in Black student organizations will provide further evidence for why such organizations should be supported by higher education administration and faculty. Learning specifically about the soft skills African American male students gain from active participation in Black student organizations contributes to what is already established about the identity development and social benefits fostered by these student groups. Furthermore, this study utilizes qualitative methods and therefore, differs from much of the existing research on African American male college students, which has often been conducted using quantitative methods. Utilizing a qualitative approach allows the perspective of African American students to inform the study, as opposed to gaining insight on learning outcomes from numerical data. Furthermore, I sought to gain insight not only on the learning outcomes but how these outcomes were achieved through the lived experiences of the participants.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand Black male students' perspectives on the relationship between Black student organizations and soft skill development using a phenomenological study. The study was intended to add to the research about the college outcomes of African American students. Black male college students who identify as active members in Black student organizations at Rowan University were asked to provide information about their experiences within a Black student organization and what soft skills were gained from those experiences.

Assumptions and Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study is that it only had two participants. The global COVID-19 pandemic negatively influenced recruitment of participants. Therefore, the validity of the study is not as strong as it would have been if I collected data from twenty participants as originally planned. In addition, the study was only conducted at one institution. Therefore, the data may not be generalized successfully when observing occurrences at institutions with characteristics that differ from those of a large public research institution. Furthermore, this study focused on a sample of students who are involved in predominantly Black student groups. The study did not gain data from students who are not in predominantly Black student groups. Therefore, this study does not yield data from the perspectives of Black students who chose not to join such a club or organization. In addition, as a former member of a Black student organization, I possessed assumptions about the positive influence of Black student organizations to the confidence and overall education of many Black college students.

Operational Definitions

1. African American and Black: These two terms are used interchangeably in this study to describe the descendants of the African Diaspora born and living in the United States of America.
2. Male: In this study, the term male refers to people who were born as male and identify as a man.
3. Black Student Organization: A college club or organization with members that are predominantly and traditionally Black.

4. Soft Skills: Traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are intangible and determine abilities to lead and facilitate (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Some examples of soft skills are interpersonal skills, time management, and cultural awareness (Schulz, 2008).

Research Questions

The study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What soft skills do African American college students perceive to have developed or improved from participation in a Black student organization?
2. Do Black college students feel they are more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups on campus?
3. In what ways does membership in a Black student organization contribute to the overall college education of Black students?

Overview of Thesis

Chapter 2 offers a review and synthesis of literature pertaining to the obstacles faced by Black college students, soft skills, and Black student organizations. This research supports the importance of student involvement theory as it relates to Black student organizations. Furthermore, the literature provides evidence of the need to conduct further research to understand the learning process of African American college students and the influence of Black college student organizations.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach of the study. The sample population and the organizations the participants are members of are discussed. Details of the data collection and analysis are also described in this chapter.

Chapter 4 provides the data collected from the focus group. This chapter presents the information obtained in the study as it relates to the research questions.

Chapter 5 offers a review of the findings of the study. Chapter 5 also offers suggestions for how the findings can be applied to practice in higher education.

<center>**Chapter 2**</center>

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

The following is a review of literature that supports the need for research on soft skill development of Black male college students who participate in Black student organizations. The literature review offers an overview of what soft skills are and why they are important. Furthermore, the literature review offers an analysis of research studies pertaining to the challenges African American male college students face. The review then discusses what Black college student organizations are and the research supporting the benefits of such organizations. Cohesively, the reviewed research provides important background information and reinforces a need for further research pertaining to the soft skill development of African American male college students and the part that Black student organizations can play in such learning.

Understanding Soft Skills

Possessing pertinent skills can aid success in the classroom as well as in the workplace. For example, being knowledgeable about specific math equations can assist a student in a calculus class, while knowing how to work power tools is important for work on a construction site. However, competencies, classified as soft skills, are not directly related to specific tasks, but nevertheless play an important role in achievement. Heckman and Kautz (2012) defined soft skills as traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are intangible and determine abilities to lead and facilitate. Hora, Benbow and Smolarek (2018) explain that soft skills are social and attitudinal competencies that allow for communication, collaboration, and persistence. The development of soft skills is

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important for success in college as well as success in the job market (Schulz, 2008; Appleby, 2017). Employers are continuously seeking new employees who possess soft skills (Hora et. al., 2018). On its website, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) lists several soft skills, noted as competencies, which are important for career readiness. These competencies are critical thinking/problem solving, oral and written communication, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management, and global/ intercultural fluency (NACE, 2019). These skills are useful to students both in college and in the workforce. For example, a student who is the leader of a club on their college campus may need to help their club collaborate with another student organization to successfully plan an event. Such a task will require strong communication skills to create one unifying vision for the event. Furthermore, if the room the students were planning to use for the event is unavailable, critical thinking must be used to determine a new location. If the two clubs are predominantly of different ethnic groups, the event planning will run more smoothly if all members are able to use intercultural fluency. Thus, in such a scenario, which occurs frequently on college campuses, many soft skills could potentially be used and developed.

The value of higher education institutions is often measured by employability of graduates. Moreover, colleges and universities are pressured to prove to legislators that their graduates can obtain employment (Hora et. al., 2018). Unfortunately, despite the push for colleges to help their students develop marketable traits such as soft skills, some students may have less opportunities to develop such skills. Hora et. al. (2018) discusses the ways in which soft skills are developed in specific context. A person's strength with a

specific soft skill may be valued in one culture but viewed differently in a different culture. Hora et. al. (2018) uses the example of strong communication skills, including eye contact and a strong handshake, which is respected in some cultures, but inappropriate in others. Therefore, some people, who wish to become successful in predominantly White schools and workplaces in the United States, may not have had sufficient opportunities to develop soft skills to aid their success. Furthermore, there are groups of people within the United States that have had additional challenges negatively affecting their soft skill development and educational journey overall.

Challenges Faced by Black Males

African American male college students experience obstacles impacting their college success that may not impact other students the same way. One frequently observed obstacle African American male students face in their quest of a successful college experience is a concern that other people will perceive them in a negative way. Research indicates that stereotypes regarding Black men negatively affect Black male college students (Wood, 2014; Mitchell & Boyd, 2018). An example can be found in the explanation Mitchell and Boyd (2018) give regarding the adverse influence stereotypes play in the lives of their research participants. Experiencing the effects of preconceived notions caused the Black students in their study to internalize negative feelings. The research indicates that experiencing detrimental interactions influenced by stereotypes may cause African American male students to feel fear and anxiety (Mitchell & Boyd, 2018). Although it is possible for all students to be concerned about being viewed through the lens of a stereotype, the stereotypes unique to African American men are especially harmful in academic environments such as colleges and universities. For

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example, a stereotype frequently discussed in research is the concept that African

American men are less intelligent or academically talented than other people (Wood,

2014). Moreover, African American male students who have experienced stereotypes

may become less likely to engage with their campus community for fear of encountering

such poor preconceived notions. (Wood, 2014). A study conducted by J. Luke Wood

(2014) analyzes the hesitance Black males express in engaging with their professors and

peers in class. Many studies suggest faculty and staff play a major role in the academic

and personal achievement of African American male students (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn,

2017). Through his qualitative study, Wood (2014) gathered that African American men

in community colleges may be less likely to communicate with their professors because

they are avoiding the possibility of being perceived as an unintelligent Black male. The

occurrences found in Wood's study are unfortunate given the research indicating student

engagement with faculty is related to academic success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges,

& Hayek, 2006). Thus, when African American male students and their faculty fail to

engage with one another, they close an opportunity to foster skill development.

      Reluctance towards participation is not limited to student-faculty interaction.

Mitchell and Boyd (2018) discuss the reluctance of some African American male

students to engage in organizations and activities on campus in an effort to avoid being

viewed as a stereotypical Black male. In addition, negative stereotypes that influence the

perception of Black men often manifest themselves in the form of microaggressions.

Microaggressions are described as, "…brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral,

or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate

hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue et

al., 2007, p. 271). Encountering racial microaggressions multiple times can cause targeted students to feel racial battle fatigue. The term racial battle fatigue is defined by Smith (2004) as "… a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily" (Smith, 2004, p. 180). Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) report the responses of four African American male student leaders affected by microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. The leadership positions the students found themselves in were associated with fostering leadership but were difficult to maintain as Black males. Therefore, the students struggled with the intersectionality of their identities as leaders and their identities as African American males. Thus, even Black male student leaders, who actively show an interest in being involved on campus, may be less involved in organizations and activities when they perceive the threat of racial stressors (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Provided that Alexander Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory implies the more students are involved during their college experience, the more student learning and development are likely to occur, a lack of involvement resulting from stereotypes and microaggressions is detrimental to the overall success of African American males in college.

Black Student Organizations

Although there is a large amount of research pertaining to the difficulties Black male college students face, one can also find among the research ways in which these students are able to persist in the presence of racial stressors. Throughout the research, achievement is often attributed to support that was offered to the students. Observed support is offered from a variety of sources, one of which are peers (Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2017). For example, Strayhorn (2017) found that Black men sought support

from same-race peers when facing issues of racism. In addition, Harper (2007) discusses how the other members of the African American population can provide a support system for Black males in college. More specifically, Harper (2007) reviews the relationship high-achieving African American males enrolled in predominately White institutions have with their same-race-peers. In his study, participants expressed that their academic achievement was due in large part to their same-race peers who valued their achievement and provided encouragement. Therefore, there is value in African American men creating same-race peer relationships that offer support throughout the college experience (Harper, 2007).

One way in which Black male college students can obtain same-race peer support is through Black student organizations. Black student organizations serve a variety of purposes and can include, but are not limited to, academic groups, Greek organizations, religious groups, political organizations, and student governments (Guiffrida, 2003). In Harper's (2007) study, participants were leaders of predominately Black organizations, opening the pathway for much of the same-race peer support they received. These organizations provided an avenue for students to advocate for minority causes, leading to trust, respect, and ultimately the support of their same-race peers. (Harper, 2007). Moreover, Black student organizations provide opportunities for community engagement (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In Strayhorn's (2017) study, Black male students valued institutions that provided such opportunities for public service. Thus, Black student organizations may allow Black male students to connect their education to causes they are passionate about, establishing an avenue for motivation and academic achievement.

Black student organizations assist Black students from predominantly Black areas to integrate into campus communities on predominantly White campuses (Guiffrida, 2003). Furthermore, Black student organizations provide opportunities to make connections with faculty (Guiffrida, 2003). In addition, research indicates Black students often feel more comfortable expressing aspects of their ethnicity in the presence of other members of Black student organizations, as opposed to expressing themselves in front of students in mainstream campus organizations on predominantly White college campuses. Black student organizations provide safe spaces for Black students to cope with microaggressions and develop racial identity (Graham, Linders, Malat, Matthew, & Wright, 2015). Predominately Black clubs and organizations are important for the growth of Black leadership and success (Harper, 2007)

Need for Additional Research

The research on African American male college success illustrates the unique challenges facing this group of collegians. False stereotypes framing Black males as unintelligent individuals and the resulting microaggressions can cause adverse effects such as psychological issues and a lack of engagement. Although Black men face many obstacles throughout their education, support systems can be very helpful in their journey to degree completion. Research indicates that support of same-race networks of peers, can be particularly helpful to African American male college students. Therefore, maintaining predominately Black organizations on college campuses is vital.

Examination of the literature prompts further investigation. Although researchers have posited the importance of predominantly Black organizations on campus, there seems to be a lack of research pertaining to the soft skills gained through membership in

a Black student organization. The unique challenges that African American male students face may lead to a more difficult time taking advantage of opportunities to develop important soft skills. Black student organizations may provide an environment where there is enough relief from their challenges to accept opportunities to development soft skills. Therefore, the following questions surface: What soft skills do African American college students perceive to have developed or improved from participation in a Black student organization? In what ways does membership in a Black student organization contribute to the overall college education of Black students? Do Black college students feel they are more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups on campus?

These questions are proposed for further research regarding the soft skills developed by African American males in Black student organizations.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Context of Study

This study was conducted at Rowan University during the spring 2020 semester on the main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rowan University is a public doctoral research university (Fast Facts, 2018-2019). Over the last decade, the institution has outreached in communities that historically have lacked higher education opportunities. Due to this outreach, there has been a 190% increase in enrollment of underrepresented students. Underrepresented students include African American, American Indian, Asian, Latinx, and Native American students. The 2017-2018 Rowan on the Rise report indicates that 30% of the institution's enrollment comes from underrepresented groups. According to the report, 10.83% of the student population is African American. The institution is considered a predominantly White institution with 64.87% of its population identifying as White (Rowan University, 2018).

Rowan University offers several programs to aid students' academic and career development. For example, the Office of Career Advancement offers a variety of workshops, career counseling, and job search assistance to Rowan University students and alumni (Office of Career Advancement, 2019).

In addition, the program, Achieving Success through Collaboration, Engagement, and Determination (ASCEND), offers additional support and programming to students of diverse backgrounds, cultures, interests, and academic performance (Singleton, 2019).

A quick glance at Rowan University's organizations webpage will reveal that the institution is home to a multitude of student clubs and organizations. In addition, several

organizations on the Rowan University Campus are dedicated to serving the African American student population. Organizations such Black Cultural League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Student Organization of Africana Studies work to increase awareness and appreciation of African American history, as well as promote diversity and equality (Rowan University, 2019). Furthermore, there is a petitioning club, Men of Color Alliance (MOCA). The MOCA Instagram page describes the up and coming Rowan club as, "dedicated to building men of purpose and excellence through self-empowerment and initiative," (Men of Color Alliance, 2019). Rowan University is also home to several chapters of historically Black Greek organizations as well.

The purpose of this study was to collect data that provides insight into what soft skills African American male students develop through participation in predominantly Black student organizations that will assist them academically and in the workplace. More specifically, I sought to understand what experiences Black male students attribute to the development of communication skills, time-management skills, and critical thinking. A lack of research regarding the skills developed while actively participating in a Black student organization prompts the following questions:

1. What soft skills do African American college students perceive to have developed or improved from participation in a Black student organization?
2. Do Black college students feel they are more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups on campus?

3. In what ways does membership in a Black student organization contribute to the college education of Black students?

The research conducted in this study examines these questions in an attempt to add to the existing research on Black student organizations and African American male college students.

This study was facilitated using a qualitative method to investigate what soft skills are developed through participation in Black student college groups and what specific types of experiences gained through participation helped in the development of soft skills. More specifically, a phenomenological approach was used. Phenomenological studies focus on participant experiences and the meaning participants give to those experiences (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). This approach is appropriate because the purpose of the study is to understand how the experience of the students relate to the research questions. Participants engaged in a focus group discussion designed to answer the research questions.

Population and Sample

I used a criterion sample for this study, requiring all participants to meet specific criteria (McMillan, 2016). Participants of this study identify as African American or Black, are students enrolled at Rowan University, and are active members of a predominantly Black student organization. All participants were members of at least one of the following multicultural groups on campus: Black Cultural League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Student Organization of Africana Studies, MOCA, or a National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC or "Divine Nine") fraternity or sorority. Samples for qualitative research require participants to be able to

provide in-depth information about the topic being discussed (McMillan, 2016). A sufficient number of participants has been reached when information from additional participants would lead to the same results (McMillan, 2016). I planned to collect data from twenty participants, ten participating in two separate focus groups. However, I ultimately collected data from two participants. The participant criteria for this study was planned in an effort to obtain the in-depth and pertinent data to answer the research questions. The selection of this sample is purposeful because each participant has experience related to the research questions. Membership in the clubs and organizations selected suggests that potential participants had a valuable perspective and also a possible interest in the topic of the study. Before collecting data from students, I asked each potential participant to provide consent through a consent form approved by IRB.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

I conducted a qualitative study using a focus group consisting of Rowan University Black male students who have been active members of at least one predominantly Black student organization. All participants completed an IRB approved consent form before the focus group commenced. A focus group moderator guide with questions (see Appendix A) was adapted from Stansberry and Burnett (2014) and modified from Evans (2016) and Saraceno (2019) to serve as the instrument for this study.

Data Procedure

Initially, primary contact emails for predominantly Black clubs and organizations were gathered from the Rowan University website. With approval from IRB an email (see Appendix D) was sent to the organizations' primary emails inviting organization members to participate in the study and share the invitation with other members of their organization who meet the study criteria. The email also included an attached IRB approved focus group flyer invitation (see Appendix E) to participate. Before contacting participants, I received approval of this study from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The focus group had a duration of one hour. Before beginning focus group questions, I introduced myself and explained what the participants should expect from the focus group experience. Furthermore, I provided guidelines for the participants to follow to establish an environment of trust and respect. I explained to the participants that their names would not be used in the study. In addition, all participants completed a focus group participation consent form as well as an IRB form established for consent to audio record the session (see Appendix C) with the understanding that the students' privacy would be respected. Both participants introduced themselves to each other. After introductions, I began leading the group with the moderator guide. Following data collection, I utilized the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012) to decipher to information gathered. I manually transcribed the data for a thematic analysis. The information was then organized by identifying words and statements that were prominent and used to create codes. The codes were then organized into categories

based on patterns in the data. Identifying general ideas in the data, I organized that data into themes to establish conclusions.

In order to establish trustworthiness and accuracy of data collection, I used recursive analysis, reading through the transcript two to three times, looking for information that supports or opposes the generalized ideas found in the data. The study was conducted over the period of one month during the spring 2020 semester.

The data collected was held on my personal computer and voice recorder. An audio recording of the focus group was kept on the voice recorder used during data collection. After the focus group, I was the only individual with access to data. For the duration of the study data was held in a locked filing cabinet when it is not being analyzed. All data was disposed of after data analysis was complete and conclusions were established.

Chapter 4

Findings

Profile of Study

This research study used a qualitative method to investigate Black male college student perspectives on the relationship between predominantly Black student organizations and soft skill development. The data collected from this phenomenological study is intended to add to the research about the college outcomes of African American students. The study was designed to answer the following three questions.

1. What soft skills do African American college students perceive to have developed or improved from participation in a Black student organization?

2. In what ways does membership in a Black student organization contribute to the overall college education of Black students?

3. Do Black college students feel they are more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups on campus?

The participants in this research study identified as an African American or Black individual. Each student also was a member of a predominantly Black student organization at Rowan University. Initially, I aimed to collect data from participants who actively participated in a Black student organization for at least one full semester. However, due to a low interest in participating in the study, data were collected from two participants who had experience as a member in a Black student organization, regardless of the length of time. One participant was an executive board member for the club. The other participant was a general member who joined the club this semester. In addition, I

had limited time to meet with potential participants to facilitate a focus group during the spring semester and preceding winter break. Furthermore, a global pandemic for CO-VID-19 caused a demand for social distancing and rapid schedule changes. This global affair also hindered participant recruitment. Thus, data was only collected from two participants during one focus group.

Thematic Analysis

The data collected in this study was interpreted using the thematic analysis approach described by Braun and Clarke (2012). I transcribed the data by hand and reviewed it for significant and reoccurring words and phrases that related to the research questions. These words and phrases were used as codes for the analysis of the data. For example, the word communication was mentioned several times by multiple participants. Therefore, the word communication was designated as one of the codes for analysis. Figure 1 illustrates the most commonly used words and concepts relating to the research questions in the form of a word cloud. The larger the word appears in the figure, the more frequently it was used during the focus group session. Using the commonalities between the codes, the data was then organized into different themes.

Figure 1. Word cloud display of frequently occurring words and concepts.

I identified four themes and several sub-themes from the collected data. The first theme I identified was *Personal Growth and Development.* Within the theme of Personal Growth and Development, I identified the following three sub-themes:

Development of communication skills. Participants in the focus group discussion acknowledged that experience in a Black student group allows the opportunity for the development of communication skills. More specifically, the participants believed that the method and style of communication that was used in their hometowns was no longer acceptable to use when facilitating collegiate student group events. One participant said:

> Once you get to learn how to communicate with people on the streets like that, then you get to learn how to communicate with people on the Eboard or something like that, SGA, I don't know whoever you have to communicate with, then it's like you can't come like that.

The other focus group participant held a similar experience, sharing:

> When you're here for a little bit and you start to see how people talk, you can't

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talk like the hood anymore, you have to actually talk like you have some sense…I

feel like my dialogue is a lot different than when I was back home. So, I feel like

now I can hold a conversation.

As a member of a the Eboard for a Black student club on campus, one participant

shared the many opportunities for club members to develop effective communication

skills. Communication skills became mandatory for him to become a strong leader. The

participant shared:

People are going to ask you what the club is about. Even when we have certain

events or stuff like that, you have to like talk. You know what I'm saying? Present

certain slides, and you have to present it like you have some sense.

Interpersonal skill development. In addition to developing effective

communication skills, one of the participants in the focus group shared his interpersonal

skill development while conducting business for the predominantly Black student club.

He recalled that in high school he did not speak to many people, calling himself

"antisocial." Looking back on his life at home before college, he realized that many

people carried a negative demeanor as a way of life. He said the following as he reflected

on his life at home, "when you're looking at someone it's like, whatchu lookin' at? Just

always kind of like negative."

As the focus group discussion continued, he went on to say that he considers

himself friendly and speaks to people more openly. In addition, he no longer allows the

negativity of others to weigh down as heavily as it would before. In fact, he tries to

understand why people may be carrying a negative demeanor. The participant said:

I feel like, as if I won't get bothered as easily with people, because people just be miserable sometimes. Because when people are having a bad day or just having a miserable life living paycheck to paycheck that's what happens.

Development of self-confidence. Furthermore, the participants of the study both expressed the emergence of confidence that can develop from being an active member of a Black student organization. Students are able to more confidently approach prominent members of the campus community. One participant shared his personal experience with developing the confidence to speak to members of the campus community and crowds of people:

Being on the Eboard for definitely took me out of my comfort zone. And I get to like, talk to a lot more people that are like in higher ed. I guess you could say too, that I would be scared to talk to before… I guess before even being on the Eboard I wasn't really talkative. I was always friendly, but I would be friendly like one-on-one, not with a crowd of people. I would kind of get dumbstruck. But, since I got more confident in myself, I have no choice because you know, on the Eboard you have to talk.

The second theme I identified in the data is *Perceptions Regarding a Lack of Relatability Between Black and White Students*. Throughout the focus group discussion, the participants mentioned several ways in which they felt Black people and White people had different experiences from each other. Within this theme, I discovered the following four sub-themes in the data:

Conflicting feelings about race based discussions. Both participants shared their beliefs and insights into the way Black people respond to race-based discussions and the way they perceive White people to respond. One participant explained that in the beginning of each club meeting, the members of the predominantly Black club discuss how they are feeling. Some club members may discuss their struggles pertaining to race. The participant went on to say, that although the club welcomes White students to join the conversation, he does not believe White students would have the same passion for the discussion.

The other focus group participant gave his perspective on why White students may not be as eager to participate in tough conversations pertaining to race by sharing the following,

> I think that there's a lot of White guilt, where they'll feel bad. Like you said, we'll be talking about something that we're mad about, what like that their ancestors did, and they'll feel that guilt. Like they feel like they personally did it. You know what I mean, like they'll feel like, dag, I owe you something. Like I should help you out now. And they'll feel a lot of that White guilt. And that's why really, then they'll get defensive, and feel like, I don't want to be here, they hate me. I don't want to be there, they hate me, they hate me. They think I'm evil.

Differences in lived experience. During the focus group discussion, the participants shared their perspectives on the different lived experience of their White peers in comparison to that of Black college students. One participant shared,

> Some people don't have a threat of like every time they leave the house, or a cop passes by that they might get pulled over, they might get like shot, or like they

might get searched for no reason, you know? I mean because you know as minorities, we have that like on our back, you know that they don't really relate to so they might just carry themselves in a different way.

Both participants expressed that although they may interact with their White peers, they do not believe their White peers relate to many of the stressors they face daily. The participants found it easier to relate to their Black peers regarding stressors related to race.

Differences in culture. Both participants in the study perceived the culture between themselves and their White peers to be different. More specifically the participants perceived differences in the way members of predominantly White student organizations and predominantly Black student organizations spent time together. One participant, who had experience in both predominantly Black and predominately White student organizations expressed the following,

I feel the main reason why you might not feel comfortable, why like a lot of people don't feel comfortable around Caucasians is because the difference in culture.

The same participant then went on to say, "The predominantly White fraternities are more like raves like going crazy, while D9s is more relaxed like vibin".

The study participants shared that events associated with predominantly White Greek student organizations tended to be hosted throughout the week. Whereas, Black student organizations tended to host their events on the weekends. The participants also stated that the activities and the energy of the events differed between the two different

kinds of Greek organizations. The participants believed that the difference in culture between Black student organizations and White organizations may contribute to Black students' hesitance to join predominantly White student organizations.

Differences in motivation. The participants of this study also perceived major differences between Black students' and White students' motivation to succeed in college. Throughout the focus group, both participants agreed that struggles pertaining poverty, injustice, and a lack of college education within family tend to motivate Black students to work hard in college. Furthermore, the participants perceived that White students did not gain motivation from the same experiences. Instead, the participants perceived their White peers to be more well off financially. In addition, the participants perceived their White peers to be more likely to have parents that had a college education. Therefore, they did not observe their White peers drawing motivation from hardships as they did. One participant stated,

> I can't explain it. Like a lot of the things we worry, like, a lot of Black people they worry about like am I going to be successful? You know what I mean? They'll think like I don't want to end up like my cousin. I don't want to end up like my uncle. Where a lot of White people like, everyone in their family is rich. You feel what I'm saying? They can get pulled over by the cops and get away with it. Like I've seen it with my own eyes. When your hanging around more Black people, then it's like they'll be more cautious and moving with like a focus.

The other focus group participant then contributed to the conversation by saying, "Their view on life is different. We're in survival mode, while they're in carefree mode." Both participants agreed that it may be easier for Black students to develop soft skills in a

predominantly Black student organization before developing soft skills in a predominantly White student organization because they felt Black students would have more of a collective focus due to the hardships that motivate them. During the focus group one of the participants said,

It's like we want to make sure like nah, school's coming first. Like because you know, you have close family members that didn't go to school that are in poverty that are living in the projects like, you know, like my grandmother is living in the projects right now and I'm lucky to even be here. While they're like, every one of my family members have gone to college, I'm straight, this is just the normal. I guess you could say we're appreciating the opportunity more, so moving with more incentive.

Thus, the participants illustrated from their statements that Black students may be striving to succeed in college to survive and escape struggles that they have experienced. Black students may also feel it is difficult to develop amongst their White peers because they do not relate to the same struggles and thus are not motivated to succeed in the same way.

The third pattern I identified as a recurring concept in the data was the theme of *Belonging*. One of the participants shared his thoughts on the importance of a person feeling they belong somewhere. When speaking about his own experience with joining a Black student organization at a predominantly White university, he said,

It definitely gives you a sense of belonging. I feel like to do something big on any type of platform you first need that sense of belonging. You know what I mean?

That's like a basic essential needed in order to thrive. You feel like you're

accepted there. You're able to thrive.

Moreover, the participant also believed that once a student gained a sense of

belonging within the university, they would build the confidence to reach out to people

they might not have been as comfortable with before. The participant said the following,

Then, [name of Black student club] sets that platform and now they might feel

more confident reaching out to other people that might be out of their comfort

zone that they might not talk to usually, whether they might be Caucasian or not.

The last theme I identified was *Experience as Black Member of Predominantly*

White Student Group. Although both participants gave explanations for why Black

student clubs and organizations are beneficial, one of the participants also shared a

positive experience he had with a predominantly White student organization. He shared

that his hometown was composed of a population of minoritized people. When he left

home for college, he made the choice to gain a different kind of experience from what he

was use to by joining a predominantly White student organization. Although the

participant was glad, he joined the predominantly White student organization, he

struggled with negative feedback from his Black peers. He shared that some of his Black

friends did not like that he joined the predominantly White organization. Furthermore, the

participant also struggled with the thought of not fitting into the organization he was

joining. However, ultimately, he believed it was a good experience. The participant

shared the following,

Yeah so, it was my way of like branching out kind of. You know what I mean? I definitely had many uncomfortable moments. Like would they accept me? Would I fit in? But, I definitely think they did like fully embrace me. I'm glad I took the risk.

The participants experience suggests that Black students may encounter uncomfortable situations when they join predominantly White student groups. However, if they are willing to persevere through the discomfort, they may gain a valuable and enjoyable experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This study utilized qualitative methods to capture data from the perspective of Black male college students regarding the soft skills they develop as a member of a predominantly Black college club or organization. I collected data from a focus group she facilitated in the spring 2020 semester. There were two study participants. One participant identified as half Black and half White. The other participant identified as Black. Both participants were sophomore students at Rowan University. One participant is an executive board member for a Black student organization at Rowan University. The other participant joined the same Black student organization in the beginning of the spring 2020 semester. I used thematic analysis to analyze the data collected from the focus group.

Discussion

The framework of this study is based in the concept that Black male college students at predominantly White institutions may have a stronger opportunity for success when supported by their same-race peers. The American Council on Education (2019) has documented African American male college students have the highest attrition rate in comparison to other college students. Soft skills such as the ability to communicate can aid success in college (Appleby, 2017; Schulz, 2008). Although success fostering soft skills can be gained through being engaged with one's college community, Black male college students may be less likely to be involved in their college communities because of the fear of microaggressions and being stereotyped (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Wood,

2014). However, when Black male college students are supported by their same race peers, they may find relief from racial stressors and have a stronger opportunity to become successful in their college journey (Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2017). The research questions guiding this study are designed to gain more data about the potential benefits of Black student organizations and ways Black male college students have developed success fostering soft skills while enrolled in a predominantly White institution. The research questions guiding this study and the respective answers derived from the collected data are as follows:

1. What soft skills do African American college students perceive to have developed or improved from participation in a Black student organization? The researcher identified the reoccurrence of two soft skills throughout the data collected in the focus group. The most prominent of the two soft skills was communication. The participant who held leadership responsibility for a predominantly Black student club shared his experience developing the ability to effectively communicate information about the club. He also explained the importance of being able to deliver presentations and speak to potential club members efficiently. African American males who find it difficult to speak in front of groups of people may develop a comfort with public speaking while facilitating events for a Black student club or organization in college. In addition, the data showed that members of Black student organizations may also develop interpersonal skills while being an active member of a Black student group. More specifically, the data showed that being an active member of a Black student group in college can assist Black male students with better understanding why people they interact

with may be feeling sad or angry and how to connect with them to facilitate a positive experience.

2. In what ways does membership in a Black student organization contribute to the overall college education of Black students? The data showed that membership in a Black student organization can add to the personal growth and development of Black male college students in a variety of ways. For example, the opportunities to socialize that Black student groups offer help to make its members more confident when speaking in front of others. Because members become more confident in their communication, they are more likely to connect with faculty and staff in their college community. By connecting to professionals on their campus, the students become more likely to become successful in their collegiate endeavors. As a potential vessel for communication skill development, interpersonal development, and networking opportunities, predominantly Black student clubs and organizations can contribute to the overall leadership development of Black male college students and members in general. Furthermore, the data indicates that Black student groups contribute to the overall college education of Black college students by providing a sense of belonging. On a predominantly White college campus, Black college students may feel detached from most of their peers. However, having a group of students with similar ethnic backgrounds allows them to feel they can be themselves and relate to others around them. In short, Black student groups offer a way for many Black students to feel comfortable in an environment that would otherwise be uncomfortable. In addition to bringing people with similar ethnic backgrounds together, Black student groups may also bring together people with similar motivators to succeed. Black student groups can potentially bring together a group of

students that have a collective goal to thrive in college in order to survive the hardships of poverty and social injustice.

3. Do Black college students feel they are more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups on campus? The participants of the study shared that they did believe Black college students would likely be more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups. Their reasoning was primarily a stronger comfort level they believed Black students would feel within a Black student group versus other groups on campus. The events Black student groups and organizations host tend to differ in style from those of other clubs and organizations, indicating differences in culture that could make students feel uncomfortable. The study participants also shared their perception of White students not relating to the struggles with social justice and poverty that they share with their Black peers. Thus, Black students may be more open to join a Black student group, and therefore more likely to learn soft skills in a Black student group.

However, one of the participants did indicate that Black college students can learn soft skills in any club or organization on campus, regardless of racial composition. In fact, some Black students may seek membership in predominantly White student groups to gain new experiences. The participant's contribution to the focus group discussion suggested that joining a predominantly White organization can foster some uncomfortable circumstances but can ultimately be a positive addition to the overall college experience for a Black student.

Conclusions

Predominantly Black student clubs and organizations provide opportunities for Black male college students to develop effective communication skills. In addition, these clubs and organizations also provide the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills as well. Furthermore, Black males who are active in Black student groups in college may gain a sense of comfort in their environment that fosters the confidence needed to establish meaningful connections with professionals in the campus community. Moreover, Black male college students may gain a sense of belonging from being around relatable peers from similar ethnic backgrounds. Black male college students may also feel a sense of collective motivation to succeed in college when involved in predominantly Black student organizations.

It is likely that Black male college students can develop various soft skills in various clubs and organizations with members of variance races and ethnic backgrounds. In fact, membership in a student group that is predominantly white can provide meaningful experiences for Black male students during their college experience. However, it is worth noting that many Black students may find it difficult to accept opportunities for soft skill development amongst their White peers if they do not feel a sense of belonging at their institution. Therefore, predominantly Black student groups serve an important purpose of providing a network where Black students can connect with students who share similar racially influenced experiences.

Recommendations for Practice

The data for this study suggests that some students perceive a lack of relatability between Black college students and White college students. Student affairs practitioners

may want to provide opportunities for students of different races to acknowledge differences, but also highlight common experiences that students may not realize they share. Making these connections will allow students to have a larger network of students they relate to on campus, thus potentially creating a stronger sense of comfort and belonging on their college campus.

This study also suggests that student affairs practitioners should support predominantly Black student clubs and organizations as well as other opportunities for students to connect with students they can relate to, as such student groups can provide a sense of belonging and a network fostering collective motivation for success. Moreover, practitioners in the field can provide opportunities for members of Black student organizations to hone soft skills. Such opportunities can be offered in a variety of ways. For example, student affairs professionals may offer students the opportunity to speak at a public event or create an opportunity to plan events while being offered professional guidance.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher of this study recommends further research on soft skill development by collecting data from female members of predominately Black student clubs and organizations. I also recommend data collection on the difference between soft skill development in Black clubs versus traditionally Black Greek organizations. Lastly, I recommend further research be conducted at other types of institutions to supplement the data in this study which was gathered from a predominantly White public research university.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Moderator's Guide with Questions

1. *Researcher will provide an introduction and overview of focus group study (5 minutes)*

Hello. My name is Shanice Glover and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Administration program here at Rowan University. Thank you for taking part in today's conversation about soft skills gained through participation in Black student organizations. Based on definitions by Heckman & Kautz (2012) and Schulz (2018), soft skills are traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are intangible and determine abilities to lead and facilitate. Some examples of soft skills are interpersonal skills, time management, and cultural awareness.

Please take this fun opportunity to voice your thoughts and feelings honestly about your experiences. The purpose of the focus group today is to communicate your perceptions of the skills you have gained from being an active member of a predominantly Black student organization here at Rowan University.

2. *Group Guidelines (2 minutes)*

We are going to go over group guidelines to help you better understand the focus group process. This will be an open discussion and each student will have the opportunity to actively voice your thoughts and feelings honestly. There are no wrong or right answers.

You will notice there is a recorder sitting in the back of the room taking notes and I will be facilitating the discussion. We went to protect your confidentiality and will not be recording names. As we ask each question one at a time, I ask each of you to be mindful when each of you is speaking and wait until each person is finished so we are being respectful of their response and are able to hear everyone's thoughts.

Does everyone agree with the group guidelines? Are there any questions before we begin?

3. *Audio Recording (2 minutes)*

The session today will be audio recorded and only the researcher will have access to the tapes. The recording will only be used for data analysis of this study. Only group results will be shared, there will not be individual responses shared. At times throughout the study, direct quotations may be utilized to address a particular theme mentioned during the discussion.

4. Introduction of Participants (5 minutes)

We are going to go around in a circle and have everyone introduce themselves by sharing your first name, major, and one fun fact you would like to share about yourself.

5. *Discussion Questions (40 minutes)*

Research question 1:

1. What soft skills do African American college students perceive to have developed or improved from participation in a Black student organization?

   <u>Focus group questions:</u>

   1) Do you believe you have developed any soft skills as a result of participating in a Black student organization at Rowan University?
   2) Do you believe you have improved upon existing soft skills you previously possessed as a result of being an active member of a Black student organization at Rowan University?
   Research Question 2:

2. Do Black college students feel they are more open to opportunities to develop soft skills through participation in a Black student organization as opposed to other student groups on campus?

   <u>Focus Group Questions:</u>

   1) Do you think you are more open to participating in events in which you can develop soft skills when the events are offered through a Black student organization as opposed to other organizations on campus?
   2) Have you developed soft skills through participation in student organizations on campus that are not predominantly Black?
   Research Question 3:

3. In what ways does membership in a Black student organization contribute to the overall college education of Black students?

   <u>Focus Group Questions:</u>

   1) In what ways has active membership in a Black student organization influenced your college education?
   2) Do you think membership in a Black student organization has contributed to your preparation for the workplace after college?

6. *Conclusion (10 minutes)*
   Thank you to you all for answering the focus group questions. The information you provided will be useful for the completion of this study. Each of you will have the opportunity to review the summary notes and make any suggestions before the thesis is finalized. Please make sure to check your emails to go over what we recorded and your thoughts. Does anyone have any questions moving forward? Before everyone leaves, I am going to ask you if you can complete a student demographic survey.

Moderator Guide has been adapted from Stansberry & Burnett (2014) and has been modified from Evans (2016) and Saraceno (2019).

Adult Consent Form for Social and Behavioral Research

TITLE OF STUDY: Influence of Black Student Organizations on Black Male College
Student Academic Performance
Principal Investigator: Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D.

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This consent form is part of an
informed consent process for a research study and it will provide key information that
will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study.

Please carefully read the key information provided in questions 1-9 and 14 below. The
purpose behind those questions is to provide clear information about the purpose of the
study, study specific information about what will happen in the course of the study, what
are the anticipated risks and benefits, and what alternatives are available to you if you do
not wish to participate in this research study.

The study team will explain the study to you and they will answer any question you
might have before volunteering to take part in this study. It is important that you take
your time to make your decision. You may take this consent form with you to ask a
family member or anyone else before agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask
the study team and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study,
you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or
by signing this consent form.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study,
you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The Principal Investigator, Drew Tinnin, Ed.D, or another member of the study team will
also be asked to sign this informed consent.

1. **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to understand Black male students' perspectives on the relationship between Black student organizations and soft skill development. The study is meant to add to the research about the college outcomes of African American students and the influence of Black student organizations.

2. **Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

African American male college students who attend Rowan University and have been a member of a predominantly Black club or organization at Rowan University for at least one semester have been invited to participate in this study. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have identified as an African American male college student and therefore may be able to provide information related to the purpose of the study.

3. **What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

The study will be conducted at Rowan University. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with 9 other participants. The focus groups will be conducted in a meeting room in the Chamberlain Student Center. The focus group as a whole will be asked approximately six questions. You will be asked to participate in the focus group discussion centered around answering the questions.

4. **Who may take part in this research study? And who may not?**

Rowan University students who identify as Black male college students and who have been members of predominantly Black student organizations for at least one semester are able to take part in the study. People who do not identify as African American, male, are not Rowan University students, or have not been a member of a predominantly Black student organization for at least one semester may not participate in the study.

5. **How long will the study take and where will the research study be conducted?**

The study will be conducted at Rowan University. The focus groups will be conducted in a meeting room in the Chamberlain Student Center. The focus group will take approximately one hour to complete.

6. **How many visits may take to complete the study?**

It will only take one visit/meeting to complete this study.

7. **What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**
There are minimal risks for participants of this study.

8. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

There may not be any direct benefit. However, this study may benefit participants by offering an opportunity to support research for Black student organizations.

Participant identifiers will not be retained for this study. Participant names will be changed to pseudonyms before data analysis.

9. What are the alternatives if you do not wish to participate in the study?

Your alternative is not to participate in the study.

10. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?

Twenty students will be enrolled in this study. There will be two separate focus groups with 10 different students participating in each. If additional information is needed, a third focus group of 10 more students will be developed. You will be asked to participate in one focus group.

11. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

12. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

There will be no cost to you to participate in this study.

13. Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

14. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information.
After each focus group, the co-investigator will be the only individual with access to data. For the duration of the study, data will be held in a locked filing cabinet.

15. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr. Drew Tinnin at tinnin@rowan.edu.

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

16. Who can you call if you have any questions?
If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

        Dr. Drew Tinnin
        Educational Services and Leadership
        856-256-4909

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

        Office of Research Compliance
        (856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

17. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?
You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read the entire information about the research study, research risks, benefits and the alternatives, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed.

All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.

Subject Name:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:
To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:

Signature: _____   Date_____

Appendix C

Audio Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Drew Tinnin, Ed. D and Shanice Glover. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (sound) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team.

The recording(s) may possibly include participant names. Names will not be used for the analysis or presentation of the information from the study. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of names when transcribing and analyzing the information from the recording(s).

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet without a code to subjects' identity and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

Your signature on this form grants the investigators named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject Name:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix D

Focus Group Invitation Email

Dear Student Organization Member,

My name is Shanice Glover and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Administration program here at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. I am sending this email as an invitation to participate in a focus group as part of my graduate studies research project. The focus group will take place on _____. The focus group discussion will be centered around the soft skills that Black male students develop through their participation in predominantly Black student organizations.

The focus group will last for approximately one hour and will take place in the Campbell Library at Rowan University. No names will be used in this study and information will remain confidential. As a participant, you do not have to respond to questions you feel uncomfortable answering and you may withdraw participation in the focus group at any time.

The purpose of the focus group is to gain insight into the experience of Black male college students' perception of the soft skills they develop through participation in Black student organizations. Your contribution to this study will be greatly appreciated.

If you would like to take part in the focus group on _____ please reply back to this email confirming your interest. If another member of the same student organization would like to participate, please forward them this email with the attached IRB approved flyer.

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB # Pro2019000774
Thesis advisor: Dr. Drew Tinnin, tinnin@rowan.edu, 856-256-4909

Thank you for your consideration,

Shanice Glover

Focus Group Participation Invitation Flyer

Opportunity to Participate in Research Study

Rowan University Students who identify as African American males and have participated in a predominantly Black student organization for at least one semester are invited to share their experiences during a focus group centered around soft skill development.

Tuesday, February 4th from 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Campbell Library, Meeting Room 228

Interested students should email:

Shanice Glover: glover44@students.rowan.edu

Or

Dr. Drew Tinnin: tinnin@rowan.edu

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB # Pro2019000774