ABSTRACT

PATTERSON, ANTHONY FITZGERALD. Leisure, Engagement, and Social Integration of Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male College Students. (Under the direction of Dr. Karla A. Henderson.)

Personal, social, and cultural issues influence any student’s ability to succeed in the college environment, but these issues are more pronounced for African American males and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds attending predominantly White institutions (PWI). As a result, the graduation rates of African American males and students from low SES backgrounds are among the lowest in the United States. These young men often report lacking a sense of belonging or connection to the university community that lead to their early departure from college. Since leisure and campus engagement can play positive and negative roles in an individual’s college experience, investigating their influence related to social integration might facilitate a better understanding of the personal, social, and cultural issues these students face on today’s college campuses.

The purpose of this study is to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceive leisure and the role that campus engagement plays in their social integration at a PWI. To achieve this purpose, I examine students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement opportunities, how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts play in their social integration at one PWI. Research was conducted from a postpositivist paradigm where I sought to discover and explain realities through an inductive process with 17 research participants.

Two theoretical perspectives ground the purpose of this study: Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model and social constructivism. Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological
structure of the educational environment examines how individuals develop through interactions with their immediate surroundings and larger societal factors. Social constructivism aligns with conducting research from a postpositivist paradigm and allows for assumptions about reality and the formation of knowledge from participants’ perspectives.

Purposive sampling was used to select the 17 young men for this study. Participants were recruited from one PWI. Taking a grounded theory approach to my research, I collected data through in-depth individual interviews. An interpretive approach to data collection and analysis was employed using coding, memo-writing, and theorizing. This research uncovered roles that leisure and campus engagement play in the college experiences of these young men. Data analysis led to theorizing about three aspects of leisure: leisure spaces foster connections, leisure facilitates the negotiation of cultural dissonance, and leisure creates a sense of purpose. Even though participants sometimes lacked a sense of belonging as part of the larger campus community and leisure contributed to their distress, young men were able to develop meaningful relationships, mitigate stress, and gain other social benefits through leisure and campus engagement.

Applications to professional practices provide intentional approaches for college administrators and future research suggestions are offered to explore these issues further. Although leisure and campus engagement were found to reflect and reinforce negative larger societal issues, they also enabled the creation of social networks and provided space for cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions that contributed to social integration.
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Leisure, Engagement, and Social Integration of Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male College Students

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management

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DEDICATION

To my spouse and best friend. Without your love, support, patience, and encouragement this would not have been possible. To our children, never lose the playfulness you have today.
BIOGRAPHY

Anthony Patterson was born in Greensboro, North Carolina where he participated in community recreation programs such as football, little league baseball, and track. While these early teams and high school athletics were fun, formative, and rewarding his most memorable experiences were just playing with friends and being active. He received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and during his four years as an undergraduate student worked in campus recreation as well as serving as a minority mentor and resident advisor. He also volunteer coached and served as a sports official in Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation. These experiences led him to pursue his Master of Science in Recreation Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After finishing his coursework he took a full-time position as the assistant manager at the UNC Faculty and Staff Recreation Association. Anthony knew his passion was to work with college students so when the opportunity arose he took a position as a program advisor with the Carolina Union Activities Board. After several years of working in student life and enrollment management at two universities, Anthony decided to pursue his Ph.D. at North Carolina State University in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management to research how leisure and student life experiences influence degree attainment as well as individual growth and development. Anthony studied under the mentorship of Dr. Karla A. Henderson because of their shared interests in leisure behavior and his desire to grow and develop as a qualitative researcher.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Colleges and universities provide opportunities for students who choose to pursue higher education, but personal, social, and cultural issues can negatively influence a student’s ability to succeed. These issues are more pronounced for underrepresented students on today’s college and university campuses (Kim, Park, & Koo, 2015; Strayhorn, 2013; White & Lowenthal, 2011). For example, African American male undergraduates attend and graduate from four-year colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.) at lower rates than their White male and African American female peers (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015; Kim, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). According to Kim, in 2009 31.5% of White males and 21.9% of African American females between 25 and 29 years of age held bachelor’s degrees compared to 13.9% of African American males. Kim’s report also noted that in 2008 only 3% of all bachelor’s degrees in U.S. higher education were awarded to African American males. These statistics are more staggering when examining the overall race and gender characteristics of U.S. higher education. In 2008, the total Fall enrollment was 19,102,814 students with only 836,940, or slightly over 4%, of these students identifying as African American and male (Kim, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

If an African American male undergraduate is also from a low socioeconomic status (SES) background, then challenges pursuing and completing a college degree are compounded. Generally U.S. students from low SES backgrounds enroll in college and earn degrees at a much lower rate than their more affluent peers, regardless of race. “In 2013 individuals from the highest income families were eight times more likely than individuals from low-income families to obtain a bachelor’s degree by age 24 (77% vs. 9%)” according
to a Pell Institute and University of Pennsylvania report (2015, p. 33). The Pell Institute and University of Pennsylvania research report also found that in 2012, 89% of individuals from the top income quartile enrolled in college immediately following high school compared to 62% of high school graduates from the lowest income quartile. These data are evidence that students from low SES backgrounds might face a host of obstacles (e.g., cultural issues, work and family obligations, institutionalized classism) that impede their transition to and persistence during college (Berg, 2010; Kezar, 2011; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001; Walpole, 2008).

When examining literature, recent studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2015; Lascher & Offenstein, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; Strayhorn & DaVita, 2010) have addressed issues related to race, gender, social class, campus climate, and student engagement. Researchers such as Costen, Waller, and Wozencroft (2013), Harper (2009), Harper and Nichols (2008), Palmer, Maramba, and Holmes (2012), and Spruill, Hirt, and Mo (2014) explored persistence and student engagement among African American males. While these studies demonstrated many of the challenges and barriers these young men face, they did not explore the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status and how these realities might influence persistence among this student population.

Additionally, research (e.g., Costen et al., 2013; Duncan, 2003; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Lindsey, 2012; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010) exists specifically related to the campus experience of African American males, but there are gaps in this literature. Harper and Nichols, for example, discussed the racial heterogeneity among African American male undergraduates and identified the need for more research within this racial population. They
stated “the vast majority of research treats Black collegians as a monolithic or homogeneous group and unique variations within the race are often overlooked” (Harper & Nichols, p. 199). Strayhorn and DaVita examined the campus engagement of African American males identifying differences based on institutional type but did not explore the underlying causes of these differences. Lindsey investigated the perceived benefits of participating in campus recreation with African American students at an historically Black college (HBCU), and Costen et al. explored the social connectedness and attachment African American students had with an academic program at a predominantly White institution (PWI).

While important research, each of these studies primarily examines or explores race and ethnicity with some discussion of gender related to the college experience of their subjects. The cultural and societal issues associated with being from a low SES background are not thoroughly investigated leaving a gap in this line of research. Specifically examining African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) might shed light on how other identities combined with race might influence these students’ college experiences. In addition to factors related to race and gender that might negatively influence an African American male’s college experience, exploring socioeconomic status combined with institutional factors could illuminate challenges and hindrances they face to earning their degree.

Even though students from low SES backgrounds have been on campuses for over three decades (Pell Institute, 2015; Walpole, 2003), in-depth and continual research on this population has not been conducted related to their leisure, campus engagement, and social integration. Terenzini et al. (2001) demonstrated this fact when they examined campus
engagement as part of a larger study. They completed a comprehensive report of students from low SES backgrounds in U.S. higher education and addressed gaps that existed regarding research on this student population. Among their findings, they observed that students from low SES backgrounds were less engaged with their peers, made fewer friends, joined fewer student organizations, and made less use of the student union when compared to more affluent peers. Additionally, students from low SES backgrounds were less likely to earn a degree at a four-year institution than their higher SES peers. However, Terenzini et al. did not discuss the roles that race, ethnicity, or gender played in the experiences of college students from low SES backgrounds.

Scant research specifically addresses the complex situations African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds face at PWIs. These young men encounter societal and cultural stigmas from peers (e.g., stereotyping, racism, discrimination, classism) based solely on their physical appearance and must balance developing their racial identity as well as ideas and expectations of masculinity while confronting decades of institutionalized privilege and racism in predominantly White environments. Research has found that myriad factors influence student persistence ranging from college readiness to campus climate (Kim et al., 2015; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007; Palmer et al., 2012). However, researchers also understand through large scale surveys and data analysis that leisure and campus engagement can have positive influences for most college students (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1993). More exploration of these concepts from a student’s perspective is needed to better understand their role in the college experience.
Leisure experiences and campus engagement might help African American males from low SES backgrounds form meaningful connections to peers, faculty, staff, and the institution while playing a mitigating role to the stressors and societal issues they face. These types of experiences might also serve as a means for young men to better realize the cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of college (Artinger et al., 2006; Kuh, 1993; Lindsey, 2012; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Sivan, 2003). However, time spent on passive leisure (e.g., watching television, hanging out with friends) has been found to be a negative predictor of GPA (George, Dixon, Stansal, Gelb, & Pheri, 2008). Similarly, some casual leisure experiences (e.g., attending parties) might lead to negative or traumatic life events during college such as binge drinking and drug use (Shinew & Parry, 2005). Given this range of possibilities, exploring the leisure behaviors, campus engagement, and social development of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds is beneficial to understanding their social integration to the college environment.

My study explored how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role campus engagement played in their social integration at a large, public, PWI. Although African American males from low SES backgrounds attend many types of campuses in U.S. higher education, large, public, PWIs generally have resources (e.g., professional staff, student unions/centers, campus recreation facilities) that potentially allow staff and faculty to directly address the needs of this population. Additionally, these types of institutions typically promote a variety of student engagement opportunities (e.g., student organizations, service learning, leadership development, campus recreation) that complement their academic programs.
Statement of Problem

The influence of college has been studied for decades, with researchers presenting findings about academic and social integration leading to why students do not become engaged on campus or persist in higher education (e.g., Astin, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Harper, 2009; Palmer et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; Tinto, 1993). This research has laid the foundation to address issues related to social integration. However, studies have not focused specifically on African American males from low SES backgrounds at PWIs. One reason, cited by Paulsen and St. John (2002) and Walpole (2003) was the lack of representation of students from low SES backgrounds on campuses. Further, how the leisure experiences and campus engagement of these students support social integration has not been widely examined.

For this reason, I explored alternative methodological approaches used in previous research on college student persistence. Social integration is important for any student trying to navigate the college experience. Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) stated, “integration is used to explain the extent to which students come to share the attitudes and beliefs of their peers and faculty and the extent to which students adhere to the structural rules and requirements of the institution” (p. 8). Therefore, social integration is learning and adjusting to the social culture, values, and processes of a campus community. College retention researchers have argued that quantitative measures of social integration (i.e., how many hours spent on certain activities or the number of events attended) have failed to identify the social and cultural complexities encountered by underrepresented students on college and university campuses (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Researchers recommend that
future studies investigating the social integration of underrepresented students include qualitative methods that allow a definition of social integration to emerge from the students’ perspectives (Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Responding to this call, Harper (2008) explored the campus experiences of African American males, and Palmer et al. (2012) investigated the campus experiences of underrepresented (i.e., ethnic minorities) at PWIs. Each of these studies took a qualitative approach. Respectively, their research found that high-achieving African American males and underrepresented students in general benefitted from campus engagement. These findings, when combined with the quantitative approaches of Strayhorn and DeVita (2010), who examined student engagement among African American males and Duncan (2003) who investigated help seeking behaviors in African American male undergraduates, demonstrate the importance of campus engagement. However, more in-depth research is needed regarding personal, social, and cultural issues that influence the social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds.

When examining students from low SES backgrounds, Walpole (2003) found that 21% of students stated they visited a professor’s home occasionally compared to 35% of students from high SES backgrounds. Similarly 48% of students from low SES backgrounds reported spending no time in student clubs or groups compared to 34% of students from high SES backgrounds. She also found that 34% of students from low SES backgrounds worked 16 or more hours per week compared to 24% of students from high SES backgrounds. These differences between low and high SES students are important as they can guide research that further explores the leisure behaviors, campus engagement, and social development of
students from low SES backgrounds and the role these concepts may play in their social development and integration.

Institutions are not only responsible for the intellectual development of students but they should also facilitate personal and social growth (Kezar, 2005; 2011). Supporting social integration through campus engagement might bolster personal, social, and cultural development. Playing an active role in all students’ experience, supporting an inclusive campus environment, and facilitating social integration through campus engagement may enhance students’ mental and emotional capacities (Astin, 1999; Iso-Ahola, 1989; Tinto, 1993). These positive outcomes could help students be more productive academically and reduce negative behaviors and emotions such as feelings of not belonging. Astin proposed, “The more involved students are in academic and extracurricular activities the more development they will experience” (p. 6).

Leisure experiences and campus engagement such as joining student organizations, participating in campus recreation programs, and completing service learning programs are linked to social integration for college students (Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007; Lindsey, 2012; Lindsey, Sessoms, & Willis, 2009; Tinto, 1993). However the influence of these types of experiences and other leisure and campus engagement on African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds needs further analysis. Taking an in-depth look at leisure attitudes and behaviors of these young men in the campus context of one PWI may offer alternative approaches for researchers and educators to better address their needs.
**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role campus engagement played in their social integration at a predominantly White institution (PWI). To achieve this purpose I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement (e.g., socializing with peers, joining student organizations, using campus recreation resources), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration into a predominantly White university community. The following questions guided my research:

1. What perceptions do African American males from low SES backgrounds have related to leisure and campus engagement?

2. What influence do leisure and campus engagement have, if any, on the college experiences of these men?

3. What factors facilitate or hinder students’ leisure and campus engagement experiences?

4. How do leisure and campus engagement influence social integration?

I conducted this research from a postpositivist paradigm where researchers seek to discover and explain realities through an inductive process (Charmaz, 2006; Ryan, 2006). Taking a grounded theory approach to my research, I collected data through in-depth individual interviews with African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds on the campus of one PWI.
Theoretical Perspectives

I employed two theoretical perspectives to ground the purpose of my study: an ecological model of human development and social constructivism. These theoretical frameworks guided my research design, methodology, and interpretation. Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological structure of the educational perspective examines how individuals develop through interactions with their immediate surroundings and the roles larger societal factors play in the development process. Social constructivism makes certain assumptions about reality and the formation of knowledge that align with conducting research from a postpositivist approach (Rogoff, 1990).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model.

An ecological model of human development was an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because of the intertwined personal, social, cultural, and institutional factors that play roles in the social development and social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) model presents layered personal, social, and environmental systems for conducting research in education. He stated that education research should take place in realistic settings, focus on the relationships and interactions between the learner and environments, and use an appropriate strategy to examine those relationships and interactions. Bronfenbrenner also indicated that a learner’s environment should be “conceived [of] topologically as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next” (p. 5). He described these structures as micro-systems, meso-systems, exo-systems, and macro-systems.
Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) model, depicted in chapter 2 (Figure 2.2), guided my study by providing a framework to examine the behaviors and perceptions of participants. The model offered a perspective on how students interacted with the social aspects of the campus community related to personal development and social integration. Although a student’s abilities and beliefs play a significant role in their social integration to campus, the environmental systems outlined by Bronfenbrenner appear important. Specifically, my study explores interactions within the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems that influence the leisure and campus engagement of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. The micro-system refers to the immediate relationships and settings a student encounters (e.g., peers, family, faculty). The meso-system encompasses the intersection of major aspects of the students’ micro-system (e.g., friend groups, student organizations), and the exo-system consist of social structures that surround a student (e.g., the institution, University offices, the Black community). This “…ecological perspective considers how the individual develops in interaction with the immediate environment” (Atzaba-Poria, Pike, & Deater-Deckard, 2004, p. 707). Bronfenbrenner’s framework was used to provide a systematic view of how African American males from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and campus engagement in relation to other social factors such as interaction with peers and the institutional climate that can influence their college experience.

**Social constructivism.**

Additionally, social constructivism provided a theoretical perspective to my data analysis, interpretation, and theorizing. Understanding how my participants were influenced by and learned from their leisure and campus engagement experiences in their words
undergirded this research. Social issues and interactions influence how individuals and groups see reality and employing a theoretical perspective rooted in social constructivism allowed for the exploration and interpretation of these differences with my participants (Charmaz, 2006; McNamee & Hosking, 2012).

Researchers and theorists who emphasize the value of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding might identify as social constructivists (Kim, 2001; Kukla, 2000; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). According to social constructivism, reality is developed through human interactions and is the result of activity by society, or members of a group. Pritchard and Woollard (2010) stated, “Reality is not an entity waiting to be discovered…[it] is not something that can already exist in a form arrived at by one individual because each individual will construct their reality which will not necessarily coincide with the reality of others” (p. 6). A social constructivist perspective of reality aligns with addressing research problems from a postpositivist paradigm because it allows for researchers to examine situations from an individualized and contextualized viewpoint while simultaneously taking a holistic approach to a research topic, which can lead to social change.

I used Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model and social constructivism to frame and discuss leisure and campus engagement from the perspective of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Examining leisure and campus engagement through an ecological model allowed me to investigate what role these concepts might play in facilitating social integration among these young men.
Significance of Study

Exploring the social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds contributes to both the leisure and student development fields of study. Little research exists in either field specifically regarding this population. A few notable exceptions in leisure (e.g., Aguila, Sicilia-Camacho, & Roberts, 2012; Costen et al., 2013; Lindsey, 2012; Lindsey et al., 2009; Hollands, 2002; Roberts, 1997) and in college student development (Harper, 2009; Harper & Nichol, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Langhout et al., 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Palmer et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; Walpole, 2008) address underrepresented students or students from low SES backgrounds and the issues associated with their adjustment to campus. However, the leisure behaviors and experiences of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds have not been thoroughly investigated in the leisure literature. Similarly, student development studies have historically focused on the ability, race, ethnicity, and gender of students, or other classifications of students (e.g., student-athletes) when explaining how students socially integrate to campus, not directly exploring the compounding role socioeconomic status might play.

The leisure and student development fields have called for more research related to underrepresented or marginalized populations in society and on college campuses (e.g., Floyd, 2007; Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, 2014; Stodolska, Shinew, Floyd, & Walker, 2014). In both fields, research directly engaging underrepresented or marginalized individuals and communities has been recommended to gather better data and to more fully understand the realities faced by these populations with the goal of addressing persistent social problems (Floyd, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).
Specifically, underrepresented students need closer examination because colleges and universities present academic and social environments that reflect larger societal inequalities, making their path to college degree attainment potentially more difficult than majority students (Kim, 2011; Pell Institute, 2015). Being in the college environment also affords new leisure possibilities that may be positive or negative depending on how they are negotiated. Therefore colleges and universities should consider the social issues underrepresented students’ face, as well as their leisure preferences, in order to provide support. Currently at PWIs, a lack of administrative and managerial attention to the leisure needs of African American males from low SES backgrounds may further exacerbate the challenges these young men face in their ability to socially integrate.

Understanding leisure and campus engagement related to African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds may positively contribute to the experiences of all college students. Therefore, I explored how these young men perceived the availability and accessibility of leisure and campus engagement at one PWI as well as the role that campus engagement played in supporting their social integration. By examining the attitudes and behaviors related to leisure of these young men, a better understanding of the role(s) that leisure and campus engagement played in aspects of personal, social, and cultural growth that contributed to social integration was gained. These findings and discussions led to theorizing about leisure, the college experience, campus engagement, and social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds.

My research builds on the scholarship about leisure behaviors and experiences related to race, gender, and social class, as well as stress and coping pertaining to recreation and
leisure. Exploring contemporary issues and encounters that influence perceptions and behaviors related to leisure with African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds is valuable and can lead to a deeper understanding of leisure in the lives of marginalized populations. Specifically, this research contributed to the recreation and leisure literature that goes beyond examining dichotomies and explores the cumulative and compounding influences that individuals with multiple marginalized identities must navigate in leisure spaces. Additionally, this research builds on recreation and leisure literature based in educational settings that examines how leisure reinforces societal inequalities such as White privilege and discrimination (Rose & Paisley, 2012), and also how leisure benefits students personally and socially in a variety of ways (Artinger et al., 2006; Lindsey, 2012; Sivan, 2003).

**Defining Key Terms**

For the purposes of this study I defined four key terms used throughout the remainder of this paper: *campus engagement, cultural dissonance, leisure*, and *socioeconomic status*.

*Campus engagement:* Participation in campus based opportunities that supplement the academic and/or social growth of students. This type of involvement (e.g., campus recreation, leadership development programs, student organizations, service learning, volunteering) often provides students the space to use what is being learned in the classroom or outside of the classroom to increase comprehension of academic concepts and/or personal development (Feldman, Aper, & Meredith, 2011; Huang & Chang, 2004).

*Cultural dissonance:* If individuals lose familiar social cues and symbols and are uncomfortable in their social environment because their cultural expectations are incongruent
with cultural realities, they may experience cultural dissonance (Bailey, 2013; Sato, Fisette, & Walton, 2013). This dissonance can result in re-examining one’s identity, sense of place, and sense of purpose “in an effort to regain psychological equilibrium” (Bailey, 2013 p. 245).

**Leisure:** Mannell and Kleiber (1997) stated that leisure can be defined as involvement with certain activities (e.g., reading, playing sports), use of time (e.g., free time, non-work time), or a state of mind or experience (e.g., perceived freedom, enjoyment) and can be examined from an external (researcher defined) or internal (participant defined) perspective. An internal vantage point of leisure was used in this study.

**Socioeconomic Status:** According to Terenzini et al. (2001), socioeconomic status (SES) is based on measures of parental education, parental occupation, and family income. SES takes into account the concepts of wealth (as opposed to income) as well as social and cultural capital. Additionally, Oakes and Rossi (2003) discussed the concept as unequal access to desired resources and services. Participants in this study self-identified as being from a low SES background. Recruitment materials and strategies were developed to target students for inclusion in this study (see Chapter 3) and participants were asked questions to ascertain their family structure, parents’ or guardians’ income level, and pre-college experiences (Mueller & Parcel, 1981; White, 1982).

**Researcher Positionality**

Theorizing about African American male undergraduates from a low SES background was important to me because I was such a student almost 20 years ago. Therefore, the positionality (i.e., experiences, education, and knowledge) that I brought to this topic is important to understand. As a doctoral candidate and former college administrator with 15
years of higher education experience, I have worked at two large, four-year, public PWIs in enrollment management and Student Affairs units. Working directly with many underrepresented students from the college exploration phase of their lives while still in high school through graduation has raised questions for me about their experience.

I was a college student from a low SES background at a large PWI. Fortunately, I found opportunities through campus recreation and Housing and Residential Education that provided financial, co-curricular, and social support. I had just enough self-confidence combined with the right push from a peer mentor to get involved with intramural sports. This involvement helped me make connections with other students. These connections led to my formation of a supportive social network and social integration with the campus community. The nudge I received from my peer mentor, who was part of a university program, combined with the availability and accessibility of campus programs, shaped my path during my undergraduate and graduate school experiences.

While pursuing my master’s degree, I studied the role that campus recreation plays in the lives, and specifically the identity development, of African American college students (Patterson, 2001). My further academic education combined with my graduate assistantship (i.e., managing a bowling and game room in a college union) and research helped me understand the role that leisure can play for any student related to social integration.

As a professional in enrollment management, I coordinated a University initiative for students from low SES backgrounds that included financial support and academic, co-curricular, and social integration support. During this experience I learned firsthand of the challenges and struggles that students from low SES backgrounds face when trying to
navigate the college experience. In many cases not having a perceived or real social support network combined with not knowing the cultural norms on a campus (e.g., professor expectations, unspoken rules, ways students can advocate for themselves) presented continual challenges for some of my students. Some students displayed resiliency and were able to adjust, grow, and persist to graduation; others did not.

Understanding my personal student experience while seeing students today facing similar issues and obstacles inspired and motivated me to pursue this important area of research. Some educators posit that African American males from low SES backgrounds are not prepared academically and the majority of institutional resources should be focused on addressing academic shortcomings. Other educators believe the issue of persistence is more complex, involving personal as well as societal issues, and believe that researchers and administrators should examine leisure spaces, campus engagement, and the campus environment. I believe these issues and obstacles are more complex than academic preparedness and intellectual ability. Therefore, I sought to understand the campus experiences of African American males from low SES backgrounds from their perspective.

**Delimitations of Study**

To uncover the complexities of African American male students from low SES backgrounds, I collected data from students about their experiences. I delimited this research to one university. Undergraduate participants who met the criteria of being from a low SES background as well as identifying as African American and male were recruited through university co-curricular programs and student organizations. Students completed in-depth interviews and were asked to share their perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and
campus engagement at this PWI. Additionally, one focus group was conducted to verify, clarify, and provide more depth to data collected during the interviews and to further inform emerging themes. Participants’ behaviors, thoughts, and experiences were explored, analyzed, and discussed in the context of this campus setting.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a PWI. To achieve this purpose I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement (e.g., socializing with peers, joining student organizations, using campus recreation resources), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration into university community. My research provided data and interpretations that explored how leisure and campus engagement influenced the college experiences of African American males from low SES backgrounds. A paucity of research from the student’s perspective exists around how to understand the experiences of this population. Researchers and educators need better information to develop supportive strategies for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds in order to increase their persistence and graduation rates.

Personal and cultural challenges exist for this population that leisure and campus engagement helped mitigate. Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model provided an overarching framework to explore how leisure and campus engagement related to social integration as well as how social structures might constrain leisure involvement and inhibit
campus engagement. Social constructivism provided a framework to understand and define students’ experiences from their perspectives. My analysis of how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived a campus environment on their terms allowed for theorizing about concepts that might inform practice and future research.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a predominantly White institution (PWI). To achieve this purpose I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement (e.g., socializing with peers, joining student organizations, using campus recreation resources), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration into the university community. This chapter provides an overview of issues influencing the persistence of African American male and low SES college students as well as a discussion of leisure in the lives of racial and ethnic minorities.

African American male undergraduates continue to lag behind their White counterparts and African American females in degree attainment. At four-year, public colleges and universities the average six-year graduation rate for all students in 2013 was 57.6% (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015, U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The six year graduation rate for White males and African American females was 57.5% and 44.1%, respectively. About 35% of African American males received their undergraduate degrees at public, four-year colleges and universities within six years of enrolling (Chronicle of Higher Education, U.S. Department of Education). If this problem can be minimized, significant broader societal issues related to race and socioeconomic status could be ameliorated. For instance, according to the U.S. Department of Education the percentage of African Americans pursuing college immediately after graduating from high school was 69.5% in
2009, but declined to 56.4% in 2012 compared to 71.3% and 65.7% of White high school graduates over the same time period.

Many societal, economic, and personal factors contribute to these statistics, but improving the graduation rates of those students who are admitted to college might have a positive influence on society as people see that attaining a college degree is possible. Examining the problem of social integration during college for this population from a leisure perspective might provide new insight to this persistent problem. Therefore, this chapter also discusses leisure in college that includes personal and social benefits of leisure related to fostering personal growth, minimizing stress, and establishing relationships. Race, ethnicity, and leisure as well as how leisure reproduces and provides a space for resistance to certain societal issues related to the college experience are also discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of theoretical perspectives employed to address this research.

**College Experiences of African American Males and Low SES Students**

Many researchers have written about aspects of student life and the campus environment that influence social integration and how students progress in college (e.g., Artinger et al., 2006; Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Harper, 2009; Lindsey, 2012; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Strayhorn, 2013; Tinto, 1993). Based on this research, leisure and campus engagement can benefit students in several ways such as facilitating social adaptation, developing relationships, and supporting personal and social growth. However, these benefits may not be attained consistently across all student populations at today’s colleges and universities because of reproduced and reinforced larger societal issues on campuses. Research has demonstrated that personal, cultural, and social challenges exist for African
American males and low SES students when pursuing their college degree (Berg, 2010; Harper, 2008, 2009; Kezar, 2011; Kim et al., 2015; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; 2013; Walpole, 2008). Some African American males from low SES backgrounds navigate the college experience smoothly and emerge leading the lives they had hoped for while others struggle, but still succeed. Unfortunately, many do not graduate because they either fail to maintain academic eligibility or leave school for other reasons (Terenzini et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Walpole, 2008).

To better understand why some students from underrepresented groups persist and succeed and why others do not, my study examined one student population. Identifying salient factors that influenced persistence for one student population might benefit all students. Since African American male undergraduates have one of the lowest six-year graduation rates at four-year public colleges and universities, my study focused on this population. Although previous research (e.g., Kim, 2011; Spruill et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2008) existed regarding African American male undergraduates, researchers have called for investigating challenges faced by these young men based on within group differences due to the heterogeneity that exists (Harper, 2008; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Harper stated African American male undergraduates cannot be treated as one homogeneous or monolithic group because of their varied backgrounds and individual attributes (e.g., socioeconomic status, familial background, geographic communities of origin). African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds may face more complex personal, social, cultural, and financial challenges than their higher SES African American peers because of the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and social status.
These young men must confront a variety of social issues based on their race, ethnicity, gender, and social class in order to succeed in college. Understanding stages of psychosocial development of college students in general as well as racial identity development related to African Americans provided insight into the challenges faced by these young men at PWIs. Chickering and Reisser (1993), building on research from Chickering (1969), discussed seven vectors that provide a framework to examine the psychosocial development of college students. Chickering's seven vectors stated that college students move through stages of development during their time on campus that closely align with their cognitive growth. These progressive stages are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. These stages of development are fluid but Chickering and Reisser stated that early stages such as developing competence and moving through autonomy towards independence provide a foundation for students that enables progression to the latter stages. For instance, as Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, and Barnes (2005) explain:

*Autonomy* refers to the task of developing self-sufficiency, taking responsibility for one's personal goals, and being less swayed by the opinions of others. *Intimacy*, a component of mature interpersonal relationships, referred to the shift away from dependence on others toward an interdependent relationship between equal partners in a friendship or romantic relationship. (p.462)

Progressing through these stages is critical to the development of any student but in addition to Chickering’s vectors, racial identity development and sophistication is also important for
African American male college students (Cross, 1995; Cross, Strauss, & Fhagen-Smith, 1999; Stephens & Ford, 1997).

Cross et al. (1999) discussed multiple ways Black identity can manifest in one’s daily life and that an identity profile defines an individual’s Blackness, and not a single trait. Five key identity operations are conceptualized to analyze Black identity: buffering, bonding, bridging, codeswitching, and individualism. An individual can have differing amounts of understanding and sophistication related to each of these identity operations depending on personal and social influences (Cross, 1995; Stephens & Ford, 1997). Cross et al. stated, “one person’s identity development may accentuate growth and refinement of operations 1, 3, and 5, whereas another person’s pathway [might] highlight operations 2, 4, and 5” (p. 31).

Buffering refers to attitudes and behaviors that provide psychological protection from everyday encounters with racism and discrimination. Bonding addresses the degree to which meaning and support are derived from Black people and Black culture. Bridging and codeswitching have similarities referring to competencies that allow a person to immerse himself or herself in an experience without having to suppress one’s Blackness. Codeswitching is when a person temporarily adjusts to cultural norms to maximize the comfort level of a group such as in the workplace or at school. Lastly, individualism is when an individual is race-neutral and expresses his or her own personality.

The Black identity profile of an African American male can play a meaningful role in his college experience as well as his approach to leisure and campus engagement. Leisure experiences might also support growth and sophistication related to the five key identity operations and overall Black identity development (Patterson, 2001). For instance if a young
man does not have well developed attitudes and feelings to protect himself against racism (i.e., buffering), combined with a high degree of bonding and low degree of codeswitching, then he might not interact with predominantly White or mainstream cultures on campus. However, if a young man’s profile demonstrates high degrees of bridging, codeswitching, and individualism then he is more likely to be able to navigate a variety of campus communities.

Comprehending racial identity sophistication provides additional context when examining the experiences of African American males from low SES backgrounds. These young men must confront social and psychological issues at a PWI to progress through Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) seven vectors while simultaneously nurturing and/or expanding their racial identity. Research has demonstrated that African American males face significant social challenges when they choose to attend a predominantly White institution. These challenges could be mitigated or exacerbated depending on where a young man is developmentally related to Chickering and Reisser’s seven vectors and Cross’s Black identity profile.

Social challenges such as developing a sense of belonging, (Palmer et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2008) confronting racism, and overcoming the stigma of low expectations (Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2013) have each been documented. Strayhorn (2008) investigated a sense of belonging using a quantitative approach when he examined data from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) of over 231 Black males and 300 White males related to their campus experiences. While his study concluded that cross-racial interactions increased the likelihood that African American males will develop a higher sense of
belonging, the challenges these young men face in finding these interactions at PWIs is still notable. Similarly, Palmer et al.’s (2012) qualitative study of racial minority students at a PWI found that while several of their participants benefited from meaningful interactions with White faculty members and being involved with campus activities, they still did not develop a strong sense of belonging on campus. However, participants did state that same-race peer support contributed positively to their success and persistence.

Finding and maintaining peer support is important for any college student but might be more important for African American males attending PWIs because of the social and cultural challenges. Harper (2009) described the racism and low expectations that African American males continue to encounter and grapple with on college campuses today, particularly at many PWIs. Harper presented a counter-narrative based on data from the National Black Male College Achievement Study, a large multi-campus qualitative research project. While the study was conducted on 42 campuses with 219 participants, Harper focused on interviews of 143 African American males at 30 PWIs where he found these young men experienced racism, micro-aggressions, and stereotyping on a regular basis.

Through his counter-narrative, Harper discussed an overlooked population of African American males on campus: high-achieving student leaders who consistently confronted racism while experiencing success on campus. Among Harper’s findings was the reality that these young men had employed a “multifaceted navigational strategy including engagement in student organizations, meaningful interactions with supportive same-race peers, and strategic publicity of their educational achievements to White persons who possess deficit views of Black men” (pp. 708-709). They were able to successfully navigate the college
experience at PWIs. This research built on Harper and Nichols (2008) study that all African American males are not alike on campuses and called for future studies to balance the negative and deficient images of African American males in higher education with research focused on achievement oriented pursuits for this campus population.

Many of the issues discussed by Harper’s (2009) participants related directly and indirectly to the overall campus climate at PWIs. Strayhorn (2013) examined Black and White students’ perceptions of campus climate to further investigate the role these factors might play in departure decisions for students. He surveyed 391 Black and White undergraduate students at a large, research-extensive PWI. While Strayhorn’s findings confirmed previous research that African American students found the campus climate “chilly” and unwelcoming compared to White students, he did advance the literature on student departure. Specifically, Strayhorn empirically found that the “perceptions of a campus climate as cold and uncaring played a significant role in determining Black students’ intentions to leave college as almost one-fourth of the variance in persistence intentions is explained by this factor” (p. 126). Intuitively this finding is understandable but Strayhorn’s analysis provided empirical research on today’s African American student and the pivotal role campus climate played in their persistence decision.

Similarly, researchers examining the persistence decisions and college experience of students from low SES backgrounds typically put the obstacles they face into four categories. Berg (2010) described these as: personal, familial, cultural, and structural (see Figure 2.1). Experiences in each of these domains might alter or end a student’s path to graduation. The
cumulative effects of experiences in all of these domains might also have detrimental impacts on an underrepresented student’s college success (Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009).

![Diagram of Four Domains]

**Figure 2.1.** Four domains of experiences that impact low socioeconomic status students’ ability to persist while in college. Adapted from Berg as cited by Ashgate (2010, p. 65).

Personal experiences and intercultural effort are important pieces to a successful college experience for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds and are difficult for campus administrators to influence (Dowd, Sawatzky, & Korn, 2011;
Kuh, 1993; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Specifically for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds, the concept of intercultural effort might play a role in student’s academic and social behaviors on a daily basis. Dowd et al. (2011) discussed the lack of intercultural effort measurement in national student engagement survey tools. College and universities across the country use these surveys to evaluate their student populations and develop policies. However, Dowd et al. noted that while these instruments routinely depict underrepresented students (e.g., African American males) as not engaged at PWIs, the scales do not account for the additional psychological effort these students have to exert to get involved. For example, underrepresented students at PWIs must confront racism, micro-aggressions, and low expectations of their abilities to begin campus engagement. If a young man is also from a low SES background, issues of classism and cultural dissonance can impose more psychological exertion.

The concept of intercultural effort might be further compounded when family and cultural backgrounds are considered. The influence from a student’s family can be positive by providing encouragement and support to engage both academically and socially in the college experience. However, family influence could also have a negative impact with family-oriented decision making (i.e., what is best for the family as opposed to the student), questioning of ability to be successful, and pressuring a young man in a way that does not allow him to engage fully in the college experience (Berg, 2010; Reason, 2009).

Just as familial obligations and experiences influence individuals, so do cultural values and perceived expectations. Cultural capital is defined as knowledge and familiarity with the cultural practices of the dominant or mainstream culture (Langhout et al., 2007;
Stalker, 2011). Berg (2010) noted that, “Beyond the immediate family, a primary aspect of adjustment problems for low-income students in college is social fit” (p. 71). For many students from low SES backgrounds the college environment is a completely different experience than their high school or community at home. They often are the first in their family to attend college so understandably they might feel disconnected or out of touch with campus life. Additionally, these students might have different attitudes from middle-class or higher SES students regarding other areas of student life (e.g., seeking help, importance of leisure, value of social connections).

Understanding the relationship between a student’s attitudes, cultural upbringing, and campus culture is important to analyzing their approach to college life. What African American males from low SES backgrounds value from a cultural perspective as well as their real and perceived cultural expectations might shed light on their college experiences. Culture relates to habitus that can impact perceptions of and decisions about leisure and campus engagement. Habitus is described as a person’s values, attitudes, beliefs, and actions that are rooted in their family, community and other social environments such as their educational system (Bourdieu, 1977; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds may have different sets of attitudes, perceptions of the campus environment, and expectations for their college experience than peers from more economically secure backgrounds. The difference in habitus between African American males from low SES backgrounds and their middle or high SES peers, depending on how significant, might make adjusting to campus and achieving positive social integration difficult (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008).
Structural experiences and systemic issues such as poverty and classism also influence the experiences of low SES students (Kim et al., 2015; Langhout et al., 2007). Growing up in poverty may mean students have fewer opportunities and privileges in preparation for college. Although some of the issues created by structural experiences (e.g., lack of self-efficacy, less social and cultural capital) might manifest themselves in the personal or cultural dimensions, some researchers would argue that larger societal forces are often at play (Berg, 2010; Rojek, 2005; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2008). Depending on the campus setting, African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds could face campus environmental issues related to classism. Classism is the act of othering those from a different social class in a way that devalues, excludes, or separates them from the dominant culture (Langhout et al., 2007). Langhout et al. examined three types of classism: institutional (e.g., structural policies and procedures), interpersonal (e.g., behaviors that are dismissive), and citational (e.g., perpetuating stereotypes and disparaging stories). They found that students of color and those from low SES backgrounds experienced each type of classism at higher rates than their higher SES and White peers.

Classism may also contribute to how African American males from low SES backgrounds develop a sense of belonging as well as their approach to cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions. Ostrove and Long (2007) contributed to the discussion of underrepresented students experiencing unwelcoming environments when they explored sense of belonging. Their research found that social class was related to a low sense of belonging for students from low SES backgrounds. Ostrove and Long’s findings were consistent with research conducted by Walpole (2003, 2008) around undergraduates from
low SES backgrounds that might further substantiate that these students feel they do not belong in some campus environments. In addition to working more, studying less, and being less involved, Walpole found that students from low SES backgrounds attending four-colleges and universities possess different cultural capital and habits than their higher SES peers. Each of these factors might influence a student’s sense of belong as well as affect the potential for cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions.

The amount of cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions an African American male from a low SES background experiences is also related to classism and plays an important role in their social adaption to college. Kim et al. (2015) and Palmer et al. (2012) discussed the lack of cross-racial and cross-cultural interaction, self-segregation, and marginalization underrepresented students experienced due to social class and race. Palmer et al., found that underrepresented students made connections with other same-race students through campus engagement but did not feel connected to the larger campus community and desired more cross-racial and cross-cultural interaction.

Interaction with peers and faculty was examined by Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) in a study about African American male student engagement. The researchers found African American males in general may have less interaction with good undergraduate educational practices (e.g., student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, and participation in active learning) based on the institution they attend. In their study of African American male student engagement, young men attending liberal arts colleges were less likely than those at master’s institutions and research universities to engage with these practices. Strayhorn and DeVita discussed that “cooperation among students may be less for Black men at liberal arts
colleges due to the cultural incongruity that likely exists for Black men on such campuses, which may not be true on other campuses (p. 97).” While these researchers primarily discussed institutional type (e.g., liberal arts, master’s, research) related to African American males engaging with good undergraduate educational practices, other institutional factors such as diversity and institutional classism should be more closely examined as well to determine their influence.

Personal, social, and institutional factors influence the college experience of African American males from low SES backgrounds. These young men have multiple and layered dimensions to their lives and their college experience that influence and constrain the decisions they make related to leisure and campus engagement (Berg, 2010; Harper, 2009; Kim et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). Similarly, a PWI campus environment is defined by various systems that influence the college experience both positively and negatively for these students (Kezar, 2011; Strayhorn, 2013; Walpole, 2008). However, Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) tried to cut through the complexities of understanding social integration when they stated, “To put it simply, successful integration results in retention and unsuccessful integration contributes to departure” (p. 416). Although this statement oversimplifies the situation for many African American males from low SES backgrounds, many administrators and educators may hold this view.

Retention, however, in and of itself does not necessarily result in social integration. Understanding the influence leisure can have on the daily lives of African American males from low SES backgrounds might play a positive influence on retention that could support social integration. This support could lead to a more enriching and meaningful college
experience for these young men. Leisure can play a mitigating role to many of the stressors and societal issues facing this population and serve as a means for African American males from low SES backgrounds to better realize the psychological and cognitive benefits of the college experience (Kuh, 1993; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Sivan, 2003). Nevertheless, leisure can also reflect and reinforce broader societal values that can have positive and negative influences on an individual’s college experience (Gobster, 2002; Shaw, 2001; Stodolska, 2007; Stodolska et al., 2014). Therefore, examining leisure and campus engagement in college setting with African American males from low SES backgrounds is critical to understanding the challenges originating from leisure as well as how individuals and groups might use leisure to buffer or navigate negative encounters.

**Leisure related to College Experiences**

Students have the opportunity to make significant gains during college related to personal (e.g., growth in cognitive skills, increased self-esteem, developing self-efficacy) as well as social development (e.g., meaningful interpersonal relationships, creating social networks) (Blanco & Robinett, 2014; Keen & Hall, 2009; Lindsey, 2012; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2008) and leisure can play a pivotal role in this personal and social growth. Personal and social growth benefits students during college and campuses need to guard against any student not having an equal chance at attaining them. Research has shown that African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at PWIs in many cases may not realize this growth and may not maximize their college experience due to personal, cultural, and structural issues they face (Berg, 2010; Harper, 2009; Spruill et al., 2014; Walpole, 2008). Exploring leisure as part of their campus
experience may provide new perspectives for academic support services (e.g., advising, peer mentoring) and student affairs units (e.g., campus recreation, student unions, housing and residential services) on college campuses to address this problem.

Leisure researchers have ascertained individual and group benefits resulting from leisure such as fostering personal growth, minimizing stress, and developing relationships (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003; Qian, Yarnal, & Almeida, 2014). Race and ethnicity have also been examined to understand how leisure and leisure spaces create, reinforce, and perpetuate larger societal issues (Floyd, 2007; Floyd & Mowatt, 2014; Gobster, 2002), while also providing space for resistance and support (Shaw, 2001; 2005; Stodolska, 2007; Stodolska et al., 2014). Understanding these aspects of leisure may provide different perspectives to social aspects of the college experience for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds.

Lindsey (2012) and Lindsey et al. (2009) investigate the campus experiences of African American college students related to campus recreation programs and facilities. Lindsey (2012) assessed the benefits and satisfaction of participating in campus recreation among African American students and found that overall students attributed a growth in communication skills, respect for others, sense of accomplishment, leadership skills, and self-confidence due to campus recreational sports and programs. Lindsey et al. (2009) examined the impact of campus recreation facilities and programs on the recruitment and retention of African American college students and found that 60% of men cited the importance of recreational sports in their college attendance and 68% of men felt the availability of recreational sports was important to their continued enrollment. Each of these
studies added to the leisure literature related to African Americans, and specifically African American college students, and offered information to explore leisure and campus engagement with African American males from low SES backgrounds. However, these studies were conducted at a four-year private historically Black college and did not address socioeconomic status.

Regardless of the campus setting, these positive benefits and outcomes from leisure are important for any student transitioning to a new environment. College places different demands on students’ time and they must learn how to manage new found freedoms. Additionally internal and external pressures might exist for college students to be academically successful and socially fit on campus. Lacking a sense of belonging, experiencing cultural incongruence, and confronting classism (Berg, 2010; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2013; Walpole, 2008) might further add to psychological stress for these students. Experiencing a growth in self-esteem and self-actualization through leisure, as Mannell and Kleiber (1997) suggests might mitigate some of the stress associated with the social pressures and challenges of attending a PWI.

**Stress and coping.**

While this psychological growth and development, which occur over time, are important aspect of the college experience, leisure can also provide a more immediate influence for African American males from low SES backgrounds by increasing both positive physical and mental well-being (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000; Qian et al., 2014). College is a stressful experience in many ways, and leisure is a means to manage and rebound from stress. Buffering and coping literature explains how
leisure experiences can mitigate stress and facilitate the development of skills to support psychological concepts such as resiliency. Leisure involvement bolsters buffering and coping skills by being an outlet for social support and developing characteristics of positive self-determination (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Iso-Ahola (1989) stated, “One mechanism for coping with the constant demands of college life for any student is through participation in recreational activities, which have been shown to play an important role in helping students balance and improve the quality of their lives” (p. 38). Researchers have found that individuals can use leisure to better cope with experiences resulting in positive psychological and social development (e.g., Coleman, 1993; Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000).

Coleman (1993) and Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) examined leisure as a phenomenon related to mental and physical health as well as providing social support. Specifically, Coleman took a quantitative approach and examined how perceived social support, leisure disposition, and general health related to coping with stress. He found that perceived leisure freedom did buffer negative life events and assisted with coping, leading to a conclusion that individuals were not positioned well to cope with stressful events if they felt their leisure choices were constrained. Other results indicated that leisure was primarily a buffer only during periods of heightened stress and that a minimal level of social leisure support was more beneficial than no support. Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) extended the research of Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) by proposing a conceptual model of a hierarchical relationship among various dimensions of leisure and coping with stress. Their model was developed based on a line of leisure research that examined the role of leisure in buffering stress as well as assisting individuals in rebounding from and coping with negative life events.
(e.g., Coleman, 1993; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Iwasaki & Smale, 1998; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

These earlier studies laid the foundation for current research in this area: Qian et al. (2014) examined how leisure time can moderate daily stress; Blanco and Barnett (2014) studied the effects of depression in college students related to leisure; and Blanco and Robinett (2014) researched the intersectionality of masculinity and stress among college-aged males. Qian et al. added to the leisure and stress literature by focusing on the internal decisions and processes people use to manage stress in their daily lives. Their findings support leisure time as a positive coping mechanism, and partially support the counteractive mediation effects of leisure. In other words, “people actively mobilize their coping resources to counter the negative effects of daily stressors rather than passively experiencing the psychological costs” (Qian et al., p.118). This research is a positive contribution to the literature but may not translate to African American male undergraduates, since Qian et al.’s sample was 92% White and 56% female with ages ranging from 33 to 84. However these researchers did raise questions about how to examine individuals in high stress situations, which might be applicable to African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds on predominantly White college campuses.

While Qian et al. (2014) did not target college students, Blanco and Barnett’s (2014) study on depression specifically examined this population. Blanco and Barnett noted the difficult transition all college students navigate, positing they are a high-risk population for depression. Their sample of 974 students from three Midwestern universities was mostly male (61%) and White (70.6%). Ten percent of the overall sample identified as being African
American and the researchers did not report the number of self-identified African American males in the sample related to socioeconomic status. However, Blanco and Barnett’s finding that even mild bouts of depression can negatively influence leisure experiences may be important related to African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at PWIs. Given the social environmental factors these students faced, mild depression experienced by a young man could lead to a decrease in leisure and campus engagement, which might lead to more depression. A student could be caught in an unfortunate cycle that is difficult to break. Additionally, African American males have historically not sought psychological help (Duncan, 2003) and if the coping mechanism of leisure is reduced from their daily experience while stress continues, then a cumulative effect may result in negative academic and social outcomes.

In an effort to investigate other aspects of stress and coping, Blanco and Robinett (2014) explored the role that masculinity plays in stress and leisure with college-aged males. These researchers stated, “given that leisure and stress affect identity development and personal health, they are critical arenas that merit further examination” (p. 363). Their study took a qualitative approach to explore how masculinity influenced college-aged men’s understandings and behaviors related to negotiating stress and how masculinity influenced their leisure activity choices. Blanco and Robinett conducted in-depth interviews with 10 college-aged males from various backgrounds. However, only two participants self-identified as African American and their socioeconomic status was not reported or discussed. The researchers found that men felt masculinity meant getting the job done, stress was part of getting the job done, and leisure helped them escape from stress. Blanco and Robinett
discussed the intersectionality of masculinity and stress as well as masculinity and leisure activities as stress negotiation. They concluded by suggesting that exploring the intersectionality of masculinity, stress, and leisure might be more beneficial than examining the dualities of masculinity and stress or masculinity and leisure. Although few African American males were in this sample, these findings may relate specifically to this campus population and their college experience.

How college-aged males and females manage or cope with stress is related to their potential to be academically successful (Misra & McKean, 2000). Misra and McKean also discussed academic stress among college students related to leisure satisfaction. They sought to document stress and anxiety in students as well as to address the paucity of research about the interrelationship of academic stress with anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction. Similarly, George et al. (2008) examined the success of college students using time diaries and other methods to clarify and build on previous studies related to college success. George et al. defined success as a combination of cumulative grade point average (GPA) and personal success, which included subjective measures related to goal achievement. The subjective measures were assessed by the participant and a selected friend. The objective measure of GPA was then weighted equally with the subjective measure, called personal success, to determine total success.

Misra and McKean (2000) and George et al. (2008) determined that time management was one of the most important concepts related to college success. In addition, Misra and McKean also found that “physiological benefits from leisure activities significantly reduced academic stressors (conflict, change, and frustration) and reactions to
stress (behavioral and cognitive) among college students” (p. 45). George et al. concluded that having clear goals was significant to a student’s success and indicated that “hanging out with friends,” (p. 714) defined as passive leisure, was negatively associated with academic success. However, George et al. also concluded that having a strong social/support network was integral to success. Both analyses were approached from a positivist perspective with little exploration of leisure behavior or students’ perceptions of campus engagement opportunities. Additionally, analyses of race, ethnicity, or gender related to these topics was not conducted in either study. While good time management and having clear goals most likely are beneficial for any college student, exploring the underlying cultural and societal factors, specifically the influence of leisure, that contribute to the development of these traits for African American males from low SES backgrounds is critical to understanding the barriers to their persistence.

**Race and ethnicity.**

Research and scholarly discourse about race and ethnicity is present in the leisure literature. This discourse contributes to exploring the role of leisure and campus engagement related to the college experience of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Floyd, (1998, 2007) Hylton, (2005) Shinew, Floyd, and Parry, (2004) and Stodolska et al. (2014) all discussed, analyzed, and critiqued race, ethnicity, and leisure in society as well as within leisure studies. Researchers have discussed discrimination in a leisure context (Sharaievska, Stodolska, and Floyd, 2014), ethnic enclosures and social networks related to leisure (Stodolska, 2007), and demonstrated how leisure can facilitate the
resistance to negative societal issues such as discrimination and traditional views of gender roles (Shaw, 2001; 2005).

Floyd (2007) discussed how leisure literature has progressed related to race and ethnicity and questioned whether the field is positioned to meet current and future challenges. In his analysis since the 1970s, leisure research about race and ethnicity appears to have gone through three phases, and the field is entering a fourth. According to Floyd, leisure research in this area has moved from a focus on concerns about racial inequality in the 1970s to studies with more theoretical and methodological sophistication and analysis of racial sub-populations in the 1980s and 1990s, and then to research in the 2000s that regularly made multiethnic comparisons among diverse groups including White ethnic groups.

He suggests we are entering a fourth wave of research because our society is in the midst of significant demographic, social, cultural, and political change. The observations made in Floyd’s (2007) analysis are relevant to exploring leisure and campus engagement among African American males from low SES backgrounds. For example, Floyd observed the need for research that addresses:

…how leisure practices create, reinforce, and perpetuate racist practices in contemporary society. And [how] our understandings of race and leisure contribute to the formation of social policies designed to foster constructive engagement and goodwill among different racial and ethnic communities. (pp. 249-250)

Similarly, Hylton (2005) discussed the continued importance of race in leisure research, calling for “sport and leisure theorists and policymakers to centralize ‘race,’ racism, and race equality in everyday considerations” (p. 83). Specifically exploring leisure and the
college experiences of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds adds to the leisure literature. Uncovering the challenges African American males face regarding leisure, campus engagement, and social integration and articulating these challenges to researchers and practitioners contributes to the line of research suggested by Floyd (2007) and Hylton (2005). College communities are microcosms of our larger society and examining leisure experiences in this context can shed light on issues of classism, racism, stereotyping, and ethnic enclosures as well as education policy and institutionalized classism and racism.

Research by Floyd and Shinew (1999), Gobster (2002), and Shinew et al. (2004), while not focused on college students, is applicable to exploring the leisure experiences of low SES African American males. Floyd and Shinew investigated the importance of interracial contact (i.e., cross-cultural interactions) in explaining differences in leisure activity preferences among African Americans and Whites. A notable result of their analysis was the tentative finding that socioeconomic status (SES) might not account for the convergence or divergence in leisure patterns of White and African American individuals. Floyd and Shinew stated, “interracial contact enhances the probability of social interactions of individuals across racial lines and increases exposure to outgroup norms and shared frames of reference” (p. 379). These factors could be similar to the campus environment at PWIs where students theoretically have access to many of the same free or low cost leisure and recreational opportunities that potentially minimize the influence of SES.

Similarly, exploring the leisure needs of racial and ethnic minorities in a larger context might provide insight to leisure and campus engagement experiences on today’s
campuses. In an effort to understand the needs and interests of racial and ethnic minorities in urban parks, Gobster (2002) conducted research about the outdoor patterns and preferences of 898 Chicago area park users (217 Black, 210 Latino, 182 Asian, and 289 White). Findings included information about access to parks and participation preferences as well as social interactions and discrimination. All of these findings are translatable to leisure and campus engagement at a large PWI for African American males from low SES backgrounds. These young men may have similar issues related to accessing campus leisure and recreation services and facilities while also potentially demonstrating differing participation preferences than their White and/or more affluent peers.

Social interactions and discrimination appear most relevant. Gobster (2002) found that African Americans tended to use park resources in small groups whereas Whites generally came to parks as individuals. Further, social interactions in parks were typically within and not between groups. The issue of discrimination was also illuminated in park management. Gobster noted that feelings of discomfort or fear were an issue for both African American and White park users. Challenges faced by minority groups in public spaces, such as urban parks, may be similar to those faced by African American males from low SES backgrounds attending large PWIs. These findings might relate to formal and informal leisure and recreational facilities on college campuses such as playing intramural sports or engaging in leisure experiences in certain areas of campus (e.g., outside of a residence hall, walking in campus gardens).

Findings from Shinew et al. (2004) were also applicable to the college and university environment as these researchers examined race related to leisure constraints and built upon
the literature about perceived constraints in relation to gender and race. One finding from this study contradicted previous research about race and leisure constraints in that African American respondents felt less constrained than Whites in their leisure activities. The researchers posited one explanation could be “that African Americans have become more accustomed to negotiating constraints and thus have developed strategies of resistance to empower themselves in life and leisure” (p.194). Shinew et al. also found that African Americans and Whites did prefer different types of leisure activities, which was consistent with previous research. African Americans reported more representation in sport/fitness activities, social activities/interactions, and non-outdoor activities whereas White respondents were more representative in the leisure enthusiast and outdoors clusters. Building on Shaw’s (2001) resistance framework, Shinew et al. also discussed how African Americans freely choosing not to participate in traditionally Caucasian leisure activities might serve as a form of resistance to societal norms and power structures. African American males from low SES backgrounds at PWIs may encounter similar perspectives towards their leisure and campus engagement. Young men in a campus setting may not know what to expect from their college experience and therefore, they may not perceive constraints to their leisure. Similar to what Shinew et al. posited, they may develop strategies to negotiate or mitigate constraints. Additionally African American males might prefer different types of leisure activities and consciously choose to not conform to stereotypical White or mainstream college leisure behavior as a sign of resistance to the social and institutional structures in the campus environment.
At many PWIs the campus climate might force African American males from low SES backgrounds to self-segregate (Kim et al., 2015) or experience ethnic enclosures (Stodolska, 2007) to buffer against racism, micro-aggressions, or feeling unwelcome on campus. Additionally some African American students may prefer same-race peer affiliations to provide support or a respite from interacting with the mainstream and predominantly White campus environment (Palmer et al., 2012). Stodolska explored ethnic enclosures in leisure with immigrants to the United States to understand patterns, motivations, and consequences related to this behavior. The findings indicated that individuals were motivated to experience leisure within their own racial or ethnic group for many reasons, but those most pertinent to the college experience of African American males were common culture, (i.e., their sense of humor, values, outlook on life) different life experiences, and the fear of discrimination. Stodolska also found consequences to ethnic enclosures that were applicable to the college experience including outcomes such as psychological and emotional comfort and avoidance of discrimination and inter-ethnic/racial conflict.

One of the cultural challenges faced by African American males from low SES backgrounds on campus is developing a sense of connectedness or belonging to their new community that might be compounded by their social class (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Walpole, 2003; 2008). Leisure and campus engagement opportunities may positively influence the collegiate experience of these young men by fostering personal growth, minimizing stress, and developing relationships (Blanco & Robinett, 2014; Lindsey, 2012; Qian et al., 2014). Leisure might also assist African American males from low SES backgrounds by providing space for relaxation, regeneration, and resistance to negative social and cultural aspects of a
campus environment (Shinew et al., 2004; Stodolska, 2007; Weng & Chiang, 2014). The cumulative effects of these outcomes might support persistence and social integration for this campus population.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

This literature review demonstrates the varied, complex, and interconnected influences African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds face at PWIs (Berg, 2010; Blanco & Robinett, 2014; Palmer et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). This reality underscores the importance of appropriately framing research on this population. These young men, like most low SES students, experience contextualized personal (e.g., psychological), social (e.g., interaction with peers), and institutional (e.g., structures, policies, procedures) hindrances related to their social adaption and integration at PWIs. For these reasons, Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model as well as the theoretical perspective of social constructivism framed my study. Bronfenbrenner’s theory posits that human development is a product of an individual’s interaction with varying personal and social environments, while social constructivism provides a context to understand how individuals perceive reality and construct knowledge through interactions and experiences.

**Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model.**

Understanding social environments and how African American males from low SES backgrounds interact with these environments was an important piece of this study. In Bronfenbrenner’s model, human development is not only a product of individual characteristics and traits but a person’s immediate social and physical surroundings (micro-systems), and the meso-systems that represent interactions among the various settings of a
person’s immediate environment such as peer groups and social networks (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004). Development is also influenced by the social context on a community level as part of exo-systems. Exo-systems include both formal and informal social structures such as the media, schools, other agencies, and neighborhoods. Encompassing all of these levels are macro-systems, which are the overarching institutions of culture and society (e.g., legal, economic, political) that carry information and influence ideology (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

Figure 2.2. Four environmental systems of Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) Ecological Model.
The ecological model was designed “to analyze systematically the nature of the relationship that exists between the learner and the surrounding milieu” (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 6). The understanding and approach to leisure of an African American male undergraduate from a low SES background (i.e., the learner) may be important in examining his perceptions of campus engagement opportunities (i.e., the milieu). A student’s micro-systems and meso-systems would directly influence the type of leisure and campus engagement he pursued during college. If an individual is exploring leisure and campus engagement but cannot access opportunities on campus, then understanding which system, or combination of systems, is hindering involvement is critical in developing strategies that might support engagement. Similarly, if an African American male from a low SES background was successful in finding leisure and campus engagement that develops new micro-systems and provides connections to positive meso- and exo-systems, analyzing those connections and how students develop and define them might help address issues related to social integration.

**Social constructivism.**

Understanding how African American males from low SES backgrounds define their college experience (e.g., making connections, experiencing barriers) can also help address social integration for this population. Framing this research in social constructivism from a postpositivist paradigm allowed me to explore and explain the concepts of leisure, campus engagement, and social integration from the perspectives of my participants. Since these young men have differing personal, social, and cultural experiences (Berg, 2010; Harper, 2009) combined with varying Black identity profiles (Cross, 1995; Cross et al., 1999)
exploring leisure and campus engagement through their eyes and perceptions of reality was needed to understand their college experience.

Social constructivists view the creation of knowledge and learning as social constructs. Through social interactions, cultural means, and active engagement, knowledge is created and learning can occur (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Although individuals possess knowledge and can learn, individual comprehensions are the result of a social process and social interactions. Charmaz (2006) stated that instead of assuming realities in an external world, social constructivism is a theoretical perspective that seeks to understand what individuals do at a particular time and place, what they view as real, and how they construct their views of reality. Knowledge is created through examining and analyzing these interactions people have with each other and their physical, social, and cultural environments (Kukla, 2000). For learning to occur, individuals must have more than passive pursuits and it is paramount for an individual to engage in social activity. Thus, the meanings and understandings individuals assign to objects and subjects derive from their social interactions (Kim, 2001; Kukla, 2000; McNamee & Hosking, 2012).

Similarly, Ryan (2006) discussed that postpositivist research constructs reality and truth through engaging with research participants and acknowledges the complexities of social experiences. Further, research conducted from a postpositivist paradigm takes a problem-solving approach in an effort to address difficult questions. However, Ryan also noted, “It is acknowledged that research may indeed reach valuable conclusions but these are always regarded as partial and revisable. There is no universal solution to problems, therefore conclusions may change over time” (p. 19). For these reasons, social constructivism served
as an appropriate theoretical perspective for this research. Exploring and learning about the perceptions and realities of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds related leisure and campus engagement through their own voice shed light on the overt and covert personal, social, and cultural obstacles they face on their journey to a college degree.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a PWI. This chapter identified aspects of an African American male's and low SES student's college experience as well as discussed leisure during college. Specifically, leisure related to stress and coping, and race and ethnicity in leisure were reviewed to provide perspectives on these issues. Additionally, discussion of Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model and social constructivism were also presented. In the following chapter I present the methodology for this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a predominantly White institution (PWI). To achieve this purpose I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement (e.g., socializing with peers, joining student organizations, using campus recreation resources), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration into the university community. I conducted this research from a postpositivist paradigm where researchers seek to explain realities and the need for social change through an inductive process (Charmaz, 2006; Henderson, 2011; Ryan, 2006).

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological approach, ethical considerations, university setting, study recruitment, methods, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I describe my strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of this research.

Methodological Approach

Determining quantitatively how often African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds participate in leisure activities and the relationship these experiences have to their academic and social integration is useful. However, this positivist line of research typically does not provide context for the college experience. Personal, social, and institutional factors that might influence a student’s campus engagement, social development, and social integration can be overlooked. Henderson (2011) stated, “Post-positivism provides another paradigm that can move positivism…into a more encompassing way to examine real
world problems” (p. 342). I approached my research from a postpositivist paradigm to examine the campus experiences of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds through their eyes in an effort to conduct research that could lead to social change.

Postpositivist research is needed when examining leisure involvement and behaviors. Coalter (1997), Kelly (2000), Kivel et al. (2009), and Henderson (2011) called for the application of postpositivist approaches to address a deeper examination of persistent issues in leisure studies. Coalter stated that researchers were at a crossroads and had an underdeveloped comprehension of the sociocultural meaning of leisure. He believed a crisis existed because researchers were studying leisure and society not leisure in society. Kelly echoed these sentiments when he wrote, “Research should begin to be more thoroughly contextual…not be segmented and segregated from the rest of life, but should be approached as a dimension of ‘ordinary life’” (p. 77). Leisure experiences in people’s lives often have been compartmentalized by researchers when analyses have been conducted from a positivist perspective.

Postpositivism allows a researcher to examine problems that might have multiple or layered meanings from a social perspective. Research conducted from this paradigm can serve as building blocks to understanding issues and helping set research agendas in addition to using a problem-solving approach (Ryan, 2006). Approaching research from a postpositivist paradigm also afforded me the opportunity to uncover new problems, and conduct research that might lead to social change (Parry, Johnson, & Stewart, 2013). Exploring how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived
leisure and the role leisure played in their social integration is a layered research problem. Gaining more information about the role of leisure in the lives of these students built on existing research that led to tangible ways of addressing social integration among this student population.

Therefore, a research paradigm that was congruent with my beliefs about the nature of knowledge and my area of interest was paramount to having a strong research design (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). My worldview most closely aligned with postpositivism and philosophically, this paradigm was the most appropriate to investigate my research questions. I value leisure and the transformational role it can play in the lives of individuals while also acknowledging that context and other social factors must be examined. I also recognize that leisure can lead to negative encounters in people’s lives. Thus, my research was designed to uncover the intertwined relationship among leisure, stress, social development, and social integration in a campus community.

My methodological approach examined African American males from low SES backgrounds and their perspectives on one university campus. I allowed students to interpret and assign meanings to this environment related to the social integration they experienced through leisure and campus engagement. Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model and social constructivism (Charmaz, 2006; Kukla, 2000; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010) were the theoretical perspectives that guided my postpositivist study. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological perspective examines how individuals develop through interactions with their immediate surroundings as well as the role larger societal factors
might play in the development process. Social constructivism examines realities based on human interactions and allows participants to define situations. Charmaz (2006) stated:

Rather than explaining reality, social constructionists see multiple realities and therefore ask: What do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality? Thus knowledge – and theories – are situated and located in particular positions, perspectives, and experiences. (p. 127)

These two theoretical perspectives allowed me to develop emerging grounded theory around the issues of leisure, campus engagement, and social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds contrasted to testing a predetermined view of the situations they might be facing. Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) further discussed grounded theory as a methodology that takes a scaffolding and inductive approach to data collection with no predetermined idea to prove. It is used to explain a concept of common importance to the participant and researcher. Additionally, Charmaz (2006) described interpretive grounded theory as seeking to understand and describe situations rather than predict them.

A grounded theory approach was consistent with my theoretical perspectives for several reasons. While Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model presented environmental systems that play a role in social connections, no set pattern or expected experiences for individuals are in the model. This model appealed to me in addressing my research questions because of its possibilities. Exploring the relationships and interactions among an individual’s personal (i.e., micro-system) and social environments (i.e., meso-systems, exo-systems) provided fluidity to examine the campus experience of my participants. I
anticipated that individuals would have varying amounts of interaction with each of Bronfenbrenner’s systems but did not know how social systems would influence their social integration. Using Bronfenbrenner’s model enabled me to explore how individuals interacted with these social systems from their perspective. Further, social constructivism allowed for the existence of multiple realities and experiences. This view of the knowledge did not privilege one version of reality over another, which is consistent with the development of grounded theorizing. My approach to postpositivist research, using grounded theory, allowed participants to discuss and define their college experiences. This approach was needed to gain a fuller understanding of the experiences of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at a predominantly White institution.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to gathering the data to address my research question, I considered the ethical issues of my research and secured approval for my study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University (NCSU). Participants in my study were adults and enrolled full-time as undergraduate students on a different university campus than NCSU. I received exempt approval for my study. (See Appendix A for IRB application and Appendix E for IRB approval letter).

In addition to fulfilling the IRB requirements, I was also aware of the sensitive nature of my topic and my responsibilities to participants. From my initial interaction with participants I treated them with respect and valued their time and willingness to share their experiences with me about issues related to their SES status. Since the African American male undergraduate population is small on this campus, I reassured participants about the
confidentiality of my research. My respect and transparency in communication about the study seemed to aid in establishing trust and building rapport prior to and during the interviews. During the research process, I encouraged participants to share as much as they were comfortable about their campus experience at the PWI where they were students.

After I completed individual interviews, an addendum was submitted to my original IRB application so that I could conduct a focus group. The addendum also received exempt approval due to the nature of my research and the population being studied (see Appendix F for IRB Study Procedures Addendum and Appendix J for Addendum Approval Notice).

Once participants agreed to join the study they received and were invited to sign a letter of informed consent for the in-depth interview (see Appendix D) or focus group (see Appendix I). Participants were given a signed copy of the form for their records and I also retained a copy. This consent document outlined all study parameters including confidentiality of participant’s responses and their identity throughout the study, how I stored and used the data, and the possibility of a follow up interview. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time.

**University Setting**

This study took place at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the southeastern United States. This is a four year, public, and comprehensive research university. I selected this university community for reasons that included the availability of participants as well as institutional resources to support students from low SES backgrounds. This institution has a publicly stated commitment to students and families from low SES backgrounds with a need blind admissions policy (i.e., financial background is not considered during the admissions
process) and a university program designed to financially support admitted students. This financial program began in 2004 supporting 6% of the incoming class and by fall 2009 was supporting 13% of the incoming class. Additionally, a variety of leisure and campus engagement opportunities were available for all students on this campus. For example, the student activities office listed over 500 student organizations in 2014. A wide-ranging recreational sports program included two fitness centers and multiple outdoor facilities. The university also offers undergraduate research, service learning, and leadership development programs.

In addition to these programs and services, this PWI had students represented from multiple racial, ethnic, and SES backgrounds. To meet the criteria for participation in my study, a young man had to be an enrolled undergraduate student who had attended the university for at least four semesters. He also had to self-identify as being an African American male and from a low SES background.

While participants could self-identify, I employed strategic recruitment strategies and asked questions regarding potential participants’ background before arranging their involvement in the study. I allowed participants to self-identify as being from a low SES background due to the difficult nature of defining and determining this status (Mueller & Parcel, 1981; Oakes & Rossi, 2003; White, 1982). The main factors that are generally considered in assigning SES status are parents’ education, employment, and income as well as the number of family members (Mueller & Parcel, 1981; Terenzini et al. 2001; White, 1982). Additionally, Oakes and Rossi (2003) state that SES is a function of material capital, human capital, and social capital.
Therefore, prior to arranging participation I asked questions about their parent(s) or guardian(s): occupation(s), marital status, education level, and perceived income level, as well as their family structure (e.g., siblings, other people in the household), scholarships, and financial aid status. During in-depth interviews additional questions were also asked about their perceptions of their socioeconomic status (see Appendix B).

**Study Recruitment**

A purposive sample of 17 African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds was recruited for this study using a two-pronged approach. First, recruitment emails were sent through selected university programs that supported underrepresented students (e.g., multicultural and student affairs units) and student organizations comprised of predominantly African American students. Second, at the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they knew other students who might meet the criteria for this study. If participants thought they did, I then asked them to share my recruitment email and contact information. The recruitment email (see Appendix C) outlined my research purpose and participant criteria.

After completing 15 in-depth interviews, I recruited participants for a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to verify, clarify, and provide more depth to data collected during the interviews, and to further inform my emerging themes. I sent a focus group recruitment email to nine of my original participants, and six initially responded they would attend. The nine young men who received the letters were considered key informants because they had been interviewees who demonstrated an interest in my research findings based on our interactions throughout the interview process (i.e., questions asked before,
during, and immediately following the interview). Also these individuals were still students at the university. Some of my initial participants had graduated and were no longer living on or close to campus. Key informants also had some variation of leisure and campus engagement experiences. This variety of involvement provided a comprehensive view of the campus climate related to leisure and campus engagement for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. For instance, one key informant was intensely engaged in campus advocacy efforts during all four years of his college experience, which required him to interact with a variety of students and campus programs. Another key informant provided an alternative perspective because he was not intensely or consistently involved with one type of campus engagement. He had briefly been involved with several ethnic, professional, recreational, and social student organizations but did not stay with any one type of campus engagement during his campus career.

These key informants commented on my initial findings and emerging themes and clarified any of their earlier responses. They also shared additional thoughts and feelings about their experiences. I primarily wanted to speak with students who had completed an in-depth interview during the focus group, but I also wanted to hear from students who were not part of the original interview process to gain a broader understanding of their campus experience related to the individuals I had already interviewed. I was open to the possibility that new concepts could result from the focus group, which is why additional students were sought. I was also interested in the discussion between key informants and new participants. Since I was not approaching this focus group purely as member-checking (Creswell, 2003) I
sought out additional young men to participate in addition to those who had already responded.

To find additional young men for the focus group, I asked key informants to share my recruitment email (see Appendix C) with peers they thought met my study criteria and might be interested in joining the focus group. I received a response from six young men and corresponded with these potential participants regarding possible dates for the focus group. After that correspondence four students contacted me but only two were able to participate.

To encourage participation in the interviews and the focus group, I also provided a financial incentive of a $40 gift card to the campus bookstore. My NCSU university department provided funding for the gift cards through an academic grant. When researching African Americans and college students, I found that providing financial incentives has been shown to increase participation rates (Huang & Coker, 2010; Patrick, Singer, Boyd, Cranford, & McCabe, 2013). However, in certain circumstances providing financial incentives to low SES individuals could be perceived as undue influence regarding expected participation (Singer & Bossarte, 2006). If incentives are offered to a vulnerable population that are inappropriate or unwarranted they might have a coercive effect towards participation. For my study of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds, I did not believe a $40 gift card would be perceived as inappropriate or lead to students feeling forced to participate because they needed the money. Rather I saw the gift card as respect for their time and a sincere acknowledgement of their vital participation.

Even though young men received a $40 gift card to the campus bookstore after completing the study, finding participants for the interviews was initially more challenging
than expected. The time of year and subject matter appeared to effect recruitment. I initiated my study late in the spring semester (2014) shortly before the final examination period. Students were studying for tests, completing final projects, and preparing for graduation. However, when the semester ended I found several participants. Another factor that may have effected recruitment was the subject matter of my research. Discussing issues related to SES status might have been difficult for individuals because of the social stigma associated with being from a low SES background. Interestingly, although the $40 gift card was welcomed, most young men said they participated in the study out of personal interest and to benefit future students and not for the gift card.

Participants.

While my participants were fairly homogenous, these African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds did have a range of leisure and campus experiences. The majority of the men held part-time jobs, lived on-campus, and did not discuss being in committed relationships. These men were socially active and engaged on campus. They only occasionally went home to visit family and friends. None of the participants had significant family obligations such as taking care of siblings, parents, or other relatives. Many young men discussed how supportive their families were of their educational pursuits and how their families encouraged them to focus on their college experience.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and demographic information about them can be found in Appendix K. More specific details were not included to avoid violating confidentiality.
Methods

I conducted in-depth interviews for this qualitative study. Charmaz (2006) noted, “Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and, thus, broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it. Through our methods we first aim to see the world as our research participants do - from the inside” (p. 14). Using a grounded theory approach enabled me to see data from various angles within the scope of the study design. Approaching my research from the postpositivist paradigm also allowed a contextualized picture of participants’ experiences that emerged from my data. After completing in-depth interviews, transcriptions, coding (e.g., initial and focused), and initial data analysis, I conducted a focus group to provide clarification of my initial findings and to help me elaborate on emerging themes and verify my data (Creswell, 2003).

In-depth interviews.

Charmaz (2006) stated that interviewing has long been a useful data collection method for qualitative researchers since the method allows for in-depth explorations of topics. Interviewing was an appropriate method to address the purpose of this study because participants were allowed to construct and reflect upon their experiences at a PWI. Through this process, I learned about the leisure and campus engagement perceptions and behaviors of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds, how they were engaged with leisure and campus engagement (e.g., campus recreation, leadership development, student activities and organizations), and the role this engagement played in their social integration.
The interviews allowed participants to describe themselves and their experiences on campus. My interview guide was developed in four categories (see Appendix B) related to aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model of human development. These categories were: campus knowledge and perceptions, co-curricular and social involvement, engagement and social integration, and personal growth and development.

Interviews were semi-structured, which allowed participants to discuss emerging topics and enabled me to ask each interviewee the same questions as well as probe to clarify responses and explore emerging concepts. Initial questions were general in nature to build comfort and rapport. I spoke with participants about their family and high school experiences in an effort to further understand their SES background and leisure experiences. Next, we discussed the transition to college and how time was used outside of class. Each participant was invited to share his leisure and campus engagement experiences along with perceptions about getting involved and adjusting to social life on campus. We discussed these leisure and campus engagement experiences in depth. Students shared what they gained from leisure and campus engagement and any difficulties or hindrances they might have experienced. Participants also shared personal definitions and thoughts about leisure. In-depth interviews were concluded by allowing each young man to share any thoughts or observations about leisure and campus engagement that might not have been addressed.

**Focus group.**

A focus group was also conducted to verify, clarify, and provide more depth to data collected during the interviews and to further inform my emerging themes. Focus group studies are “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a
defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment…[where] group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments“ (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). In a group setting, participants were able to build on the thoughts and experiences of others. The purpose of my focus group was to examine initial research findings and gain confirmation or disconfirmation along with a deeper understanding of emerging themes from my data. I shared my interpretations and analyses from the in-depth interviews and asked participants to provide thoughts to elaborate on these findings and share alternative opinions and experiences.

I developed an interview guide for the focus group that emerged from my initial coding of the personal in-depth interviews. These questions addressed four core categories: (a) the value and process of creating social connections; (b) how leisure and campus engagement facilitated discovery of self, place, and purpose; (c) what being an African American male both within the Black campus community and the broader campus community meant; and (d) what role a low SES background played in their leisure and campus engagement (see Appendix G). Questions were designed in a semi-structured format giving participants an opportunity to provide feedback and allowed me to explore and gain more context for how these students perceived the campus environment in relation to their other personal (i.e., micro-systems) and social (i.e., meso-systems, exo-systems) environments.

The time was set for the focus group on a Saturday afternoon. A Saturday seemed to be convenient for students as opposed to during the week. I planned for eight students (i.e., six key informants and two new participants) but only six attended. Two of the key
informants were not able to attend because they had last minute obligations with part-time jobs. Confirmed focus group participants were sent a reminder the evening prior to the session restating the time, location, and purpose of my research and the focus group (see Appendix L).

The focus group began at 2:00 p.m. and ended at 3:45 p.m. This interactive discussion clarified and verified the themes that I believed were emerging from the data. I provided an environment where participants felt comfortable to share their experiences and impressions. While some researchers believe focus groups might stifle a person’s willingness to provide personal information, this possibility was lessened through a purposeful focus group design (Creswell, 2003; Krueger & Casey, 2000). I created a structured but comfortable environment by having an agenda for the focus group that was shared at the beginning of our discussion. I also provided light refreshments. Additionally, we all introduced ourselves and shared information such as our hometown, major, and leisure interests to establish rapport. Participants were engaged throughout the discussion and built on each other’s responses. In some cases individual responses were supported and more depth was provided, and at other times alternative points of view were shared. For instance, when talking about involvement with non-African American peers, the majority of the group discussed the difficulties they encountered but George shared the positive nature of his encounters and how easily he developed relationships with peers from various racial, ethnic, and SES backgrounds. As we moved through questions in the focus group, I reminded participants to also think about other types of leisure experiences since most of the focus of the in-depth interviews was on
positive campus involvement. However, few negative or anti-social leisure and campus engagement responses were shared.

**Data Collection**

The in-depth interviews and focus group were conducted sequentially. In-depth interviews occurred from (April 2014-October 2014) and a focus group was conducted in January 2015. In-depth interviews lasted between 45 and 95 minutes with the average time being about one hour. Interviews took place at agreed upon locations with the participants. The majority of interviews were conducted using interview rooms located in the campus alumni center. I used two audio recording devices during interviews to ensure sound quality and reduce the possibility of losing data due to equipment failure. When possible I provided water for participants and tried to ensure their comfort. I followed the interview guide during each interview as discussed previously, but also asked probing and follow-up questions as needed. Probing questions provided more context and depth to responses that I might have not understood. Throughout the interviews, I observed participants’ language and actions to help me better understand their experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For instance in addition to a young man’s words, body language and tone of voice can also provide insights about a person’s experience. I employed this same technique during the focus group.

The focus group lasted 90 minutes and took place in a room on campus. I recorded this session using two audio recorders for sound quality and to minimize the possibility of losing data due to equipment failure. Additionally, a second moderator participated during the focus group. Krueger and Casey (2000) strongly recommend using a second moderator to
facilitate the discussion and to provide support and perspective. I secured a second moderator who was also a fellow doctoral student two weeks prior to the focus group and shared my research purpose, status of my study, and the purpose of the focus group. The second moderator and I met prior to the focus group to discuss the agenda and other logistics (e.g., greeting participants, setting up the room, note taking, observing non-verbal communication, setting up and monitoring equipment). My second moderator was also an African American male and introduced himself along with the rest of the group during the introductions. He explained his role in the group and that he would be taking notes regarding who initiated responses. He also documented any non-verbal reactions during the focus group. Non-verbal responses were mostly nods of agreement and participants trying to get attention to speak.

The moderator and I debriefed for 30 minutes following the focus group regarding the session, his notes, and observations (Henderson, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2000). These notes were coded and added to all the data I collected.

Following each interview and the focus group I took field notes about the session. These notes included my observations of the participants’ demeanor (e.g., did they have an engaging posture, did they seem rushed, did they just want to get through the interview?), punctuality (e.g., were they late?), and issues with the space if any occurred (e.g., knocks on the door or other interruptions). Particular attention was given to details that could not be ascertained from the audio recordings. For example, Nelson reflected on a discussion with his African American friends about dating outside his race. He said “do you know what I mean?” on multiple occasions. This phrase is often used as a point of emphasis and just listening to the recordings I might have gotten that impression. Nelson, however, was
actually asking my opinion at these points, which I tried not to share because I wanted to hear
his experience and not influence him with my perceptions. I took field notes about how he
asked me questions throughout his interview that seemed like he was looking for
confirmation or acceptance of his responses. Field notes enabled me to capture my thoughts
during the interview and information about the setting that might have influenced the
discussion. They were helpful to reflect on prior to and during data analysis.

Data Analysis

I used a grounded theory approach to continuously analyze my data throughout the
research process looking for patterns and emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin &
Strauss, 2008). Following each interview, I transcribed responses verbatim and then used
qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA to manage and analyze the data. It was
important for me to remember that as a researcher, I constructed codes based on my
understanding of data. I entered this process with an open mind so codes could emerge based
on the data.

After completing and transcribing seven interviews I conducted initial coding and
early memo-writing. Participants were sharing the progression of their leisure and campus
engagement related to their transition from high school to college and then throughout their
time on campus. Most young men said they made initial connections through leisure
experiences with other African American students that led to campus engagement in the
Black community on campus. For instance, Taliaferro shared how he made initial
connections with other African American students during Transition Bridges and then joined
the Black Student Association because of those connections. I coded these lines as peer
connections to getting involved and early campus involvement with established program. Early participants also discussed how their transitions to the university community were difficult and how disconnected they felt from the campus. Booker shared that he experienced culture shock when he arrived on campus because of what he called a systematic social hierarchy. This statement was initially coded as separation by race and social status and shock/disappointment about the campus environment.

During initial coding I mainly used line-by-line coding practices. Line-by-line coding examined each line or sentence of data individually. Coding the data in this way allowed for a critical and analytic review of materials, which helped me see nuances and better define what a participant was sharing (Charmaz, 2006). For instance, line-by-line coding highlighted the cultural and financial issues Douglas experienced when he was successful in making the club rowing team. He was excited by this opportunity but quit suddenly. A line-by-line analysis of this experience contrasted with an incident by incident analysis showed the range of emotions he experienced when he decided to quit the team that went deeper than his ability to pay the membership fees. Douglas was reminded of negative high school encounters when he was in this leisure space and the steps he had taken to mask his identity. He also compared paying to join club rowing to the free campus engagement experiences around activism and social justice. If I had coded this experience in an incident by incident process I might have missed these additional details and only focused on the financial barriers present with club rowing.

Initial line-by-line coding yielded 319 codes. Field notes and early memos helped me understand these initial codes in relation to what was said in later interviews. I wrote early
memos within the transcriptions to capture ideas and to summarize an individual’s experiences. Writing, and reflecting with, early memos enabled me to analyze a participant’s experience and explore ideas that might be relevant to investigate in future interviews. Below is an excerpt from Martin’s interview:

*He experienced academic challenges during the first year because he did not have realistic expectations of college level work, but wanted to get involved. Perhaps he got a little over involved during his first semester. However, he was able to recover academically and maintain involvement. Some students might have stopped all involvement if that happened but Martin figured out how to balance involvement and academics.*

*He mentions going to the fall involvement event that is always touted as an important event for student involvement. If students bring the event up again I need to ask if they went to subsequent fall involvement events in their 2nd, 3rd, and/or 4th years. Martin, like most early interviews, mentions attending the event and finding organizations to “join” initially but he did not really stick with the groups he found at the fall involvement event. How helpful are these events for low SES or underrepresented students in general when they are so large that it is hard to find groups that might interest them?*

Writing early memos that summarized in-depth interviews enabled me to begin exploring concepts and codes (i.e., categorizing responses and looking for connections).

After my first seven in-depth interviews were coded and early memos analyzed, I conducted a comparative analysis and began focused coding as I continued to conduct
interviews. Focused coding enabled me to synthesize and categorize my data. During this process I reviewed my initial line-by-line codes looking for connections between and among codes. I critically examined behaviors, experiences, and situations that were influencing participants’ lives on campus and how I viewed them. In focused coding, I used the most meaningful initial codes to move through large amounts of data. Approaching my data this way allowed me to determine what conditions informed my study, the actions and interactions of participants, and the consequences or outcomes they were experiencing (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I implemented constant comparison and analytic tools described by Corbin and Strauss such as the flip-flop technique, drawing on personal experiences, looking at language, looking at emotion, and looking for negative cases, as I reassembled my data for continued analysis. Going through each of my initial coding segments looking for comparison and analyzing participants’ experiences provided deeper analysis as I continued collecting new data.

Using flip-flop technique informed future interviews and allowed me to compare and connect experiences I saw throughout my data. For instance, when participants stated their transition to college was “difficult,” I envisioned what an “easy” or “expected” transition to college might be like. I also questioned if an “easy” transition to college even existed. Similarly, when students discussed what they gained from leisure experiences, I drew on my personal experiences as a student and a college administrator to provide possible understandings of their situations. As participants shared about the organizational, time management, and communication skills they developed and the personal growth and self-
reflection they perceived, I saw how these concepts connected because of my research as well as personal and professional experiences.

Examining language and emotion were also needed to compare and analyze the data. Many participants discussed “friends” during their interviews and I had to analyze and compare the use of this word throughout my study because of the contextualized meaning it held. I also was aware of the emotion and tone students used when describing experiences on campus. As students talked about negative encounters they often sounded upset. In some cases after comparing other statements and field notes, the participant was upset but he was also disappointed and depressed about what this encounter potentially meant for other parts of his campus experience.

Identifying negative cases was also helpful in moving from initial coding to focus coding. Throughout my analysis participants shared primarily prosocial leisure involvement but I continued to analyze my data and probe during interviews for other types of negative or anti-social leisure experiences.

During focused coding, I also continued to conduct in-depth interviews and write memos to reflect on and analyze my data. I incorporated the perceptions and behaviors that emerged in my initial interviews and analyses into later interviews. For instance, initial participants discussed how their transition to campus was difficult and how relationships made within the Black campus community were helpful. A sense of separation from the larger campus community and increased self-confidence from campus engagement also emerged during early interviews. These ideas influenced subsequent interview probing.
Iterative memo-writing continued and was more comprehensive allowing me to examine emerging ideas about the campus experiences of African American males from low SES backgrounds. Writing these iterative memos helped me move through and make sense of my data; this was a critical part of my data analysis process. Memos facilitated the coalescence of my data and the analysis of my methods to ensure I had sufficient empirical evidence to justify my emerging findings. For instance, as participants continued describing experiences they were having within the Black community on campus I wrote an advanced memo (see Appendix M) to assess these ideas and their possible relationship to social capital. Memos were used to compare my data, codes, and categories and to question the codes and categories that emerged. Charmaz (2006) noted, “Memo-writing forces you to stop other activities; engage a category;…[and] take the time to discover your ideas about what you have seen, heard, sensed, and coded” (pp. 81-82).

Continuing the constant comparison of my data throughout this process, I synthesized initial codes into 14 focused codes (see Table 3.1). Completing this focused coding provided a framework for my analyses of emerging themes and theoretical concepts, enabling me to begin theoretically sorting and synthesizing data around the main concepts related to the leisure and campus engagement of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at this PWI.
Table 3.1

**Focused Codes**

Navigating challenges  
Feeling supported by and connected to the university  
Providing support and guidance to others  
Creating social ties and bonds  
Developing informal networks and opportunities  
Needing space / time alone  
Branching out to new types of experiences  
Sticking with groups from pre-college experiences  
Pursing engagement aligned with interests  
Engaging with Black student organization and the Black community  
Feeling lost, not knowing where or how to begin  
Wanting to make an impact and help others  
Seeking opportunities for growth  
Feelings of separation / exclusion / different campus

Theoretical sorting, integration of memos, and saturation to develop grounded theory were the final aspects of my data analysis after interviews were collected (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sorting provided the logical connections for analyses to create and review any theoretical linkages in data. During this process I continued iterative memo-writing about the perceptions and behaviors of participants and how these encounters might influence their experience. I also conceptually mapped the relationships between and among situations and concepts I found in my data such as the relationship among leisure, campus engagement, and stress. Conceptually mapping relationships facilitated theoretical sorting. This step allowed me to see concepts (e.g., classism, self-segregation, self-discovery) that shaped social conditions for my participants (Clarke, 2003). The integration of my memos occurred with
theoretical sorting and was where I determined how memos best came together to help explain my research findings. Leveraging all of the information gained throughout the processes (i.e., data collection, initial and focused coding, memo-writing), three themes emerged among the participants: feeling isolated on campus, experiencing self-discovery, and facing cultural challenges.

With these emerging themes, I assessed if I had gathered enough data to achieve theoretical saturation. Saturation was achieved because new data ceased to spark new ideas, properties, or connections within or related to my themes (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretically, I saw complex and interconnected relationships among each of my themes and used memo-writing to theorize about these connections. For example, my participants were experiencing stress on campus related to feeling isolated to the Black campus community, struggling when they transitioned to college, and continuing to struggle when they did not feel part of the broader campus community. Participants appeared to use leisure to develop relationships and networks of support and they believed this leisure was important to their campus experience.

Theoretically, my data supported the three themes but more data were needed to delineate the properties of these themes related to the experiences of African American males’ from low SES backgrounds. Therefore, I conducted the focus group and specifically examined three areas: creating social connections; discovery of self, place, and purpose; and being an African American male on campus. I transcribed the focus group verbatim and coded the data while still being open to other emerging relationships or concepts. Field notes from my second moderator were helpful in organizing the data from the focus group.
While new ideas did not emerge from the focus group discussion, a better understanding of the relationship African American males from low SES backgrounds had within the Black campus community and the cultural challenges faced for these young men across campus were brought into focus. Negative aspects of leisure such as replicating and reinforcing broader societal issues (e.g., racism, stereotyping, privilege, classism) were discussed. Also, the feelings of isolation and the essential role that leisure and campus engagement played in creating connections that somewhat mitigated isolationism were substantiated and clarified.

The focus group data supported my initial themes and early theorizing from in-depth interviews. Based on my focused coding, memo-writing, and theorizing, three themes emerged related to the role leisure and campus engagement played in the college experience of these young men at one PWI. These themes were: (1) mitigating feelings of isolation, (2) discovering a sense of self, and (3) navigating campus cultures. They are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

My initial goal was to interview between 25 and 30 African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Given the scope of my topic, and the young men I interviewed, theoretical saturation began to occur after conducting, transcribing, analyzing, and memo-writing during the course of 15 in-depth interviews. Participants shared detailed descriptions and reflections about their college experience during their interviews. I began to hear reoccurring information that led to focused codes. Using constant comparison I analyzed in-depth interviews, conducted early and focused codes, and wrote iterative memos for conceptual and theoretical connections. I conceptually mapped the relationship among my
focused codes to analyze these categories and any connections among them. For example, I compared data (e.g., transcripts, early codes, memos) around the focus codes of creating social ties and bonds with feeling lost and not knowing where to begin and seeking opportunities for growth to conceptualize their theoretical linkages.

This constant comparison between and among each focused code using the analytic tools discussed previously, led to three emerging conceptual categories that were explored in my focus group. I specifically explored creating social connections; discovery of self, place, and purpose; and being an African American male on campus with young men in the focus group. After completing the focus group and analyzing all of my data, new ideas or theoretical concepts were not being generated during later memo-writing. The focus group delineated the properties of my codes, provided more data, allowed for deeper exploration of theoretical ideas, distinguished between and among codes, and clarified categories (Charmaz, 2006).

Analyzing the focus group with previous data enabled me to explicate the analytic links between and among my focus codes resulting in theoretical saturation and three main emerging themes. When conducting qualitative research, attaining theoretical saturation supersedes sample size (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) meaning that some studies, such as this research about African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds, can have a small number of participants depending on the research purpose and the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis.
Trustworthiness and Sensitivity

Due to the student population being studied, the concepts of trustworthiness and sensitivity were vital. Trustworthiness regarding my participants, data collection, and data analysis were paramount. In qualitative research approaches credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are associated with trustworthiness and I implemented strategies to address each (Creswell, 2003; Morrow, 2005). I used sensitizing to refer to my experiences and abilities to comprehend and analyze the data appropriately and to embody the view of participants while trying to minimize bias and/or recognize the bias I had (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process I tried to reduce the possibility of bias and ensure trustworthiness by being familiar with the subject matter, maintaining a clear purpose, and examining a range of observations. My educational, professional, and personal experiences contributed to my familiarity with the college experiences of low SES African American male undergraduates. In some respects having this familiarity was also a challenge. I used memo-writing as a check to ensure I was not using my experiences and knowledge to force my data into existing theories. My purpose was clearly stated to participants during interviews and the focus group. If participants drifted too far off topic I gently brought them back to my research questions. Similarly with data collection and analysis, I took a broad approach but framed probing questions, my thoughts, and concepts within the study parameters. For instance during data analysis and theorizing I did not overreach in describing the power and meaning of relationships participants developed through leisure and campus engagement. These relationships could have been described as social capital but in reflecting
on my research questions, data, and literature not enough information was present to make that theoretical connection. I also examined a range of observations during in-depth interviews and the focus group that included negative attitudes and behaviors as well as prosocial involvements.

To ensure credibility throughout my research I tried to minimize bias and explore my research in a systematic way. Throughout the data collection process, participants were encouraged to speak openly and were not restricted when sharing experiences. I asked open-ended questions that required more than a yes/no answer and attempted to develop a safe space so participants would speak honestly about their experiences. Young men could share anything regarding their leisure and campus engagement. I originally explored taking a mixed methods approach to my research that included a quantitative survey and having students keep a structured time diary or journal for additional sources of information. However, given the lack of information and understanding of what low SES African American male undergraduates are experiencing at PWIs, I decided to use in-depth interviewing as my primary form of data collection and then use a focus group to further explore my initial findings from the interviews.

Throughout my coding and memo-writing I kept an open mind towards emerging data. I also constantly checked myself to make sure I was not conflating my college experience with the experience of my participants. To facilitate this self-check, I completed initial memos about early impressions of my data. Writing about these concepts and my thoughts allowed me to see experiences of my participants from a different perspective than transcribing and coding. Additionally, I shared information with the chair of my dissertation
committee throughout the research process. She reminded me to maintain an open mind during the data collection and analysis process.

In addition to keeping an open mind, developing clear guiding interview questions was another aspect of my research that led to credibility. My interview guides were developed with the chair of my dissertation committee and these questions were designed to tie directly back to my overarching research purpose. I also kept field notes during the research process to reflect on actual interviews as they were conducted. I used these notes to document any methodological concerns during an interview. For instance, if I asked a confusing question and had to clarify with participants, I documented the occurrence as part of a field note so I could better prepare for future interviews. I also wrote an early memo about my interviewing skills and how they were developing. Continued memo-writing showed links between my data as well as supported my analyses and grounded theory development.

I addressed transferability in my approach to this research as it related to the generalizability of themes and theorizing (Henderson, 2006). I shared specific details about the campus context, my recruitment process, and my data collection, analysis, and theorizing. Dependability and confirmability were built into my process. Dependability meant having data that accurately and adequately reflected my study findings (Henderson, 2006; Morrow, 2005). Confirmability meant ensuring that analysis accurately conveyed the data and not the biases or beliefs of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). I described my data collection that included modifying my study to include a focus group to clarify and confirm concepts, and
my data analysis process that included field notes to capture observations and iterative memo-writing that assisted with coding and analyzing emerging themes.

As data were collected and subsequently analyzed to assure trustworthiness, I also thought about theoretical sensitivity. “Sensitivity means having insight, and being tuned in to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data. It means being able to present the view of participants and taking the role of the other through immersion in the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008 p. 33). I tried to see the world and my research participants’ experiences as they did. However, I also maintained theoretical connections as I explored, analyzed, and explained my data. For example, when analyzing students’ perceptions about the social environment on campus, I remained connected to Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) social systems and how different systems overlap to influence a student’s experience. I kept in mind that most incidents are not completely caused by one issue or system.

I do believe that leisure and campus engagement can be a transformational influence for students because of my personal experiences as a low SES African American male undergraduate and being a college administrator serving this population. However, this belief did not limit my open minded approach to this research study. Rather I was more critical of my own analysis throughout the process in an effort to minimize any personal biases. My personal beliefs and experiences assisted with interpreting data and explaining the issues these men were facing at a PWI. For instance I looked for connections between and among the social systems that African American males from low SES backgrounds had available in this campus environment. I recognized through the course of this study that these connections provided support, but they also created distress and sometimes obstacles to social integration.
The knowledge and experience I brought to the topic was useful in making sense of the data, informing the research process, and developing emergent themes. I have had significant experience working with low SES students in several capacities related to campus engagement and social integration. Because of my experiences I was aware of potential biases or preconceptions that I held about the value of these experiences for students (e.g., personal growth, stress relief, connections with peers), how and why students chose to engage with these opportunities, and why students might choose not to get involved. Regardless of my experiences, I followed the advice of Corbin and Strauss (2008) as well as Miller et al. (2006) and approached this work with an open mind using prior expertise as a way to organize and respond to the data and not force the data to fit themes and observations.

Remembering guidelines and using analytic tools such as questioning, making comparisons, exploring meanings of words, and using the flip-flop technique (i.e., looking at an experience from the opposite viewpoint) assisted me with sensitivity throughout this study. I critically examined my data, questioning my findings from different angles and constantly comparing cases throughout the analysis process. I examined the meaning of words and phrases from these students based on their information and my study context, and tried to avoid predetermined definitions. Words and phrases like “friends,” “struggle,” “feeling uncomfortable” were investigated from multiple perspectives. Using field notes, memo-writing, and regular discussions with the chair of my dissertation committee also helped monitor my adherence to these guidelines and techniques.
Summary

This chapter provided a discussion and review of methodological approach, ethical considerations, university setting, study recruitment, methods, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. The rationale for my methodological approach was a postpositivist perspective that allowed me to explore the leisure and campus engagement that African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds faced at a PWI.

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a PWI. The detailed description of the research process presented in this chapter allowed me to theorize about the role leisure and campus engagement played in mitigating feelings of isolation, discovering a sense of self, and navigating campus cultures. In the following chapter I present and interpret these findings.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a predominantly White institution (PWI). To achieve this purpose I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement (e.g., socializing with peers, joining student organizations, using campus recreation resources), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration into a university community.

In this chapter I discuss the results, including the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. Data analysis from in-depth interviews with 17 African American males from low SES backgrounds resulted in three main themes: (a) mitigating feelings of isolation, (b) discovering a sense of self, and (c) navigating campus cultures. Nine subthemes related to each of these also emerged during the data analysis.

Mitigating Feelings of Isolation

The first theme that emerged was that leisure and campus engagement played a substantive role in mitigating feelings of isolation for the participants in my study. Most of these young men arrived at this PWI with few friends or social connections. None of my participants discussed having social networks on campus before starting their collegiate experience. Most of them were eager to explore new opportunities, meet new people, and expand their horizons. However, the transition to campus was described as a “struggle” by many participants because they did not feel connected with the campus environment.
Even though several participants attended a transition program prior to beginning classes, they experienced a level of separation from the broader campus community. During one program called Transition Bridges, the majority of participants were underrepresented students in small groups. While this experience was beneficial to participants, they did not see the real campus climate and variety of cultures present in this large university community. When the fall semester started, the young men were facing a new and unfamiliar social environment. Although participants understood they were attending a PWI, the majority of young men did not have extended firsthand experiences with predominantly White and affluent communities. Malcolm shared the following when asked about his transition to college:

It was tough. It was really tough because you leave all your friends. None of my friends came here. You’re living on your own, so being like from a predominately Black area to a predominately White area, it was just different. You live on a hall with all White guys who for the most part… (pause)… just a different kind of feeling. You gotta find your place and comfort level with people who don’t look like you and probably come from more privileged or established families.

Malcolm, like the majority of young men in this study, used leisure and campus engagement to mitigate social isolation. Participants used leisure and campus engagement to cultivate friendships and social networks, find social and emotional support, and manage the stress associated with these connections. These subthemes demonstrated how leisure and campus engagement mitigated feelings of isolation for young men at this PWI.
Cultivating friendships and social networks.

Participants created friendships and social networks through leisure and campus engagement that mitigated a sense of isolation. These types of experiences helped students with their transition and social adaptation to college and to make connections that were not happening in the classroom. Additionally, participants created both strong ties, which benefited them in this new environment through informal interactions with fellow students as well as formal involvement with campus programs like intramurals, student organizations, and co-curricular programs. Being an underrepresented student on campus was challenging. During the focus group Powell reflected how most young men felt entering this environment:

I agree with the isolation thing. I didn’t see any Black faces in my dorm the first year and the only way I was able to get together with more African Americans or diverse people was through the organizations….You really have to search each other out and get involved to find people who look like you and you have things in common with because people in class don’t look like you either.

Participants reported varied success in building relationships through academic and classroom experiences. These feelings expressed by Powell were common and demonstrated the value placed on leisure and campus engagement in developing connections with peers as well as faculty and staff in ways they were not able through the classroom. When asked how classroom or academic experiences helped him develop relationships, Taliaferro, a graduating senior, responded: “Actually, I probably never had a friend I made through class.”

Only three young men discussed developing meaningful connections as a result of classroom interactions. Booker stated, “The classes that were interactive allowed me to meet
a lot of students that I now call my friends and they are in my network.” His experience with interactive courses within his major requiring group work and meeting outside of class to complete assignments allowed him to connect with his peers. Booker said, “You have to sit next to them [in class]. You start eating together and just find out more about them. That makes the school a little bit bigger for you.” The other young men who made meaningful connections through class or academic related experiences also referenced the interactive nature of the course that led to these relationships.

Most of the other participants, however, did not experience developing friendships in traditional lecture style courses or courses that had small amounts of group work. For instance, the young men said they did not develop relationships through study groups formed in classes because they were not invited to join them. They felt isolated in the classroom as part of a small number of, or the only, African Americans in a course. Outside of the classroom and academic setting was where the majority of participants fostered relationships and created bonds ranging from weak and informal social ties to strong and lasting relationships.

Recreational activities, hanging out with people over meals, going to parties, and participating in campus programs such as intramurals and student organizations were each discussed as ways participants cultivated informal ties that partially alleviated the sense of isolation. Experiences such as Luther’s did not create lasting relationships but did help him become more comfortable on campus while providing enjoyment and relaxation. Luther remembered how he initially connected with fellow students over a game of sand volleyball.
“When I first got here a lot of people were just trying to get to know people and a lot of the first years were playing [volleyball], and I just ran up to a random group of people.”

Other students shared experiences of meeting new people over meals, in the dining hall or local restaurants, and during parties. Washington recalled his first year and cultivating connections when he shared, “Freshman year it was through the dorm, but after that you go to the cafeteria and the gym. You meet people there. You just sit down and talk with them.” Participants also went to parties to relax and interact with other students. Encounters like these served to broaden students’ connections and helped them begin to feel like part of the campus community.

Similarly, when discussing participating in intramurals, Martin’s experience was typical for several participants when they recalled making initial connections: “Prior to the [intramural] team I knew two people but after the team I met eight new people and I still see them around campus today…so overall I do feel it helped me a lot.” He was able to connect with more students on campus by joining the team and seeing those peers around campus lessened the sense of isolation from the campus community. The majority of participants shared similar stories related to joining student organizations as well as engaging in other types of informal or casual leisure experiences like shopping and playing videogames with other students. In many cases strong ties were formed and leisure experiences played a role in mitigating feelings of isolation.

Although the majority of participants initially had casual leisure experiences with peers, most desired a deeper connection to the campus community. Malcolm’s reflection
about his initial leisure involvement accurately described what several participants felt prior to finding campus engagement opportunities:

I used to just play guitar and hang out with my friends. [I had] conversations with people on my hall, but I knew I was looking for something more genuine. [A] deeper connection with people and something more fulfilling in terms of the university. So, I knew I was searching for something but I didn’t know what it was.

Involvement with student organizations and co-curricular programs enabled these young men to build strong and lasting relationships. Luther described the experience of joining student organizations: “Once I started joining clubs I found a lot of likeminded people, going through the same things I was going through. We kind of motivated each other. That helped me get settled into the college atmosphere.” When remembering how he developed strong ties with others on campus Junior shared, “I have created good friends, some solid friends within the groups definitely. I’d have to say that my co-chair is my best friend out of all the groups. But, I have definitely been able to build relationships.”

Several participants joined a student organization and found the intensity of their involvement was a factor in developing strong ties. Those participants who simply went to meetings felt less alone on campus but did not develop strong bonds with their peers. Strong ties were formed when young men became engaged with student organizations and committed more time and energy in some way. Volunteering for responsibilities was one way to make connections more easily. Douglas joined a student organization and immediately volunteered to serve as the photographer for one of their events. This role allowed him to have a reason to introduce himself to other students and make connections. He also had a
reason to continue interacting with other members of the student organization after the event. This additional interaction increased the intensity of his campus engagement and he developed stronger relationships with some members of the organization. The men who did not choose to volunteer for responsibilities or become more engaged in an organization did not appear to form deeper connections with other members of the group.

Some men did not develop these strong ties through student organizations, but the majority of participants discussed connections that alleviated feelings of isolation as a result of leisure and campus engagement. As participants fostered important connections and strong ties with peers, they felt part of a group or groups and they had people they could communicate with about their daily lives. When discussing what he valued about his friendships formed through social interactions and his student organizations, Junior shared, “I have people who I can talk to and share experiences with at any given time. I think I am fortunate that I have found good people who…will continue to be my friends.” This sentiment was echoed by other participants when reflecting on their overall leisure and campus engagement experiences.

Cultivating these types of relationships and social networks was critical to mitigating feelings of isolation African American males from low SES backgrounds experienced. Most of these young men arrived on campus and initially found casual experiences with other students through leisure and campus programs. After developing these early connections, I found young men began to engage more deeply and consistently in campus programs and leisure experiences, which created stronger bonds with peers. These strong ties mitigated the sense of isolation and led to finding social and emotional support.
Finding social and emotional support.

The majority of participants found social and emotional support through relationships developed during leisure experiences such as over meals, playing videogames, and hanging out with friends as well as through their involvement in campus engagement opportunities such as student organizations and co-curricular programs. Support came in various forms: how to get involved on campus, emotional support during difficult times, and a space to relax and discuss issues related to college and life. Most men discussed the overwhelming university environment. They said they would not be successful in college if they had not had the social and emotional support to help mitigate feelings of isolation. Powell reflected on his relationships and how important they were to him:

I tend to form my relationships around what I am interested in doing. So my closest friends are in my organization….I think it is important to have support [from friends] because you won’t make it through this university without it. No matter how much you try to do it by yourself, there is going to be some point in time where you are going to need somebody to have your back.

Social and emotional support often came in the form of providing information on how to get involved with campus programs, informal student opportunities, and social outlets on and around campus. Participants began their involvement at different points during their college experience, but one consistent finding was that they sought and found initial leisure experiences and campus engagement through peers, and not from university resources. For example, King recalled that during his first year he was not involved socially or engaged with campus programs. A sophomore invited him to attend a student organization event and that
invitation resulted in him joining the group as well as viewing members as a resource for how to get further involved on campus. King recounted:

   During my freshman year in the spring [he] pulled me into… a round table discussion. That kind of peaked my interest as far as somebody like telling me here’s where you need to be or here’s what you should think about doing.

   The majority of participants discussed how friends and informal connections were the primary means of learning about leisure and campus engagement. This leisure and campus engagement, in turn, enabled social and professional connections. Carver reflected on his campus connections during his college experience:

   In the beginning they were more social connections that brought more information like the hottest parties, which is to be expected of young college students. But later in my career, they turned into this is a great intern opportunity-- this would look good on a resume. I guess they evolved into more professional networks.

   Several young men used the social and emotional support provided through leisure and campus engagement to work through difficult life circumstances and challenging campus incidents. Life events ranged from the death of a family member to the uncertainty of post-college plans. Frederick described the support he found from members of his fraternity:

   When we were on line [initiation process with his fraternity] my grandmother passed away. If I did not have them here with me I don’t know what might have happened. I mean, I had friends here but I didn’t have friends close enough to help with a death. It was like immediately when they found out everybody was right by my side.
If a participant had a bad experience in a class or another aspect of his life, the bonds developed with peers outside of the classroom provided support to manage these emotions. For instance Junior reflected on his close friends as “the core that I can build off of. If something happens and I don’t know how to interpret it, I can go talk to them.” King also reflected on how his campus engagement provided support when he was experiencing academic stress:

When I wasn’t having the best time in the classroom, I had these other organizations to look forward to…. They would kind of change how I was feeling at the time or the mood I might have been in or what I was experiencing. They were an outlet.

Having a space with friends where they could relax, be themselves, and talk with others about life on and off campus was important for most men. Some participants found this type of social and emotional support during campus engagement such as through student organization meetings, but the majority of participants found it during leisure experiences such as over meals, going to the mall, and other social activities. Malcolm described being with his friends:

Breakfast was kind of a thing especially Saturday mornings. [We] just kind of talk and laugh. After a while the food got a little old because it was the same breakfast every Saturday and Sunday but you know we are just all like sarcastic and just saying stupid things. Talking about sports, girls, and I don’t know, just talking crap to each other.

Similarly Douglas talked about being with friends during leisure experiences and how that space was beneficial. Douglas said the time was used, “Just complaining. We complain about
everything. A lot of us are doing similarly hard work so that is what we do--we complain and we bond about life.”

Three interviewees had different experiences than others regarding social support. These men did engage regularly in leisure activities and other campus involvement opportunities, but they did not see or want to use these relationships for social and emotional support. George, Mandela, and Derek discussed how they spent time alone processing and reflecting on their experiences as opposed to sharing them over a meal with friends or during a student organization event. George noted:

I watch TV. Yeah I just sit and watch TV by myself. I’m a social introvert. It is like not an official thing. I like to socialize with people but… if you ask me what I was doing before I came here it was watching TV in my room.

These men preferred to handle difficult situations alone and did not seek social support from their peers. For instance, when Mandela talked in the focus group about the role his friends played in providing support, he immediately responded:

I don’t really tell people much. I really don’t want to be a burden to people because we all have things. You know, like family or money or whatever so I just don’t want to be that person who is like here is my life on top of yours so I just scale it back a little.

When Booker had difficult experiences he also did not discuss them with friends. Not being selected for Club Soccer was hard for him to accept because it was a sport he loved to play and he felt he was good enough to make the team. He recalled basically not touching a soccer ball for almost a year and managing these emotions on his own.
That’s the way I went [just handled everything alone]. Wasn’t the best way. It was dark and depressing but I got through it. I would not recommend it to anyone else.

_Interviewer:_ Did you know there were resources on campus?

_Booker:_ I did but this was just kind of my style. I was like it’ll end soon, it’ll end soon. I did have friends but I would say they really didn’t know what was going on.

Each of these young men were actively involved on campus but chose time alone to reflect and recharge or did not want to burden others with their difficult situations.

Most young men, however, viewed social and emotional support as a mutually beneficial relationship and part of being a member in this campus community. Participants found this support through positive leisure and campus engagement experiences and these relationships played a significant role in mitigating feelings of isolation. However, I found that participants needed to monitor and evaluate their involvement because some men had a tendency to over commit to friends and campus organizations, which ended up creating stressful situations with negative consequences.

**Managing the stress of connections.**

Connections developed during leisure and campus engagement experiences had a complex role sometimes resulting in stress and stressful situations for the young men in my study. Although leisure and campus connections mitigated feelings of isolation, several men shared stories that demonstrated campus engagement and social relationships were sources of stress in their lives. Some participants discussed feeling pressured to get more engaged with friends as well as student organizations. Both internal and external pressures existed related to social connections and campus engagement. Participants felt the desire to nurture new
social connections, but as these networks grew, they had more relationships to manage. Similarly, these young men genuinely valued their campus engagement whether it was service oriented, recreational, or activist in nature. They also hoped that campus engagement would increase their competitiveness for opportunities after graduation. Participants recognized that they had to balance academic commitments with their social life and campus involvement. When asked where he felt pressured, Junior epitomized how many participants related to stress:

I think different pressures. Like there is no one pressure that is extremely stressful. It is a lot of different things calling my attention and the people who are calling [my attention] not recognizing that I have other things. I think that is something I struggle with … like with the fraternity. Because now I have a bunch of guys who really want to be close with me but…it’s almost like I don’t want to just throw them [the fraternity brothers] in there. A lot of them don’t have the same commitments I do and so they don’t always understand when I say I can’t go today.

Several participants discussed the stress created as a result of pursuing campus engagement. They sometimes felt pressured to participate and make contributions to these groups such as planning events or taking on leadership roles. The majority of men also recognized that attending regular meetings and programs while balancing academic responsibilities increased their stress level. When George was asked how he spent his time outside of class, he shared:

I study possibly three hours a day and it’s between 12:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. From the time I get out of class, which is usually 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m., I have meetings with
different groups and I’m planning stuff. That’s been like that since my sophomore year, honestly.

George acknowledged this stressful lifestyle but felt he needed to maintain his campus engagement to be more competitive for professional positions and/or graduate school.

Stress created in these situations was even greater for men who admittedly had time management and prioritization difficulties. Luther expressed ideas that were consistent with how some participants perceived campus organizations.

I know a lot of people look up to me because I have been in the group a lot longer and they expect a lot from me. Being in that position of leadership I feel more pressure to do well and be devoted. Like the practice time--making sure the practice time is very serious and engaged.

Colin also shared the pressures he experienced as a sophomore being asked to take on significant roles in multiple organizations as well as trying to maintain a part-time job and do well in classes:

I actually did completely awful because of everything I had on my plate. I was struggling with my transition, I was depressed, I was dealing with [work] which was a lot. For half the semester I had a job at the Union but I quit because that was too much. I was also on the campus programming board and was planning a $100,000 homecoming concert at like age 18 (slight laughter). I actually failed every class that I took that semester.
Colin was able to return the following semester, get back on track academically, and continue his involvement with better prioritization and time management. But mishandling stress related to his campus engagement had negative consequences.

A few men also talked about the stress created from developing and maintaining friendships during their leisure. Although they understood that relationships were important, they also had to put them in perspective and maintain a certain amount of self-care. They discussed difficulties in balancing the needs of their friends with their own. When Barack reflected on the social networks and friends he had on campus, he appreciated them but expressed that at certain times he just needed to be alone because of the stress these expectations created for him:

Sometimes disconnects happens when I don’t always want to be around people. Some people, they just don’t understand. If I don’t respond to a text message, it is not because I don’t like you. It is because, you know, I am in my own zone. So it’s dealing with taking that time out for me instead of just giving my presence and energy to my friends. That has been somewhat of a struggle for me--trying to please everyone.

Booker also felt stress related to some of the relationships that he had formed on campus. He wanted to do more on campus socially and help his peers, but at times needed to prioritize his academics and networking to obtain a good job after graduation. He described the stress, “That is something I struggled with you know like preserving yourself versus saving someone else.”
Although managing the stress caused by leisure and campus engagement was demanding, participants knew being involved with campus programs and developing social networks was important. Those young men who were able to balance the intensity of their engagement and clearly articulate to friends how and when they would be available were better able to manage the stress related to these relationships and minimize negative consequences. Young men who were able to manage this stress, through support from the relationships they cultivated, mitigated feelings of isolation.

**Summary: Mitigating feelings of isolation.**

Casual and spontaneous leisure encounters (e.g., meals, pick-up volleyball, playing videogames) as well as campus engagement (e.g., student organizations, intramural teams) led to informal relationships in the campus community. These informal or casual relationships were an important part of participants’ social adjustment to this new environment. Young men could develop weak ties easily with little commitment or expectation by joining a group of peers going to dinner or playing basketball. Participants mostly shared examples of prosocial leisure involvement. Going to parties and consuming alcohol were discussed but most participants said they were not heavily involved with the party scene. Participants did mention parties as a way to build casual relationships. Similarly, participants developed casual relationships through co-curricular involvement (e.g., Transition Bridges, LeaderShape), student organizations, and campus activities. Even though these were structured campus involvement, participation did not ensure strong ties were made with peers. Campus engagement did, however, provide opportunity for social interaction, and thereby increased informal connections and mitigated feelings of isolation.
In some cases, these informal connections led to friendships and strong bonds for the young men in my study. Sustained consistent leisure involvement and intense campus involvement, where participants were committed and engaged with the program or organization, facilitated meaningful friendships or strong ties. In addition to making connections, strong ties provided social and emotional support. While informal connections and friendships were initiated in similar ways, with friendships and strong ties participants learned more about their peers, shared experiences, and developed trust. These outcomes happened for some young men through regular interactions over meals and hanging out, and for others through intense engagement in co-curricular programs or student organizations. Participants who joined student organizations, consistently engaged, and assumed responsibilities requiring interaction with other members forged meaningful relationships and strong ties.

Participants discussed the negative and positive aspects of leisure and campus engagement, but overall they understood that to mitigate feelings of isolation they needed to engage with peers and the campus community. For the majority of young men, leisure and campus engagement allowed them to cultivate friendships and networks that provided social and emotional support. Most young men had multiple types of relationships and the combination of these networks played a significant role helping them find connection on campus. Social connections led to social capital for some participants by creating more relationships and leading to new opportunities. In some cases leisure and campus engagement experiences were sources of stress and a few men experienced negative
consequences. These interactions, however, generally allowed them to learn about themselves and promote self-discovery.

Discovering a Sense of Self

Discovering a sense of self was the second major theme that emerged from the data. Young men learned about themselves through leisure and campus engagement. Whether they were participating in formal campus involvement like student organizations, enjoying leisure experiences such as hanging out with friends, or simply spending time alone in recreational activities like jogging or working out, participants said they were better able to understand themselves as a result of these interactions and activities. When reflecting on his college experience Douglas, a graduating senior, said, “You know for me leisure or recreation has been a gateway to learn, grow, and be a better person.” His statement captured the sentiments of the majority of participants in my study.

Although these young men looked forward to starting college, getting involved, and meeting new people, the majority of them felt they needed to develop a better sense of who they were to maximize these opportunities and relationships. When thinking back to what helped him with his transition to college, Malcolm shared:

I think it was just probably a new place, college, predominantly white environment…and I was basically the same kid I was in high school when I first got to college. So I wasn’t particularly a confident kid in high school but it was just a lot easier. So it makes sense why I wasn’t particularly successful my first year because I was trying to be the same person I was in high school.
Variation was found in the types of leisure experiences that were meaningful to these young men. These different experiences helped them not only transition to college but grow and develop as adults. Through leisure and campus engagement, overall, participants experienced growth in self-concept, gained a sense of purpose, and wanted to make a difference on campus. Each of these subthemes contributed to participants’ discovery of a sense of self at this PWI.

**A growth in self-concept.**

Self-concept is a person’s general understanding of the self and the attributes possessed. Self-concept clarity is important for any individual entering new situations and challenges in life (Ritchie, Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Gidron, 2011). Several young men reported that throughout high school they had significant educational support. Teachers and counselors enabled them by providing and directing them to opportunities. Once on campus, however, they realized proactive behavior related to their social life and informal education was necessary. Luther summed up the feelings of many participants related to leisure and campus engagement:

> I would definitely say [involvement] has inspired me. ... [I] like for things to come to me because sometimes in high school counselors would say if you fill this out you’ll probably have a good chance of getting it. But in college you have to actually go after things.

Most of these young men learned the type of person they were partially through the freedom and choice associated with college. They also began to realize that understanding their strengths and weaknesses was important. During the focus group Powell shared, “I feel like
my comfort zone was where I came from back home. I knew who I was in my household. Outside of that I really didn’t know my strengths and what I could handle.” He went on to share that branching out through leisure and campus engagement was how he began to appreciate and understand his abilities.

Leisure and campus engagement allowed these students to explore who they were in this campus environment. Most participants joined organizations, participated in campus co-curricular programs, and had different types of leisure experiences. Several men initially joined service organizations that included volunteering in the local community (e.g., tutoring and mentoring) or on-campus organizations (e.g., student Red Cross). Others joined campus organizations that were cultural, recreational, or activist in nature (e.g., Black Student Association (BSA), Club Lacrosse, or social justice oriented groups). A few participated in co-curricular programs focused on personal growth and development that were open to all students through an application process such as Lead MTU, LeaderShape, and Transition Bridges.

Volunteering in the local community through campus engagement enabled young men to work with others and learn about themselves. Martin reflected on his experience, “I learn from the kids. I teach them a lesson and I learn something myself. It is like a reciprocal relationship. I learned a lot about my personality. Working with them I learn things about myself.” Similarly, Douglas came to know himself better through his involvement with a student organization advocating for equal on-campus housing options for all students:

I had never been harassed and to this day I have never been harassed. I have always been fortunate to live with queer people who are similar to me, which is a privilege.
But really being able to advocate for [equal housing options] opened my eyes to some of my own personal biases.

Those men who participated in co-curricular campus programs also experienced an increase in self-awareness. These types of programs varied in length. Lead MTU spanned eight weeks during a regular academic semester. LeaderShape, a national model used on several campuses across the country, was an intensive one-week session conducted over Spring Break. Another example was Transition Bridges, an academic transition program conducted during the five weeks of the second summer session. Carver shared why and how the social aspects of Transition Bridges were meaningful to him:

… actually the most important [involvement] was [Transition Bridges] because it gave you a platform. It’s like a platform that is already built up for you and all you have to do is step up. You just meet so many people. The program targets a certain demographic of people [students from various minority populations], the people that it targets are so different… You may have some commonalities but they are so different from you and I think that really helped me with branching out, accepting new ideas, and new ways of life.

In addition to learning about themselves, leisure and campus engagement developed self-confidence for several participants. Developing self-confidence facilitated branching out, trying new activities, and meeting new people, all contributing to a growth in self-concept. The participants discussed becoming more confident in their communication, time management, and other organizational skills, making them more comfortable in social and
academic settings. For example, Taliaferro shared the impact that being in BSA and
Harmony, an a cappella group, had on his self-confidence:

> I had a solo for the first time in my life with Harmony and, of course, I was nervous
> but it was good for me to do things that I had never done before. I was able to grow as
> far as my confidence level. Like with BSA, it is a similar thing…to know that I can
> have an impact if I put the effort into working with different people on campus.

He said when he started college he was intimidated by classes that required participation, but
as he developed more self-confidence through leisure and campus engagement experiences
he no longer scoured course syllabi to avoid participation requirements. He was more
confident in his ability to communicate with others.

Similarly, King explained that while he learned from various involvements, he was
able to bring those experiences to one organization and gain a significant amount of self-
confidence in his leadership abilities. He shared that his student organization “helped develop
me into what I would consider a leader since I have been here. It was a great opportunity for
me to grow and evolve into something new and something better.” When students got
involved on campus they began to understand the important role this participation played in
realizing their goals during and after college.

Realizing that this participation was valuable and that the confidence gained through
social interactions was important, a few young men also reported learning how to value their
background and the role it played in developing a sense of self. Understanding that their
personal experiences and perspectives were important to share, not only during casual
conversations over dinner or on the basketball court but also during organization meetings,
was beneficial to their development of self-concept. Barack articulated the internal challenges he faced when he talked about joining what he perceived as a predominantly White and affluent student organization:

Going into those rooms I just felt like maybe I didn’t have as much to bring to the table as these other people. So, I felt a little… I wasn’t… I didn’t feel as confident when we had discussions. I was hesitant to speak up and to voice things that were on my mind.

As a result of having to confront these feelings, through his involvement in BSA as well as interacting with friends, Barak learned to appreciate his background and eventually he said he became more engaged in the predominantly White and affluent student organization. When reflecting on how and when he felt self-assured on campus Malcolm discussed conversing with friends about campus life and reflecting on his background during leisure experiences. He did not join a cultural student organization but found an informal group of diverse friends who exercised together and shared meals. Malcolm recalled, “I think it was getting comfortable with being in a new place, making a few friends, validating your experiences. Realizing that wealth doesn’t indicate worth.” Navigating engagement with the larger campus community and within the Black community, discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, played a significant role in how these men developed self-concept and a sense of self.

Not all participants described this growth in self-concept. Three of the men interviewed seemed to arrive on campus with positive self-concepts. George, Nelson, and Carver each felt comfortable when they matriculated to campus and did not necessarily find
that leisure and campus engagement played a significant role in the growth of their self-concept. Each young man reported finding leisure and campus engagement beneficial. However, their interviews included little discussion about discovering a new sense of self. They were self-assured about their abilities when arriving on campus. George came from a small, rural town that lacked diversity. However, because of family responsibilities as well as being involved with the marching band and his church, he knew a lot about himself prior to coming to college. Nelson, on the other hand, went to a large high school in an urban area. He was in the International Baccalaureate program and participated in high school athletics. His high school experiences were valuable, but he spoke about the work experience he had with two jobs near the end of his senior year of high school and throughout the summer before attending college. These positions bolstered his self-confidence and helped him learn organizational skills. Carver was from a military family and shared how his father instilled certain values and how he also gained confidence while growing up because his family lived in multiple states. He talked about attending school on military bases for most of his life and then attending a public high school. All of these experiences combined to cultivate the self-concept Carver brought to his college experience.

Based on my interpretations, understanding oneself, becoming confident in abilities, and valuing personal experiences and perspectives were critical pieces to developing self-concept. Although leisure and campus engagement were not salient contributors to self-concept for all participants, these types of experiences (e.g., hanging out with friends, casual recreation, membership in student organizations, attending co-curricular programs) appeared important for most men. Leisure and campus engagement were also a challenge for some
men and a source of stress, as discussed previously, but participants still saw the benefits in these experiences. As Junior shared, “It’s taken a lot out of me learning what I am capable of, but now I know that I am more than capable of a lot of things. It helps you grow as an individual by being so involved.”

**Discovering a sense of purpose.**

Discovering a sense of purpose and meaning for attaining a college degree was closely related to growth of self-concept and sense of self. Participants’ reasons varied for why they were in college at this particular university and included: attaining a good job, being in a better situation than where they came from, desiring to help others, and leading a fulfilling life after graduation. One commonality among all participants was that leisure and campus engagement played a role in determining their sense of purpose. Washington shared:

I joined some clubs and it actually does… it gives you a sense of purpose on campus. I would say (pause) outside of just going to class because sometimes that can get dull and you are like what am I here for? I would say that is why clubs are here.

These attitudes about the value of campus participation were consistent for all participants in some way. Each young man discussed finding a sense of purpose related to his particular situation. In many cases this purpose was found through positive campus engagement like Washington described. In other cases young men had to confront negative situations such as Colin shared earlier regarding managing the stress of connections resulting from over commitment and mishandling stress.

A few participants found a sense of purpose through handling negative or difficult experiences. Some men experienced micro-aggressions as well as racism on campus.
Examples of these encounters are discussed later in this chapter related to experiencing cultural dissonance. Although some of these negative experiences were frustrating and confusing situations, many men expressed how they learned from the interactions, which gave them a clearer sense of purpose. Junior shared reflections from his academic experience:

I have definitely run into a few teachers or TAs who have been a little on edge around me where I’ll just ask them a question and occasionally they will look a little intimidated or scared and I feel a little confused. Because as big and imposing as I may or may not be I am literally just asking you what the homework is… It does put me off a little bit as far as returning and asking more questions.

After talking about these micro-aggressions with friends and mentors, Junior was able to prioritize his goals for attending graduate school and continued to approach faculty and staff rather than worry about possibly making them uncomfortable.

Through involvement in student organizations several men discussed having interactions that influenced their decision about pursuing their major or their career after college. King, as an example, was not sure what major he was going to pursue when he came to college. He enjoyed reading magazines in his leisure time, however, and decided to join a student media organization as a writer. He remembered:

It was a little intimidating at first because I didn’t have writing experience. I went anyway because it [experience] wasn’t really a requirement and that is what [the group] was about anyway. It was about learning the ropes and exploring and writing…kind of learning through practicing writing.
King continued with the student organization and ultimately decided to pursue a major in communication studies.

Two other men, Taliaferro and Douglas, developed a sense of the lives they wanted after graduation based on their accumulated leisure and campus engagement. Taliaferro shared:

I would say [campus engagement] has made me want to go more in to public interest law or a nonprofit organization so it has changed the outcome or the impact I want to make. I don’t really want to find a really good job that pays lots of money. I want to make sure the job I have and the life I create is one I can keep this same sense of urgency and care that I have for other people.

Similarly, Douglas created several meaningful networks of friends through positive experiences with leisure and campus engagement, which provided support for him to change his major and pursue a career aligned with his values after graduation. When reflecting on how he felt during student organization events he shared:

I am happy. I think I am happy because a lot of the things I am doing are raising awareness about things people don’t understand. I enjoy talking about LGBTQ issues, history, and oppression. I feel these issues are really important to campus and our world. I would hear students say, “Oh wow I didn’t even know this was happening or like how can we help?” The feeling of wanting to support something they didn’t know about beforehand feels great.

Douglas said these revelations combined with his passion for social justice ignited by his leisure experiences with friends motivated him to lead a life of activism.
Although these men discovered a sense of purpose in different ways and with differing amounts of clarity, the majority of participants thought leisure and campus engagement played a role in this process. Leisure and campus engagement provided experiences where they learned about their values and strengths as well as how they could use them. For many young men, this understanding contributed to their self-discovery and wanting to make a difference on campus.

**Wanting to make a difference.**

As young men grew in self-concept, and developed of a sense of purpose, several participants spoke about a desire to pursue meaningful activities that would make a difference. In some cases this difference was immediate (e.g., working with other men of color or supporting students who might need temporary food assistance), but in others it was future oriented (e.g., ensuring that campus organizations would endure).

Over a third of participants discussed a desire to make an immediate impact on campus through student organizations and to address issues that were important to the university community. Although King was involved in a student media group, he also was involved in a student organization created to advocate and assist all men of color at the university. He discussed what this experience meant for him. More importantly, however, he also reflected on why he committed his time and energy to this type of campus engagement:

> I felt like I could have a good impact there. Not because I felt like I was needed -- that wasn’t it. But just knowing that my work wasn’t necessarily in vain was one thing that kept me around. Knowing that I did enjoy it and knowing that it would potentially help someone else out are all things that kept me involved.
Similarly, George created a new student organization that provided a food pantry for his peers. He felt this issue was important because finding a meal should not be a concern for any student. Through his desire to make an impact on campus he reflected on working with other students to form the organization as well as making connections on campus with both faculty and administrators. Similarly, Douglas worked with students, faculty, and administrators to address campus issues related to LGBT students. He wanted to change behaviors of the campus community related to this population and reflected on his activism:

> It is a love hate thing for me. It is hard because you come here to be a student but you just realize that being a student is secondary. If you are trying to get something done that means so much to you, you put that first. I know we make choices and you have to decide what you want to do, but I made the decision to do it. It is for the benefit of our campus and people that have similar identities to me.

During the focus group, Powell and Junior shared how they wanted to change how African American males engaged with the university. They said they wanted change the overall campus culture through their campus engagement.

> Two other participants, Booker and Barack, also desired to make a difference on campus and discussed using their leisure time and social connections as opposed to formal campus engagement. Booker had difficulty finding campus activities that were meaningful for him and discussed joining and leaving several organizations because he felt they were not doing anything tangible and not maximizing his time. He explained, “The problem I realized with a lot of clubs is they seem more resume building than being action oriented. I get really dedicated and I don’t like wasting time, so if I do something I want to see the impact.”
also shared that informally talking with older students was helpful to him in making connections on campus and finding opportunities:

My way of involvement since second semester junior year… I just figured I could do more good if I found and mentored people. I had a really helpful mentor who spent a lot of time with me when I was preparing for interviews. He was a graduating senior. So I wanted to kind of be that guy. I just started seeing how people were doing, asking them what they wanted to do with their life. I give them resources like here are jobs you should look at, let me see your resume, let me see your cover letter.

This type of involvement during his leisure time helped Booker learn more about others as well as himself as he tried to make a difference.

Barack was involved in student organizations that he enjoyed, but he also was involved with an informal social network in his leisure time that provided a medium for other men to connect and communicate about their experiences. He recalled how an older student added him to a social media group during his first semester because the student thought they had a lot in common. This informal group helped him not only develop connections but also to exchange ideas and explore his self-concept. Barack remained part of the group because he found the social network valuable for men like himself and wanted it to continue:

Ever since I got here there has been a group of guys. It’s not like an organization but like we’ll have a GroupMe [social media platform] and we always talk and we always get up with each other. This year I’ve been real connected to some guys. We just talk about whatever crazy stuff. We just keep adding people. We just added another freshman. It seems like I am talking about an organization.
Two participants, however, did not express or exhibit a desire to make a difference on campus during their interviews. Mandela and Malcolm both had small groups of peers they interacted with during their leisure and were involved in only a few student organizations and campus activities. They contributed to the university community through involvement but were not motivated by wanting to make a difference. Additionally neither participated in any co-curricular programs. Mandela had a specific goal of getting into graduate school and wanting to protect his time. He indicated his academics were more important than making a difference on campus:

I’m just really focused on getting the right grades for potential law school applications. Therefore, I didn’t really try to stick my foot out because I knew that it could take away from me spending time in the books and getting that right G.P.A. So I limit myself.

Malcolm did not have the same concern over his G.P.A. but shared that developing his sense of self and spending time with friends were important. He spent the majority of his first year with informal networks of friends during his leisure exploring campus and his own identity. He described that year and how he decided to get more involved on campus:

By the end of that [first] year I was a lot more confident as a person. My grades were better and I was like, I can handle this place now. I remember I wrote down what I wanted to accomplish the next year and that really directed me in terms of what I wanted to do.

Malcolm participated in several campus student organizations such as Club Boxing, ROTC, and a student media group after his first year. Similarly, Mandela was involved with the
honor system and occasionally participated in campus programs. However, neither young man framed his participation as wanting to make a difference on campus. Although making a difference was not the desire of all participants, wanting to make a difference motivated many young men to branch out and engage with other students and campus opportunities.

**Summary: Discovering a sense of self summary.**

A growth in self-concept, gaining a sense of purpose, and wanting to make a difference on campus all contributed to young men discovering a sense of self. These concepts developed for participants in a variety of ways and settings. Casual leisure experiences with friends allowed participants to “get out of their comfort zone” and find new relationships and opportunities. Through these interactions and relationships, participants were exposed to situations that necessitated use of interpersonal skills. Campus engagement provided similar opportunities but also required the development of organizational, time management, and communication skills that participants found important in developing this sense of self.

Positive self-concept was critical for participants to capitalize on their leisure and campus engagement experiences. For young men to engage with the larger university community, they needed meaningful relationships and a positive sense of self. Developing self-concept clarity through leisure and campus engagement enabled men to become more involved with individuals, social groups, and campus engagement opportunities because they better understood who they were and what they wanted out of their college experience. As participants became more socially engaged and introspective they were more intentional about future leisure and campus engagement.
Leisure and campus engagement played a role in developing this sense of purpose. When young men came to this realization, their overall college experience benefited. Participants were able to better prioritize relationships as well as academic and social commitments. When approached by peers to participate in new experiences or campus engagement, young men were able to evaluate requests and opportunities based on their sense of purpose. Self-concept clarity contributed to their ability to decline involvement that might increase stress. When participants made sound decisions about their leisure and campus engagement, meaningful relationships and campus engagement resulted that for some students created a desire to make a difference on campus.

When participants had the mindset of making a difference combined with a growth in self-concept and a sense of purpose they seemed to become more intentional about their leisure and campus engagement. Leisure and campus engagement enabled an overall discovery of self by providing experiences that stretched participants’ psychologically and socially. In the case of these young men, the outcomes were positive. Several participants shared stories of difficult situations and feelings of depression that relationships developed through leisure and campus engagement buffered. Discovery of self also negated these experiences and in turn bolstered low SES African American male undergraduates’ ability to navigate the campus culture.

Navigating Campus Cultures

Navigating campus cultures was the third major theme that emerged from my data. During individual interviews and the focus group, participants shared stories and perceptions about campus culture. African American males from low SES backgrounds had to recognize
and navigate multiple campus cultures. These young men had to navigate multiple peer communities on campus: the predominantly White community, the Black community, and the affluent community. This journey brought pressures and difficulties in socially integrating with the university.

In their individual interviews Barack and Malcolm shared some of the pressures. Barack discussed interacting with his White and Black peers:

I realize that talking to my White friends and talking to my Black friends is just different. Down to the way we talk and the way we interact with one another. You know, you really have to (pause) I realize you have to take yourself to another level and put not just yourself but your people in front of you and realize that you are a reflection of them.

Malcolm described how arriving on campus related to his affluent peers:

I had a positive outlook because I had done well in school up to that point. But you get here and it is kind of like you are really starting all over again. I guess coming from a poor background and then coming to a place where (pause) I don’t know if everybody is rich or anything like that, most people are probably average middle class. I don’t know, but the people on my hall had money….I remembered feeling like I was behind. Not intellectually but in terms of experience --experience people had.

Young men in this study had to interact with campus groups including the predominately White students, the affluent community of students, and the cultural expectations of the smaller Black campus community.
Three subthemes demonstrated the journey these young men had in navigating multiple campus cultures during leisure and campus engagement. Participants experienced cultural dissonance making it difficult to connect with the larger community, confronted internal cultural pressures engaging with the Black campus community, and had to reconcile these cultural experiences with their low SES background.

**Experiencing cultural dissonance.**

Understanding the predominantly White and affluent campus culture was a complex process for most young men in this study. Several factors facilitated, and in some cases forced, participants to acknowledge this larger campus culture related to their race and socioeconomic status. Confronting stereotypes and racism, difficulties of getting involved with predominantly White leisure and campus engagement opportunities, and encountering cultural incongruence when in predominantly White and affluent campus communities all contributed to experiencing cultural dissonance. The interactions that participants experienced through leisure and campus engagement also demonstrated the differing cultural values these African American males from low SES backgrounds had within the larger community and the discrimination and stereotypes that were present. Negative encounters forced many participants to negotiate cultural dissonance in this campus environment.

Several young men shared in their in-depth interviews about racial incidents that were confusing and enraging. I sensed this discomfort during the interviews and as I transcribed and coded data. Therefore in the focus group, I explored if other men had similar experiences. In the focus group, participants talked about confronting stereotypes and racist
behaviors during their time outside of the classroom, which confirmed and provided more depth to data from the personal interviews.

During individual interviews, stories and observations were shared from various settings demonstrating micro-aggressions and discriminatory behaviors experienced by some men. Encounters occurred in residence halls, at parties, and within student organizations. Malcolm, for example, described an incident he experienced during his first semester with racist and discriminatory comments from his roommate and a hall mate. Fortunately for him he was secure enough in his Black identity to not overreact to these statements. He reflected on the encounter with his hall mate:

I was talking to a guy in my [residence] hall. He was upset because he was not successful with women. He was barking about a math problem on a Friday night and I said, not like trying to be an asshole, but if you want to meet women you can’t be barking about a math problem on a Friday night. He said, “well at least I am not Black” and it’s an offensive statement. It is very offensive but for me it was just odd….It is something I will never forget because that thinking probably isn’t rare. He had a full ride without loans or anything and seemed like one of the premiere candidates to go to this school, so to say something that is so ignorant was weird and it’s still weird.

In making this emotionally charged statement, Malcolm’s hall mate, who was White, implied his lack of a relationship was better than being Black and was attempting to establish his superiority. Whether this statement was intended to challenge Malcolm’s manhood or insult
his race is not clear. Malcolm was left not only questioning if other individual students shared these thoughts but what this incident said about the university community as a whole.

Similarly, Barack shared an experience describing discriminatory behavior he encountered while in a social setting with his White friends. The group of friends planned to attend a predominantly White fraternity party. When they arrived, members of the fraternity would not let them in because Barack was in the group. Being discriminated against by fellow students was unexpected behavior, which created cultural dissonance because he thought this university was supposed to be a diverse and inclusive environment.

Several other participants discussed challenges to leisure and campus engagement in predominately White settings. They described not feeling welcome and sensing they would not be treated fairly when trying to join an organization or team. Luther’s experience about auditioning for a predominantly White a cappella group was an example. He recalled watching the interaction student members of the group had with White men as they went into the elevator for their auditions. The White men would engage with each other, talking and laughing. Luther found when he was escorted to the audition room, there was silence on the elevator ride. Luther shared more about this negative experience:

I kind of felt like walking into the audition I wasn’t going to get it. I auditioned and I didn’t think it was a bad audition, but I didn’t get a call back. So that was kind of, (pause) I don’t know getting on to this campus I felt like the odds were kind of against me. I didn’t attempt to do student government here…. I didn’t feel like I would be too welcome there either. I guess I would say I got involved in a lot but some things I kind of didn’t feel welcome.
A few other young men shared similar feelings of not being fairly considered or that the recruitment process was not inclusive when attempting to join predominately White student organizations. Booker and Barack both tried out for Sport Club teams that were predominately White. Neither was successful getting on a team. Each indicated that they thought they were not selected because the White members of the team knew each other or were more comfortable with the White students. When asked what role he thought his race played, Barack recalled:

I am pretty sure it was factored into their thought. You know seeing a black guy playing soccer-- he’s gotta show me something a little different.

Interviewer: So when you got down to the final cut, do you feel they might have selected people they knew?

Barack: That is what one of the guys told me. He said they picked him by who they knew. You know, guys they had personal relationships with. I ended up playing with them in a pick-up game and they were like “hey you really good” and I was like (laughter) “Yeah, you should’ve picked me.”

Luther, Booker, and Barack each experienced cultural dissonance attempting to join student-led organizations in this new predominantly White campus culture. Each of these men believed the selection process would be fair, unbiased, and based on their talents. However that was not how they perceived these encounters or how the campus culture was portrayed.
In the focus group I further investigated the overall campus culture with participants. I asked young men how they became comfortable on campus. Silence followed, and then Powell shared:

I would actually say I got more uncomfortable as I got older at this university... I feel like a lot of times we say we [the campus community] are progressive but there is so much stuff underneath the surface that shows us we are not nearly as progressive as we might think.

Powell later shared, “I think it is the structure-- that is why we are uncomfortable. I don’t think it is us. It is the system that we live in and it is messed up.” Junior also added his thoughts about his comfort on campus:

I feel it happens at the university because students are coming from a lot of different places where these schemas and stereotypes are in place and so you kind of get buffeted by all of these different views of people of color. Not all of them are positive. Even in terms of just tailgating [entering a secure building behind someone with access] into a dorm, I don’t feel comfortable with that especially behind a White person because they’ll give you that look, like, are you even a student?

All the men in the focus group seemed to support these statements. Junior and Barack also offered assessments of the culture on campus related to African American males from low SES backgrounds. Junior shared:

I feel like it is prevalent everywhere especially on this campus of really privileged people. We need to change the climate, how we are viewed, and that is really difficult.
especially for people [of privilege] …it doesn’t really matter to them if people of color are downtrodden.

Barack added, “I think it goes with our socioeconomic status, too, because you might have friends who didn’t have to deal with the same struggles. They can’t really relate to what you are going through.”

Regardless of these feelings, participants said they interacted in different ways with predominately White communities on campus through leisure and campus engagement. Their interactions and involvement also had a range of intensity. Some occasionally attended parties, social events, or held membership in organizations, but were not deeply engaged. Others maintained lengthy and deep involvement. In the majority of these cases I found participants experienced cultural incongruence in leisure and campus engagement settings. For instance, Colin discussed his perceptions about the culture of two organizations in the focus group. After hearing his experience, other participants around the table agreed and listed other campus engagement opportunities where they perceived similar experiences occurred. Colin explained:

Ambassadors is not a very diverse group. I remember going on the retreat and there was a culture around it that was (pause) that is not in line with what I like to do. There’s just a White, privileged, fratness culture that it’s just hard to get your voice in. It’s just hard to comingle when you don’t wear certain things or do certain things. It’s a completely different culture that has been completely normalized in the group. I say that because it is likely that there are various groups on campus just like that.

*George*: Dance All Night.

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Colin: Yeah Dance All Night is definitely like that. I have been involved with Dance All Night and it is just not an enjoyable experience to be unable to fully be who you are. To just have fun, express yourself, and comingle is hard when everything is tailored to one group of people [White affluent students].

These young men had to recognize and process this display of White, male privilege, discrimination, and overall cultural dissonance so they could learn and grow from this campus environment.

Despite these negative social experiences and constructs, several men had positive leisure and campus engagement experiences, which contributed to negotiating cultural dissonance. Mandela maintained lengthy and intense engagement in one predominately White student organization that he thought contributed to a better understanding about campus and his involvement. Both Malcolm and George were able to form diverse social relationships and connections in their leisure time. While they did have mostly Black friends, they each felt they formed and maintained other relationships, which bolstered their awareness of other cultures and exposed them to other campus communities. George shared his thoughts during the focus group and added more depth to comments he made previously in our one on one interview:

I have a very diverse group of friends…. They are different religions, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and ability. It is kind of hard to manage those friendships, but in terms of my friends, if you want to watch a movie let’s watch a movie. I have a Pride and Prejudice group of [diverse] friends and we watch it every month.
Others participants in the focus group shared trepidation around discussing Black issues when they were in the presence of their White friends. George’s response also addressed that concern:

You don’t have to talk about race issues. Now it might come up, and one thing I try to do with my friends is educate them, engage them, and empower them so they can educate their friends. We tend to have those deep discussions on societal issues so it is easier for us to get together and hang.

Junior provided another perspective on experiencing cultural dissonance. He had a diverse group of social relationships and was deeply involved in both predominately Black and predominately White campus engagement experiences. Junior thought he benefited from this variety of involvement and that he learned more about himself and was more aware of the campus environment because of these experiences. He shared the following during his individual interview when asked about being an African American male on campus:

There are good things to take out of being here and we need to struggle to get some of them, but that doesn’t mean they are inaccessible. That also means we shouldn’t give up. If anything I think it means we should work harder.

Although Junior saw the cultural issues on campus, through his leisure and campus engagement experiences he knew it was possible with persistence and commitment to secure leadership roles and meaningful opportunities in the broader campus community. Junior also expressed that he wished more men in the Black community understood and could wade through the cultural issues.
Much of the cultural dissonance originated because these African American males from low SES backgrounds expected they were entering an intelligent, diverse, and culturally aware campus environment. This university puts forth an image of a progressive and accepting culture to incoming students. Therefore, being confronted with racism and discrimination from fellow students was unexpected. Similarly, when in predominantly White settings, these low SES African American men also felt they could not be themselves and engage with the group because of cultural incongruence. Navigating the predominantly White and affluent cultures on campus while experiencing cultural dissonance was difficult for most men.

**Engaging with the Black campus community.**

The Black community sometimes did not help these African American males from low SES backgrounds negotiate the cultural dissonance they faced. The participants indicated that because of social stigmas and peer pressures, engaging with the Black community at times psychologically constrained or deterred them from interacting with predominately White and other diverse communities.

Issues related to involvement with other Black students such as self-segregation and internalized racism emerged during my interviews and were further discussed in the focus group. Although these men viewed the overall Black community as being essential to their success in college, internal psychological struggles and expectations from Black social structures existed. Engagement with the Black community ranged from being a product of inertia to trepidation about what might happen if they explored certain social relationships or campus engagements outside of the race. Examining the Black community with the focus
group offered insight for understanding the context regarding what African American males from low SES backgrounds faced.

When discussing the Black community, the comments shared by Barack, Colin, and Malcolm captured how participants perceived the integral but complex role the Black community played. Barack explained:

The Black community has been a big part of my experience. It’s helped me understand going to a PWI [Predominantly White Institution]. You have different things going on and it is good to have people you can relate with, who came from where you came from, and they know your experiences. At the same time you do need to branch out and meet more people to get that balance.

The majority of young men in the focus group were appreciative to have the Black community. Colin reflected: “The Black community is sort of like my backbone. I don’t know, it is not something I have to put a lot of effort into.” Others expressed their agreement verbally and non-verbally. Malcolm further described how the Black community provided a foundation that was critical but had limits:

For me it is the core that I can build off of. I have a lot of Black friends and that’s been great and I know who I can talk to if someone says the “n-word” and I don’t know how to react. But I also feel like I run into a lot of issues that my Black friends exclusively can’t address because like me, they are students and they are learning.

While seeking guidance from others outside of the Black community was acceptable, these young men knew that some types of leisure and campus engagement were socially unacceptable to the Black community. If they chose to engage, there could be social
consequences. Examples were romantic relationships outside of their race and joining White Greek organizations.

Four men shared stories of dating outside of their race and the reactions and difficulties they faced as a result. Nelson reflected on how Black students reacted to him dating a White woman one evening:

I go back to my room and my roommate is Black and there are other Black students in there and then I come in and they were like, “Oh, you were with your girl.” I’m like “yeah,” and I think it is funny as soon as I mention she is a White girl like it was a shock to them and we got into a legit argument…. [They felt] if we don’t stick together and watch out for each other then we are not doing the right thing.

The students in Nelson’s room, who were both men and women, knew the African American population on campus was small. If Nelson had romantic relationships outside of the race, they felt he was turning his back on the Black community. In many cases, he indicated that African American women were the most outspoken because from their perspective that not many “good Black men” were on campus. If men dated outside of the race that decreased their chances of finding a romantic partner. However, in Nelson’s confrontation, he also sensed that African American males felt if he dated a White woman he was no longer one of them and was symbolically more supportive of the predominantly White culture and not the Black community.

Further, during the focus group when we discussed participants’ feelings about any constraints the Black community might place on these men, Colin made this observation and the majority of men agreed:
Initially I was going to say it only constrains you if you allow it to but certain things… like if you join a White frat the Black community is going to look at you like, OK, you are one of those [meaning trying to be White] Black people. They [the Black Community] are not going to be as welcoming. So there are certain things around campus where the Black community will judge and not allow you to do it even if that is really what you want to do.

Although the Black community does not physically constrain young men from joining predominantly White fraternities or dating outside of their race, the social stigma and peer pressures made exploring these types of experiences difficult as the men expressed in their individual interviews and the focus group.

Barack and George indicated the ambiguity about the social stigma and peer pressures found in the Black community. They both agreed about the stigma attached specifically with dating outside the race and joining predominately White fraternities. Their observations and experiences also demonstrated the diversity within the Black community. Barack felt comfortable going to parties and joining other predominately White student organizations. In the focus group, he said, “As far as my [Black] friends shunning me for going out, I don’t think I get that from my friends. They are like you are going with them, alright cool.”

George had a slightly different relationship with the Black community. After initially not getting involved in campus engagement opportunities because of focusing on his academics, he said when he tried joining certain organizations in the Black community he experienced internalized racism similar to the discrimination some Black men felt when trying to join predominately White organizations. He realized, “Even if I did want to get
involved with the Black community there was still like a sort of favoritism. They picked who they wanted to basically include.” He went on to share this reflection during our focus group discussion:

So I kind of found refuge in different populations on campus. Not to say I don’t love them [the Black community] because I love them. I have more Black friends than I have any other friends on campus….But I took that as a sign they didn’t want me….I think a lot of people saw me as studious and they didn’t want to hang with me that way. Then they saw me at a party and they were like, “oh my god you can actually hang.”

The internalized racism George felt was not only due to him not immediately pursuing campus engagement but also the way he said he “dressed and carried himself.” He heard that other Black students perceived him as pretentious because of how he behaved and that in his words he wore “preppy White clothes.”

The leisure and campus engagement many participants experienced with the Black community facilitated learning about their culture in a university context. Just as several men were shocked by the cultural dissonance experienced in the larger predominantly White campus culture, they were taken back by the self-segregation and intra-racial cultural issues encountered within the Black community. In many cases racial self-segregation was an unintended outcome for participants. Young men who participated in predominantly Black leisure and campus engagement opportunities and found emotional and social support often maintained those relationships. Participants branched out within the Black community deepening and intensifying their leisure and campus engagement to a point where they could
not get involved with other opportunities and manage their academic and other responsibilities effectively. Unintended racial self-segregation during leisure and campus engagement occurred often and unknowingly for young men in this study because of the value placed on maintaining relationships within the Black community.

Young men in this study had experienced and observed self-segregation and internalized racism prior to joining university groups, and outside the university setting, but thought things might be different on campus. Also, the cultural incongruence they experienced forced them to reflect on the role of the Black community in their lives and learn how to navigate in the larger campus environment through leisure and campus engagement.

**Understanding socioeconomic status.**

Cultural and financial issues related to socioeconomic status also played a role for the majority of participants during their leisure and campus engagement and influenced how they navigated campus. Socioeconomic status in many cases influenced the types of opportunities they desired to pursue because of their cultural background and financial realities. Mandela reflected on being a low SES student on this campus during the focus group:

> Usually low SES goes with a culture. People of low to middle income have a certain (pause) culture. We’ve experienced the same things, we dress a similar way, talk a similar way. I think economics and culture are really tied and that definitely impacts how we view campus as opposed to someone from a more affluent background.

While socioeconomic status and race are closely tied, African American males from low SES backgrounds on this campus had cultural and financial hurdles in the larger campus culture as well as within the Black culture. These young men not only had to confront the White
privilege and institutional racism present in the predominantly White culture, but had to endure institutional classism as well. Concurrently, their experience in the Black community confronting self-segregation and internalized racism was also difficult because of their socioeconomic status.

Being from a low SES background in many respects dictated the leisure and campus engagement opportunities these young men could pursue on campus. Many social, campus engagement, and co-curricular opportunities cost money and these financial barriers existed even for men with significant university financial support. Leisure experiences such as going off campus for a meal, to the mall shopping, or taking trips with friends all added a financial barrier for several participants. Booker shared his thoughts about how being from a low SES background influenced his social life:

If I wanted to eat out I had to come up with that money. If I wanted to go out, I had to come up with that money. If I wanted to go shopping I had to come up with that money. So that kind of hampered what I would call a social life.

Martin also wanted to have an active social life but recalled having to be selective about his leisure activities. “I didn’t like sitting in the room so if there was an opportunity to do something, and I could afford it, I did it.”

The financial costs associated with participating in certain types of leisure and campus engagement was important. However, lack of exposure and cultural dissonance might have also played a role in decision making. For instance, not being exposed to international travel and making assumptions about costs deterred Luther from applying to an international co-curricular program. Luther’s reflection about being asked by a more affluent
friend to participate was indicative of how several young men felt about opportunities that might have seemed monetarily insignificant to students from higher SES backgrounds:

My friends [with money] would say, “You just put in the application and it is $50 and then you have to pay for your plane ticket.” I’m like (laughter) OK, going to a different country [but] that is expensive. So I kind of shied away from opportunities like that.

Luther’s immediate reaction was the financial cost was too great but he also did not consider the program because he had not been exposed to and was from a culture that did not encourage international travel.

After arriving on campus Douglas, who had run cross country in high school, wanted to pursue a new recreational experience and chose club rowing. He was successful in making the team, which he perceived as predominately White and affluent. Douglas was excited by this opportunity but once he attended practices and learned more about the culture and financial costs, he decided to not to stay on the team. He explained:

Crew was a very homogenous space and reminded me of high school. I did not like it and it costs too much money. As someone coming from a low income background, I don’t have a thousand dollars to play your sport! I mean that makes no sense. I can be an activist for free.

In Douglas’s predominantly White high school in a rural community he described how he experienced racist and discriminatory behavior from students he was not close with as well as micro-aggressions from people on his athletic team. When reflecting on high school he shared:
“I was called a nigger the second week I was there because I said hello to a White guy’s girlfriend. That was different for me coming from [his hometown], which was mostly Black. My minority status was never an issue.

Club rowing not only reminded him of this type of culture, but he could not justify, or afford, spending money for this type of leisure and campus engagement.

Even within the Black community financial barriers existed with certain campus engagement opportunities. During the focus group, Powell shared a common thought about the Black Greek community and the financial and cultural barriers associated with those organizations. His perception was that if you wanted “to get involved in a Black fraternity and if you came from a family that is higher SES or values the Greek culture, they [family members] are more apt to help.”

Although most participants had not previously talked about how their low socioeconomic status influenced their personal situations, the majority of young men in this study concluded that SES not only determined how a student could get involved but also made recovery from a difficult situation harder. In the focus group, Colin described, “Being low SES makes things so much harder at college in general. There are just so many things you are not able to do or to get over if you don’t have money.” He went on to talk about how a more affluent peer received an open container citation and had to pay over $600 in expenses to keep the charge off his police record. That student was able to call his parents and get the necessary financial assistance for a lawyer. Men in the focus group agreed their parents would not easily be able to help in a similar situation. As George surmised: “Your
SES status does influence what you can get involved in. I definitely see people who are able to do certain things because they have money.”

**Summary: Navigating campus cultures summary.**

Seeing their peers participating in leisure and campus engagement opportunities they perceived as inaccessible was an unfortunate reality most African American males from low SES backgrounds understood. Growing up in a low SES environment, they were accustomed to being constrained in their leisure options due to financial barriers. Even though more outlets were present in this university setting, having to navigate campus cultures consumed much of their psychological energy.

Young men did not perceive they had access to the same social connections and opportunities that their White and more affluent African American peers. In some cases financial reality was the issue while in other cases issues of classism and cultural factors were at play. Most participants could not take advantage of all the campus had to offer. The majority of young men had to address cultural dissonance and incongruence while simultaneously learning the social norms for engaging with the predominantly White and Black cultures on campus. Young men had to confront micro-aggressive behaviors in the predominantly White community on campus in leisure and campus engagement settings. Several stories were shared about the real and perceived barriers associated with finding involvement in predominantly White student organizations. Participants also faced cultural incongruence within the Black community on campus. While overall young men found the Black community supportive, participants did acknowledge the presence of self-segregation and internalized racism. The cumulative effects of cultural dissonance experienced in both
the predominantly White and Black campus communities often were a hindrance for these young men.

In addition, these young men had to confront the challenges of finding their way as a low SES student in an affluent environment. Classism was present at this PWI, although in some circumstances young men had difficulty discerning if their marginalization was due to race or SES. However, cultural differences were evident as many participants believed they did not enter this campus environment with the same types of social or cultural experiences and connections as their more affluent peers.

Navigating these campus cultures required acknowledging and processing the racial, cultural, and financial issues that were omnipresent. Leisure and campus engagement were a source of these challenges, while at the same time they provided a medium for many young men to investigate and confront cultural and societal issues.

Summary

This chapter discussed the complexities that African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds experienced at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Mitigating feelings of isolation, discovering a sense of self, and navigating campus cultures all were important aspects of their experience. Leisure and campus engagement provided the young men in this study with support and connections to manage the stress of balancing academic and social responsibilities and expectations. Participants cultivated casual connections, supportive friendships, and social networks through their leisure and campus engagement experiences.
My findings demonstrated that participants saw leisure and campus engagement as a way to find and cultivate these relationships. Participants understood the positive role leisure and campus engagement played during their college experience. As a result, they established casual relationships and had informal leisure experiences that alleviated feeling isolated because they were connected with the larger campus community. Additionally, through structured leisure and campus engagement, men were able to share experiences and bond with peers to create strong ties and connections that provided social and emotional support.

Even though classism, racism, unintended self-segregation or ethnic enclosure, and other negative societal issues were present on campus, the combination of informal relationships and meaningful friendships created social networks for young men that contributed to mitigating their feelings of isolation caused by these issues. Social networks varied in number and size for participants, but the majority of men developed networks through leisure and campus engagement experiences. These social connections provided a sense of stability and belonging. Positive engagement with these social networks allowed participants to maximize the strong ties developed with individuals on campus.

Nevertheless, leisure and campus engagement sometimes were the cause of distress and cultural dissonance for participants. Young men occasionally had negative encounters with the larger predominantly White community related to their race, culture and socioeconomic status. Participants also faced issues within the smaller Black community on campus in part because of their SES. These young men had to navigate campus cultures related to their race, culture, social class, and income. Exploring these factors facilitated a better understanding of how leisure and campus engagement developed social support for
African American males from low SES backgrounds and contributed to their social integration into this predominately White campus community.

In the next chapter, I discuss these findings, further interpret the data, present strengths and limitations of this study, provide implications for practitioners and educators serving African American males from low SES backgrounds, and recommend future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This final chapter presents a summary of my findings, recommendations for future research, and implications for practitioners and educators serving African American male undergraduates from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a predominantly White institution (PWI). To achieve this purpose, I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement (e.g., socializing with peers, joining student organizations, using campus recreation resources), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration into the university community.

In this chapter, I first summarize my findings from Chapter 4 and discuss the roles that leisure and campus engagement played in the lives of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at a PWI. Second, substantive theorizing interpreted from these data is used to integrate themes and connect this study to previous literature. Third, I reflect on my methodological process and discuss strengths and limitations to this study. This chapter concludes with implications for practitioners and educators and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Data from my study suggested that leisure and campus engagement played complex roles in the lives of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds related to social integration during their college experience at this PWI. At times leisure
provided support, encouragement, and opportunities for exploration and growth, while in other situations participants experienced racism, discrimination, classism, stereotyping, and distress resulting from social pressures and campus engagement. Findings demonstrated that leisure and campus engagement mitigated feelings of isolation and enabled self-discovery while participants navigated campus cultures in an effort to understand the university. Leisure and campus engagement provided a source of emotional and social support, led to self-concept clarity, and exposed young men to cultural similarities and differences across campus. However, leisure also created distress by being a source of negative social encounters (e.g., racism, classism, stereotyping) and placing young men in challenging and perplexing situations that questioned their abilities and sense of belonging. Participants developed an understanding of this campus environment and adhered to structural rules and requirements, but some young men were unable to make meaningful connections with the broader campus community.

Arriving at this PWI was the equivalent of “starting over” socially for most participants. They were in an environment where they knew few people and did not share the same cultural experiences and upbringing as the majority of their peers. Young men initially had little connection with other students on campus and experienced seclusion and isolation. Leisure and campus engagement mitigated these feelings by helping young men develop informal relationships, meaningful friendships (i.e., strong ties), and social networks. Participants developed these relationships and networks in myriad ways ranging from casual and informal leisure experiences (e.g., hanging out with friends, exercising in groups) to structured campus engagement (e.g., student organizations, intramurals, co-curricular
programs). Relationships provided emotional and social support that were beneficial to all aspects of the college experience. In some cases, relationships led to stress and stressful events, but meaningful friendships and social networks helped participants manage stress and learn from difficult situations.

Leisure and campus engagement also provided a space for young men to discover a sense of self that was connected to managing stress and other aspects of mitigating feelings of isolation. Young men experienced self-concept clarity, a sense of purpose, and in some cases an internal desire to make a difference through their leisure and campus engagement. Self-discovery was an aspect of the college experience most participants expected and desired when they chose to attend this university, and the majority of men attributed a better understanding of self to their leisure and campus engagement. Self-concept clarity, a sense of purpose, and wanting to make a difference on campus were a result of being involved with mostly prosocial leisure and campus engagement experiences. Further, young men also learned about themselves and were driven to have a positive influence on campus even after negative encounters. When participants reflected on negative situations such as discriminatory behaviors or the detrimental aspects of self-segregation, they were able to grow from incidents, which resulted in more intentional leisure and campus engagement.

Throughout their college experience, African American males from low SES backgrounds were also confronted with campus-based social and cultural situations. Participants had to navigate campus cultures during their college experience that included encounters with racism, micro-aggression, self-segregation, internalized racism, and institutionalized classism. They sometimes had to confront micro-aggressive behaviors from
the predominantly White culture on campus in leisure and social settings when pursuing campus engagement. Seeking leisure and campus engagement in this predominately White community resulted in cultural dissonance and made their full participation on campus difficult. In the Black campus community, participants struggled with cultural expectations such as being involved within the Black community on campus and “sticking together,” while also wanting to explore the larger campus community. Most young men in this study did not fully agree with complete self-segregation or ethnic enclosure. The majority of participants expressed a desire for meaningful involvement with the Black community and predominately White and affluent communities on campus. Their main goal was to improve their life circumstances after graduation and most young men held the perspective that engaging with the broader campus community was part of that process.

While this cultural dissonance existed for participants and appeared during leisure and campus engagement, African American males from low SES backgrounds had to pursue leisure and campus engagement to forge meaningful relationships and social networks. Participants were clear that academic based social interactions were limited and did not lead to meaningful friendships or significant social networks. Young men had to establish both casual relationships and strong ties on campus that led to feelings of support and connection within the Black campus community and other small networks on campus through leisure. Casual relationships, in some cases, also led to social connections that resulted in meaningful interactions with the larger predominantly White and affluent campus community.

The level of social integration young men were able to achieve was connected to their relationships, social networks, self-concept clarity, and cultural dissonance. Meaningful
relationships and social networks assisted participants in understanding the institution’s structural rules and requirements in addition to providing support for campus engagement. Self-concept clarity gave young men a sense of purpose. This sense of purpose led participants to seek leisure and campus engagement that facilitated their goals and future directions. These interconnected concepts (i.e., meaningful relationships, social networks, and self-concept clarity) contributed to social integration. However, experiencing distress and cultural dissonance due in part to leisure and campus engagement impeded social integration. Nevertheless, the findings taken together provided a means for theorizing about the experiences of these African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds.

**Interpretive Theorizing**

Little research exists about the role that leisure plays in the social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds on college campuses. For this reason, I employed a qualitative approach to my research. Student development theories describe the relationship between campus engagement and social integration of college students (e.g., Astin’s (1993) Theory of Student Involvement, Tinto’s (1999) Theory of Student Departure) and leisure researchers (e.g., Driver et al., 1991; Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996; Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997) have studied the psychological and social benefits of leisure. However, neither field has critically examined issues related to the leisure experiences of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds to explore how these factors influenced their persistence.

To better understand the relationship among leisure, campus engagement, and social integration I undertook this study. My guiding theoretical frameworks were
Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model, and social constructivism. Bronfenbrenner designed the model “to analyze systematically the nature of the relationship that exists between the learner and the surrounding milieu” (p. 6). This approach to exploring leisure, campus engagement, and social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds (i.e., the learners) was valuable. Bronfenbrenner provided a structure to examine and theorize about my findings with his nested model of social systems (See Figure 2.2). Employing social constructivism and conducting this research from a postpositivist paradigm allowed me to interpret and analyze leisure, campus engagement, and the college experience with African American undergraduates from low SES backgrounds through their eyes and words. This perspective was critical for my study and for understanding the obstacles these young men face. The meanings participants assigned to their leisure and campus engagement were derived from their social interactions, and were not predetermined definitions or categories (Kim, 2001; Kukla, 2000). I used the micro-system, meso-system, and exo-system presented by Bronfenbrenner’s model to theorize about the experience of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds based on the socially constructed meaning and knowledge participants assigned to their experience.

I collected data from 17 African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at one predominantly White institution (PWI) over the course of nine months. After completing the individual interviews, I conducted a focus group to verify, clarify, and provide more depth to data collected during the interviews as well as to further inform my
emerging themes. With confidence that I achieved theoretical saturation after analyzing all of my data, I theorized about my findings.

These data led me to theorizing about three interconnected and influential roles leisure had on the college experience of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at this predominantly White institution:

a) *Leisure spaces foster connections*: Leisure and campus engagement provide space to cultivate relationships that foster a sense of connection and buffer against distress.

b) *Leisure facilitates the negotiation of cultural dissonance*: Leisure and campus engagement facilitate the negotiation of cultural dissonance experienced by African American males from low SES backgrounds.

c) *Leisure creates a sense of purpose*: African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds develop self-concept clarity through leisure and campus engagement that creates a sense of purpose.

My literature review contributed to data analysis and theorizing enabled me to interpret my findings to better comprehend the situation of my participants and other students in similar circumstances. The main themes from my analyses were integrated resulting in theorizing about the influence of leisure and campus engagement on social integration. These influences are discussed and compared with current research.
Leisure spaces foster connections: Leisure and campus engagement provide space to cultivate relationships that foster a sense of connection and buffer against distress.

The space leisure and campus engagement provided to cultivate relationships that fostered a sense of connection and buffered against distress was evident for these African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Participants discussed how they felt isolated upon arriving on campus but found and maintained relationships that developed critical social and emotional support through leisure and campus engagement. They found relationships in their micro-system and meso-system social environments. Webs of casual relationships, meaningful friendships (i.e., strong ties), and social networks were necessary for young men to develop a sense of connection and to buffer against internal and external pressures present in the meso-system and exo-system in this campus environment.

Researchers have analyzed the social experiences of college students at various types of institutions (e.g., Astin, 1993; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Similarly, leisure researchers (e.g., Artinger et al., 2006; Driver et al., 1991; Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996; Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003; Lindsey, 2012) have documented the psychological and sociocultural benefits of leisure. My findings complemented the literature in student development that demonstrated the important role of campus involvement (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993) and sociocultural challenges and barriers underrepresented students face on university campuses (Dowd et al., 2011; Langhout et al., 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Palmer et al., 2012). Findings in my study also supported research about the psychological and social benefits of leisure (Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997) and the role leisure plays in
creating meaningful relationships and social networks (Glover, Parry, & Shinew, 2005; Uhlik, 2011).

This theorizing about space to cultivate relationships was related to research around the challenges and barriers regarding how college students from low SES backgrounds find a sense of belonging (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Strayhorn, 2013), and experience campus culture (Langhout et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2012). Ostrove and Long examined the relationship among a sense of belonging, social class, and college adjustment. They found that socioeconomic status was related to a sense of belonging that directly and indirectly effected college adjustment and performance. Palmer et al. explored the campus experience of underrepresented students at predominantly White institutions (PWI) and found that students partially attributed student involvement to academic success. However, Palmer et al.’s participants stated their involvement was primarily based in campus engagement opportunities with other underrepresented students. To investigate campus culture, Langhout et al. assessed classism in academic settings because “working-class and working poor students often felt isolated, marginalized, and psychologically distressed” (p. 147). Low SES participants in Langhout et al.’s study did not connect to the larger campus community and felt isolated and marginalized because of institutionalized and interpersonal classism. Lacking a sense of belonging, being marginalized to same-race and underrepresented communities, and experiencing classism led to psychological distress, which was consistent with my findings.

Ostrove and Long (2007) and Langhout et al. (2007), however, did not examine issues or situations that might support a student from a low SES background’s sense of
belonging or buffer against the distress created by classism. My findings indicated the relationships African American males from low SES backgrounds developed through leisure and campus engagement were beneficial in supporting a sense of belonging and minimizing the effects of classism. These relationships were formed in both the micro- and meso-systems. Meaningful peer relationships developed through casual leisure experiences such as consistently exercising with friends (e.g., micro-system) and engaging with student organizations or campus programs such as on intramural teams (e.g., meso-system). Additionally, self-discovery through this campus engagement provided young men with confidence and purpose to minimize the effects of classism. Consistently participating in leisure experiences (e.g., casual recreation, hanging out with friends) afforded young men the opportunity to find emotional support, relax, and psychologically escape from the larger campus social system. Leisure experiences also had a rejuvenating effect on young men’s psychological abilities to manage the effects of classism.

Having consistent support and outlets were vital. Palmer et al. (2012) demonstrated that underrepresented students used peer support and student involvement to achieve success at a PWI, but these researchers did not examine how these relationships and connections formed and the role leisure played. My findings underscored that leisure created the space to form supportive peer connections both through face to face interactions such as meeting over dinner or going to student organization meeting, and through virtual social networks such as joining online social media groups. Understanding how peer support and student involvement relationships were formed is paramount to determining how to support African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. The young men in my study found the
space leisure and campus engagement provided mitigated and buffered some of this distress by facilitating the development of relationships and social networks.

My findings related to how leisure fostered connections for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds were consistent with the formation of social capital and leisure (e.g., Glover et al., 2005; Uhlik, 2011). Cultivating casual relationships, meaningful friendships (i.e., strong ties), and social networks are components of social capital formation (Glover & Hemingway, 2005; Injen & Eijck, 2009; Uhlik, 2011). The participants in my study created these types of relationships in leisure and campus engagement spaces. Glover et al. (2005), in their study of community gardeners and social capital, found that tie strength (i.e., weak or strong) influenced the type of social capital (i.e., bonding or bridging) that was accumulated and how individuals were able to use social capital. Strong ties resulted in bonding social capital that provided access to group resources and support. Weak ties led to bridging social capital that allowed groups to find resources outside of their network (Glover et al., 2005). My participants were able to develop strong ties typically within the Black campus community that created bonding social capital. Bonding social capital provided emotional and social support where students believed someone “had their back” on campus and served as a source of informal learning about the campus environment and motivation to continue their college experience.

Weak ties cultivated within the Black community and occasionally with the broader predominantly White and affluent community on campus led to bridging social capital. Uhlik (2011) investigated the relationship between tie strength and social capital and found that weak ties were more important than strong ties in developing bridging social capital.
Although this research was situated in agency partnership development, the findings were relevant and applicable to individual relationships. Within the Black campus community, my data showed that weak ties mostly provided a sense of perceived social support and connection. However, when young men developed weak ties with the predominantly White and affluent communities on campus, access was gained to the broader campus in positive ways, fostering connection and buffering against distress. For example, my findings showed that several young men were able to cultivate weak ties in the predominantly White campus community leading to bridging social capital that resulted in diverse campus engagement opportunities.

Although my findings related to connections and how social capital formation occurred were similar to Glover et al. (2005) and Uhlik (2011), these researchers did not investigate the cultural issues that can simultaneously influence and hinder the development of social relationships. African American males from low SES backgrounds in my study were faced with developing social relationships within the Black, predominantly White, and affluent communities on campus. Having to navigate these cultural communities was unexpected because most young men thought they were entering an inclusive campus environment. Cultural norms to develop social ties within one community in some cases were incongruent with creating ties in other communities. Cultural incongruence made developing social capital difficult and created distress. Leisure and campus engagement could not erase these cultural differences, but young men in this study could find emotional and social support to buffer the distress.
African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds appeared to enter this campus community with a different set of experiences than their affluent peers regardless of race. Differing socio-cultural values, experiences, and expectations made transitions to and fully socially integrating with this campus community difficult. Issues that were part of the exo-system environment (e.g., institutional classism, structural diversity, campus climate) were the primary sources of hindrances to social integration. Nevertheless, leisure and campus engagement through micro-system and meso-system environments provided space to cultivate relationships that fostered a sense of connection and buffered against distress from internal and external pressures within the campus culture.

*Leisure facilitates the negotiation of cultural dissonance: Leisure and campus engagement facilitate the negotiation of cultural dissonance experienced by African American males from low SES backgrounds.*

To navigate and manage internal and external pressures in this environment, the young men I interviewed needed support, a strong sense of self, and opportunities to get involved. Leisure and campus engagement facilitated the negation of cultural dissonance experienced by African American males from low SES backgrounds by providing supportive relationships and positive experiences. Cultural dissonance occurs when individuals are exposed to cultural norms or experiences that differ from their own and their expectations (Bailey, 2013; Sato et al., 2013). My findings indicated that African American males from low SES backgrounds had to navigate three peer communities on campus: (a) the predominantly White community, (b) the Black community, and (c) the affluent community. Micro-system, meso-system, and exo-system environments all played roles in how young
men experienced and navigated these communities. Across all campus cultures, cultural dissonance impeded the social integration of these young men. Even though the University espoused a diverse and inclusive culture, the leisure and campus engagement environment was heavily influenced by White males and students from privileged backgrounds at this PWI.

Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) studied the persistence of first-generation college students (FGS) compared to continuing-generation college students (CGS) using several variables related to their college experience. Results from their study, among other findings, demonstrated that FGS who were also low-income did not persist at the same rate as FGS who were from high-income families. Lohfink and Paulsen also found that underrepresented low-income students felt oppressed on campus based on their perceptions of social life and campus climate. In short, their findings indicated underrepresented first-generation college students who were low-income were “not only disadvantaged by their parents’ lack of information about college but also other social and economic characteristics that constrained their educational opportunities” (p. 418). These social characteristics were similar to the issues related to classism (Langhout et al., 2007) and a sense of belonging (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; 2013) and partially contributed to the cultural dissonance I uncovered in my study. My study delved more deeply into the social experiences of one underrepresented student population and provided more context for these cultural hindrances.

By approaching my research on the issue of social integration through leisure and campus engagement, participants were able to share their academic, co-curricular, and social experiences in their own voice to describe perceptions of cultural dissonance. Young men in
my study saw White students from privileged backgrounds as well connected on campus and having access to leisure and campus engagement opportunities that they did not. Within the Black campus community, the Black Greek population influenced cultural norms and values. Young men perceived members of the Black campus community as understanding part of their identity but believed their more affluent Black peers could not appreciate their life experiences or the economic challenges they faced. The cultural experiences, norms, and privilege of their more affluent peers, regardless of race, appeared different from the experiences and perspectives of African American males from low SES backgrounds in my study.

Young men in my study perceived themselves as working harder than their White and affluent peers. They “struggled” to navigate these various social communities on campus. Research from Rankin and Reason (2005) investigated the complex issue of campus climate for underrepresented students across 10 universities and Dowd et al. (2011) presented a conceptual framework to examine intercultural student effort and institutional effort to address racial and cultural barriers, which had been overlooked in student engagement assessments. Rankin and Reason found that racially and ethnically underrepresented students experienced harassment and discrimination at a higher rate than their White peers and that underrepresented students and White students perceived the campus climate differently. Rankin and Reason combined all participants who identified as non-white and a U.S. citizen as a student of color for the purposes of their research. Even though 22% of White students reported experiencing harassment, compared to 30% of underrepresented students, White students maintained a positive disposition towards the campus climate, which was unlike
their underrepresented counterparts. My research went further by demonstrating how a negative disposition manifested in a young man’s micro-system and meso-system environments make him less likely to pursue or be invited to engage with cross-racial and cross-cultural opportunities. Several young men attempted to pursue leisure experiences with predominantly White campus organizations and were not received positively or offered the same opportunities to join these organizations. Several participants also experienced negative social encounters in leisure and casual recreation spaces such as having to confront racist and micro-aggressive behaviors. Each of these negative encounters and experiences had a cumulative effect in that African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds often became hesitant to seek involvement in other predominantly White or mainstream leisure and campus engagement at this PWI.

Participants experienced constraints to their leisure and campus engagement that they had to negotiate and these findings were consistent with previous leisure research. Specifically, Floyd and Shinew’s (1999) investigation of leisure styles among Whites and African Americans, Shinew et al.’s (2004) analysis of the relationship between race and leisure constraints, and Floyd and Mowatt’s (2014) discussion of leisure among African Americans each documented leisure constraints faced by African Americans. Similar to my findings, these researchers found that racial, social, and cultural constraints to leisure were interrelated and complex. Young men in this study had to confront layers of cultural dissonance related to multiple communities at this PWI that influenced their overall view of leisure, campus engagement, and the campus climate.
Any student’s disposition toward campus climate might influence their leisure and campus engagement. African American males from low SES backgrounds in my study perceived the need to exert more effort to get involved on campus. Dowd et al. (2011) highlighted that student engagement surveys do not account for student effort required to overcome cultural constraints on campus or gauge the institution’s efforts to minimize these barriers. Their conceptual framework argued for measuring intercultural effort in students and institutional effort when determining how well colleges and universities are facilitating student engagement. Approaching student engagement from this perspective as I did to some extent shed light on why students were or were not engaging. My participants struggled in the predominantly White and affluent communities (i.e., meso-systems and exo-systems) to learn cultural norms and values through leisure and campus engagement related to student organizations and university programs. Some African American males from low SES backgrounds felt marginalized in these groups because cultural norms were dominated by the White Greek culture on campus and they perceived that these groups did not support an inclusive environment. However, my participants put forth intercultural effort and in some cases were able to establish relationships (i.e., weak and strong ties) across predominantly White and affluent cultural communities. Participants who forged cross-racial and cross-cultural relationships often found leisure and campus engagement experiences in the predominantly White and affluent communities, but still had to negotiate culturally incongruent experiences.

An aspect of campus climate and cultural incongruence that was not identified or addressed by Rankin and Reason (2005) or Dowd et al. (2011) were intra-cultural issues. On
this campus within the Black community itself, circumstances often forced young men to manage cultural dissonance. Most participants desired to be actively involved in the Black campus community, but they also wanted to explore other campus communities. These students’ main goal was to better their lives after graduating and they believed interacting with a diverse social network could contribute to achieving that goal. However, self-segregation pressures or ethnic enclosures from members of the Black campus community created cultural dissonance that added a layer of complexity to leisure and campus engagement both within the Black campus community and the mainstream campus community.

Self-segregation often made developing interracial and cross-cultural connections difficult for the African American men from low SES backgrounds in my study. Kim et al. (2015) examined self-segregation and interracial friendships by race. The purpose of their study was “to investigate the effects of peer environments on collegiate interracial friendships and how such effects vary by student’s race” (p. 58). Their major finding was that structural diversity (i.e., students of different races being present on campus) had a direct positive effect, regardless of race, on students’ interracial friendships. However, these researchers noted that for African American and Asian American students the relationships were weaker than for their White and Latino peers. They also found no link between involvement in ethnic student organizations and interracial friendships for African American, Asian American, or White students.

My findings, however, diverged from the results presented by Kim et al. (2015). These researchers did not control for socioeconomic status or investigate campus climate that
might explain the difference experienced by African American and Asian American students. Structural diversity (i.e., physical presence of underrepresented students) provided young men in my study with opportunities to interact with members of other racial groups through casual leisure experiences that developed weak ties, but cultural issues (e.g., classism, self-segregation) in the Black and predominantly White communities created barriers to developing meaningful relationships with peers outside of their race.

In the leisure literature, Stodolska (2007) investigated ethnic enclosure, social networks, and leisure behavior of immigrants to the United States. Stodolska sought to understand the concept of ethnic enclosure (i.e., self-segregation) in leisure and its effects on immigrants. While this research was not conducted with African Americans, parallels to the social and cultural experiences of immigrants to the U.S. and the African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds attending PWIs that I interviewed existed. Stodolska found that ethnic enclosure was mostly beneficial for immigrants (e.g., providing psychological comfort, respite in a new environment, avoidance of discrimination), but also resulted in delayed cultural assimilation to mainstream U.S. society and limited employment as well as advancement opportunities. The “Ethnic Bubble” model presented by Stodolska related to ethnic enclosure was consistent with my findings.

The perceptions and realities related to self-segregation and ethnic enclosure were propagated by micro-system and meso-system factors such as interaction with peers and the barriers found by young men pursuing mainstream or predominantly White campus engagement. African American males from low SES backgrounds encountered negative experiences in their residence halls, in attempting to join student organizations, and during
parties and other social events. Exo-system factors such as university programs also perpetuated the cultural dissonance experienced by African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at this PWI. Young men perceived some campus engagement opportunities as inaccessible or unwelcoming. Others joined institutionally supported campus engagement only to find a culture that reflected the values and norms of the White, privileged community on campus, and not those of the inclusive institution they expected.

In these situations, leisure and campus engagement were the cause for cultural dissonance. However, meaningful friendships (i.e., strong ties) and self-discovery developed through leisure and campus engagement also contributed to managing cultural dissonance for my participants. Management of cultural issues was supported during leisure experiences and through emotional and social support from peers in a young man’s micro-environment. The psychological benefits of leisure related to stress reduction and mental well-being (e.g., Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000; Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003; Qian et al., 2014) also had implications for addressing the stress caused by cultural dissonance. Similarly, Weng and Chiang (2014) examined how indoor and outdoor leisure activities supported psychological restoration, which my participants also seemed to achieve during leisure and campus engagement. Bonding social capital (Glover et al., 2005), specifically, provided the young men I interviewed with support and guidance when cultural dissonance occurred. Self-discovery enabled participants to manage cultural dissonance because they understood their own abilities, values, and sense of purpose. The relationships among social ties, self-discovery, and leisure were interconnected with the presence of all required to navigate campus life. This intersection occurred for my participants in leisure and campus
engagement settings where experiences facilitated the negotiation of cultural dissonance and also helped them find a sense of purpose.

*Leisure creates a sense of purpose*: African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds develop self-concept clarity through leisure and campus engagement that create a sense of purpose.

An interconnected and iterative relationship existed among social ties, self-discovery, and leisure for the young men in my study. As a result of these relationships, African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds developed self-concept clarity through leisure and campus engagement that created a sense of purpose. Campbell et al. (1996) stated that self-concept clarity is “the extent to which the contents of an individual’s self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent and temporally stable” (p. 141). Considered both a psychological state and trait, individuals could possess self-concept clarity but it might be challenged when entering new environments (Ritchie et al., 2011). My participants sought out leisure and campus engagement experiences in their new college environment that facilitated personal growth and self-discovery. Young men learned about their strengths and weaknesses and developed interpersonal skills through social interactions. Once these interactions occurred, participants were able to continue or find other leisure and campus engagement experiences. Leisure and campus engagement generated self-discovery, which enabled young men to learn about facets of their personality. As a result African American males from low SES backgrounds developed a sense of purpose that guided their college experience.
Researchers have specifically examined the role leisure and campus engagement can play in psychological and social development for college students (e.g., Artinger et al., 2006; Bailey & Fernando, 2012; Bohnert et al., 2007; Iso-Ahola, 1989; Lindsey, 2012), which can lead to finding a sense of purpose. Although these studies were not focused on African American males from low SES backgrounds at PWIs, a review of their findings is relevant to my study because these researchers investigated personal social benefits, developing a sense of purpose, and social adaptation. Each of these constructs can contribute to self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996).

The categories of social benefits from participating in campus recreation programs were examined by Artinger et al. (2006). These benefits were part of the micro-system and meso-system environments primarily because of the interaction with peers and social groups experienced during campus recreation programs. However, exo-system environmental factors played a role in Artinger et al.’s study since campus recreation was an extension of the institution. Overall, the researchers found a weak relationship between campus recreation participation and the personal social benefits category. These findings were consistent with the experience of my participants related to campus recreation. However, in my study when the relationships and networks that developed as a result of campus recreation involvement were examined, positive personal social benefits were experienced. Young men were able to expand their micro-system and meso-system environments and enhance their self-awareness. Several young men formed casual relationships with peers through campus recreation and informal leisure experiences that led to strong ties and increased leisure and campus
engagement opportunities. These cumulative experiences appeared to influence self-concept clarity and contribute to finding a sense of purpose.

Self-concept clarity and a sense of purpose were also influenced by casual and informal leisure experiences of these African American males from low SES backgrounds. Several participants routinely engaged in informal leisure with friends such as having regular meals together, watching movies, and hanging out. They also attended campus engagement events such as student organization meetings or campus discussions. During these times young men could dialogue with peers about life and the campus environment as well as find support. These types of interactions allowed participants to reflect on what they wanted from their college experience. Bailey and Fernando (2012) examined routine leisure and project-based leisure (PBL), as defined by Stebbins (2012), related to individual happiness and developing a sense of meaning. Bailey and Fernando found that every day or routine leisure experiences (i.e., informal and casual leisure) more strongly predicted happiness and meaning than PBL. My findings supported Bailey and Fernando because consistent interaction with casual and informal leisure and regular campus engagement fostered self-awareness and self-confidence for my participants that led to self-concept clarity and a sense of purpose. However, some of my participants who attended intense, leadership-based, campus engagement (e.g., Lead MTU, LeaderShape) stated these experiences also contributed to their growth, development, and finding a sense of purpose. PBL, similar to campus recreation, also formed casual relationships for young men during the campus engagement that developed into meaningful connections and other leisure and campus engagement experiences beyond the PBL experience. My study indicates that certain types of
PBL might also contribute to developing a sense of purpose similar to casual and informal leisure.

Bohnert et al. (2007) investigated the role organized activities, including casual leisure and PBL, played in social adaption during the transition to college. Aspects of social adaptation were friendship quality, loneliness, and social dissatisfaction. These concepts contributed to a student remaining in the college environment and engaging with peers. This engagement also contributed to a young man finding a sense of purpose. Bohnert et al.’s findings indicated that organized activities were most beneficial to social adaptation for students who had poor adolescent social adaptation. My findings did not investigate participants’ adolescent social adaptation, but the majority of my participants did demonstrate positive social adaptation resulting from organized activity involvement on campus. Through leisure and campus engagement participants were socially satisfied and exposed to campus and community environments. Satisfaction led to social adaption encouraging more leisure and campus engagement that supported self-discovery and increased campus and community exposure. This continual leisure and campus engagement as well as exposure to community issues facilitated finding a sense of purpose.

An increase in self-awareness leading to a sense of purpose played an important role for African American men from low SES backgrounds at this PWI because of the complex social environment they faced. Participants who had a sense of self were able to maximize the personal and social benefits of leisure and campus engagement. Through involvement with peers in leisure and campus engagement, participants learned about their personality traits, how they functioned in social settings, how to interact with individuals and groups, and
experienced social growth and development. Participants were also exposed to social issues on this campus and in the surrounding community. Young men sought opportunities that aligned with their goals and were able to manage psychologically draining or negative experiences because of the buffer created by self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996; Ritchie et al., 2011). Once participants found experiences that supported self-concept clarity they were able to develop a sense of purpose. This sense of purpose guided their decision making in leisure and campus engagement and other aspects of their college experience.

**Methodological Lessons and Reflections**

The conclusions drawn and the theorizing about the individual experiences and daily lives related to leisure and campus engagement of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds were a reflection of the methods used in this study. Qualitative research that employed a thoughtful and rigorous interpretive approach was needed to understand the intertwined and layered experiences these young men had at a predominantly White university. This methodological process was challenging and stretched me both personally and professionally. I learned about myself through this endeavor and grew considerably as a researcher.

Interviewing these young men reminded me of positive and negative encounters from my undergraduate experience at a PWI. I tried to prepare for these emotions but given the exploratory nature of this study preparation was difficult. Since I conducted semi-structured interviews, participants described areas of their lives and situations that I did not anticipate. Though the chair of my dissertation committee informed me these emotions might occur and various possibilities were considered, until I actually experienced it as a researcher, I did not
understand how to truly manage my emotions. However I quickly developed strategies after the first three interviews to limit the amount of personal information I shared with young men during interviews. I did share some information in an effort to build rapport, but did not want to share too much to detract from allowing participants to give voice to their experiences. I took note of questions participants had for me during an interview as well as what I wanted to share with them if time permitted after an interview. This strategy was effective to keep the focus on the participants’ story and to help me manage my reactions.

Even though I had interviewed individuals and groups on other occasions, in-depth interviewing for research purposes required me to leverage these skills as well as learn and hone new techniques. An early issue for me was knowing how far to probe with follow up questions. I had an initial fear of leading participants to responses, but after sharing a few early transcripts with the chair of my dissertation committee, getting feedback, and reviewing field notes, I learned to recognize the places and times I needed to probe further.

Keeping some participants focused on the research questions while maintaining a level of control in the interviews was also difficult. My personality helped and probably hindered this situation in some ways. I am a relatively easy going person and always had ample time to speak with participants. Their wandering was fine with me. However, on some occasions a participant and I got a little too far off track and I had to re-focus the interview. I made sure to err on the side of caution and nudge participants back on track with a gentle question, or let them know I would make a note to discuss tangential ideas after the interview or focus group.
The focus group also stretched me as a researcher. I prepared for the session using guidelines from Henderson (2006) and Krueger and Casey (2000) that were helpful. Additionally, I found a second moderator that provided technical (i.e., took notes) and psychological (i.e., someone to discuss ideas with) support to me before, during, and after the session. Constructing an agenda for the discussion and walking through that plan with my co-moderator prior to the session was important for managing the focus group.

Fortunately for me, I had educated and interested participants for the interviews as well as the focus group. Young men did receive a $40 gift card for completing the interview but I never had the sense any participant came just for the money. Several said I could keep the gift card because they assumed I had purchased them with my own funds. Because participants were engaged in my research and wanted to share their experiences openly made data collection informative and fun.

Data analysis was also exciting but challenging for me. Given the amount of data I collected, reviewing, coding, and sorting was simultaneously arduous and energizing. At times I felt overwhelmed by transcribing because I did not have the best keyboard skills. Transcribing, however, kept me close to my data and reviewing the stories of participants provided the fuel to continue working. Being an inexperienced qualitative researcher interpreting my own data produced similar emotions. I was able to speak with the chair of my dissertation committee regularly to alleviate some feelings, and memo-writing was a tremendous help as well. Being able to simply write about ideas and how they were interconnected was intellectually freeing and stimulating.
I would encourage researchers looking to do similar methodological approaches to become as familiar as possible with conducting postpositivist studies to understand that this type of research takes a blend of discipline and flexibility on behalf of the researcher. I had to be ready to go where my data as well as participants took me. I also learned to be disciplined during interviews and to keep up with coding and memo-writing between interviews.

**Strengths and Limitations**

In addition to my methodological approach, my study had other strengths and limitations. A purposive sample, the research design, and my development as a researcher were all strengths. A purposive sample of young men was important for this study given its exploratory nature. Interviewing participants who were actively involved with leisure and campus engagement and who wanted to take part in this study allowed me to gather rich data. The participants in my sample were well educated, contemplative, and honest regarding their experiences. These traits allowed me to have thoughtful exchanges during interviews and the focus group.

The research design was a second strength of the study. Conducting in-depth interviews enabled me to hear the broader cultural issues African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds faced on this campus. I explored the experience of individuals, which provided a foundation and the core categories for my research. The focus group allowed me to confirm and elaborate on findings and gather data on how themes were interconnected. For example, during the focus group I was able to discuss more directly the cultural experiences participants encountered within the Black campus community.
A strength of this study was my development as a researcher and my familiarity with attending and working at PWIs. I am also an African American male who was raised in a low SES environment. Thus, I had to continually monitor my research process to ensure trustworthiness and strove to maintain a professional demeanor and tone throughout my data collection process.

While these strengths were vital for my research, acknowledging and explaining limitations are important for future research. Limitations were related to the sample including the recruitment process, type of student interviewed, campus selected, and potential for researcher bias.

First, the recruitment process was a limitation in my study. Identifying students from low SES backgrounds was difficult because some individuals did not identify themselves in those terms. Additionally, even though the overall campus population was almost 30,000 students, the African American male undergraduate population from low SES backgrounds was relatively small.

Second, finding a purposive sample of involved African American males from low SES backgrounds was a limitation and challenge. However, for the purpose of this study, interviewing involved young men who could share their expectations, emotions, and reactions about leisure and campus engagement was necessary to understand the influence these concepts had on social integration. Likely, there were young men at this PWI who were not involved with campus engagement and their experience might be different. My participants primarily shared experiences about prosocial leisure and campus engagement. Other African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds, who were not
interviewed at this PWI, may have encountered antisocial or detrimental leisure experiences that influenced their lack of social integration.

The collection of data at only one university was a third limitation. These data were collected at one large, public, predominantly White institution over a nine month period. Different campuses vary but the detailed descriptions and substantive theorizing as well as my positionality and sensitivity for this population provided implications for transferability to similar campuses.

Finally, the potential for researcher bias was also a limitation. During the data collection and analysis process, I checked myself for bias and as Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested, stayed close to my data ensuring the participants experiences were being documented and analyzed, not my own. Through transcribing interviews verbatim, I was able to ensure I understood not only the experience of my participants but the context and environment in which those experiences occurred. Transcribing helped me recall the emotion and feelings participants exhibited when they were reflecting on their college experience. This closeness would have been minimized if I were reading transcriptions that someone else completed for me. I also used memo-writing and discussions with the chair of my dissertation committee to ensure I was sharing the experience of my participants and not my own. Other strategies to minimize bias were presented in Chapter 3.

Applications to Professional Practices

An intended outcome of my study was to share insights for university administrators concerning the college experiences of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. The graduation rate for African American males and students from low SES
backgrounds lags behind that of other student populations (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). One way to increase the graduation rate may be to understand more about the social and cultural experiences of these students. Therefore, my research explored the leisure and campus engagement of African American males from low SES backgrounds related to their social integration at a PWI to address this persistent problem. Findings indicated micro-system, meso-system, and exo-system factors directly influenced the leisure and campus engagement experience of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Both the overall campus culture and the campus culture within the Black community presented constraints to social integration for this student population on personal (i.e., micro-system), social (i.e., meso-system), and institutional (i.e., exo-system) levels. However, leisure and campus engagement had positive influences to minimize these negative outcomes. To address social integration issues for students such as the ones I interviewed, college and universities should intentionally address exo-system, meso-system, and micro-system factors on campus. Taking these measures will not only improve the educational experience and outcomes for African American males from low SES backgrounds, but for all students.

**Addressing campus culture: Exo-system factors.**

Currently many colleges and universities take proactive steps to create open, inclusive, and accessible campus communities. These efforts, as demonstrated by graduation rates, have not been successful on a large scale equally for all students. Creating a culturally aware campus climate is a challenge that many university officials are facing (Kim et al., 2015; Langhout et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2013; Walpole, 2008). Particularly at large
predominantly White institutions, administrators are confronted with institutional classism and self-segregation. Although each of these issues will differ by campus and are difficult to assess, administrators should continue to examine and take strategic steps to dismantle them. Addressing these issues in measurable and intentional ways is needed to positively influence the social experience for African American males from low SES backgrounds.

The first major issue for universities to address is institutional classism. Administrators should become attuned to the level of classism on their campus and develop campus based strategies to address this social and organizational issue. Institutional classism “occurs because of organizational structures, policies, and procedures that differentially affect students based on their social class” (Langhout et al., 2007, p. 150). Policies and procedures related to marketing leisure and campus engagement (i.e., how are experiences and programs portrayed on websites, social media, and in printed materials), recruiting and selecting participants (i.e., are processes inclusive and accessible), and fees (i.e., are they as low as possible, are scholarship or grant opportunities available) for student involvement should be examined. Colleges and universities should also systematically assess organizational structures (i.e., how offices and programs are aligned and staffing), policies, and procedures with students, faculty, and administrators to develop strategies for addressing institutional classism. Institutions should ensure leisure and campus engagement are not only financially accessible but also culturally inclusive and welcoming.

Administrators must also explore the positive aspects and the consequences of self-segregation or ethnic enclosure in the context of their campus environment. Specifically at PWIs, understanding how self-segregation might support overall campus goals is needed.
Additionally, determining how the creation of an inclusive and welcoming environment is impacted by self-segregation across all student populations is valuable. Although my findings examined self-segregation within the Black campus community, self-segregation exists across several communities at colleges and universities (Kim et al., 2015). Kim et al. found that self-segregation reduces the potential for meaningful interracial friendships and interactions to occur that can contribute to increased cultural awareness, intellectual self-confidence, and an openness towards diversity. Campuses can use awareness campaigns in leisure spaces to highlight and appreciate cross-cultural interaction among students and student organizations. These visual representations of desired institutional values would demonstrate the institution’s position, spark discussion, and encourage more cross-cultural interaction among students of all races and ethnicities. Addressing self-segregation is difficult as students are and should be allowed to freely associate with whomever they want. However, exploring creative programs and processes within leisure and campus engagement settings that increases cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions might begin to address self-segregation tendencies.

Additionally, examining physical spaces and policies around casual and formal leisure and campus engagement through a lens of supporting cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions is necessary. Campus leisure spaces are similar to community common spaces and local parks. Therefore, leisure research findings from Gobster, (2002) Shinew et al., (2004) and Rickard and Stedman (2015) could help colleges and universities better analyze their campus context related to cross-racial and cross-culture interactions as well as how communication strategies can create a sense of place for individuals. Administrators must
determine how to minimize the consequences of self-segregation while supporting the benefits (Stodolska, 2007) that could serve as the foundation of a cohesive campus community.

**Fostering inclusive campus engagement: Meso-system factors.**

As colleges and universities address classism and self-segregation from an institutional perspective, fostering inclusive campus engagement from a student perspective is also essential. The campus environment at the PWI in this study was laden with issues of power and privilege that negatively influenced the leisure and campus engagement of African American males from low SES backgrounds. Administrators and students should work together addressing differing perceptions of campus climate, a lack of cultural awareness, and designing systems that better assess and evaluate the campus engagement environment. Taking these measures would expose and confront negative behaviors related to power and privilege. Providing education and raising awareness with all students around these issues might begin to change perceptions and behaviors of formal and informal student social networks across a campus.

Just as self-segregation often is not addressed, many colleges and universities do not confront differing beliefs about campus climate held by student communities (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Rankin and Reason found that on many campuses racially and ethnically underrepresented (i.e., non-white) students have different perceptions about the overall campus climate than their White counterparts. Young men in this study also believed their views of the campus environment were incongruent with the predominantly White and affluent campus community. This inconsistent view of the campus culture can make finding
common ground and changing behaviors and attitudes difficult. When majority students possess a positive opinion about campus climate, making substantive changes might be difficult because most students do not see a problem with the status quo. Administrators and students need to create appreciative and honest ways the campus community can discuss their views and perceptions. Fostering an appreciative culture would necessitate that students, and other members of the campus community, value the strengths and contributions of others, are introspective, and are open to making positive change. This dialogue must be a continual discussion that encourages participation from all communities as campus culture evolves and new issues might arise overtime.

Similarly, addressing racial and cultural competence of all students would begin to minimize power and privilege, which could change the campus culture. My study showed that African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds had negative cultural encounters in both the Black and predominantly White campus communities. A lack of racial and cultural awareness was present along with issues related to socioeconomic status and privilege that these young men had to confront to maximize their leisure and campus engagement. Administrators and students working together to implement co-curricular initiatives that support racial awareness and cultural competence would not only address self-segregation but also expose other racially insensitive and culturally incongruent behaviors. Increasing racial awareness and cultural competence combined with confronting classism across the campus community might also provide all students with the tools to facilitate meaningful cross-racial and cross-cultural encounters.
Once these campus engagement programs are developed and implemented, administrators working with students can take concrete measures to evaluate student involvement and effectiveness. The campus community (i.e., team of students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders) must first establish a base line (e.g., participation, perceptions of climate, student involvement outcomes) on their campus related to leisure and campus engagement programs. Based on campus priorities, key success indicators (i.e., goals and measureable outcomes) related to not only involvement but also a qualitative assessment of student experience should be established with input from students. Institutions could then develop a systematic and meaningful on-going evaluation process for leisure and campus engagement programs involving all students and specifically ensuring that underrepresented students have a clear voice to influence the campus climate.

Campus engagement support and advising: Micro-system factors.

While addressing the campus culture and fostering inclusive campus engagement, administrators should formally consider the potential of leisure as a means to not only positively influence a sense of belonging and mitigate the negative aspects of self-segregation, but to bolster self-concept. Colleges and universities should provide students with support designed specifically to address cultural issues on their campus and offer campus engagement advising to facilitate student involvement. Administrators should consider providing tangible resources and new approaches to student development that purposively include leisure and campus engagement perspectives to positively influence social integration among African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds.
These young men experienced classism, self-segregation, internalized racism, as well as the everyday stress of college life. The cumulative effects of these issues would challenge any student. Administrators should ensure students have access to and understand the full range of counseling and psychological support services that are available to them and remove as many constraints (e.g., financial, enrollment process, perceptions of students who use services) as possible. New approaches to the delivery of counseling and psychological services should also be developed with and from the perspective of underrepresented students. Many young men discussed the buffering role leisure (e.g., playing basketball, group exercise, cooking with friends) played in their college experience. Developing creative counseling options for students using leisure and leisure spaces might lead to increased use of formal counseling and psychological services by this population as well as for all students on campus.

Similarly, colleges and universities should consider a proactive and institutionally supported approach to leisure and campus engagement. Many young men in this study faced challenges to getting involved that ranged from a lack of knowledge about campus engagement to the racial and cultural issues previously discussed. However, young men also needed to find the types of leisure and campus engagement that were most important and beneficial for their growth, development, and educational experience. While participants in this study fortuitously found positive leisure and campus engagement experiences, not all students find these opportunities.

Supporting and offering formal campus engagement advising might have a positive influence on engaging African American males from low SES backgrounds with the campus.
environment. Creating and advancing campus engagement advising would educate students about the roles of leisure and student involvement, reduce difficulties to finding opportunities, allow students to share their goals as well as barriers and hindrances they experience, and facilitate a structured, purposeful, and individualized approach to leisure and campus engagement for any student seeking this type of support. Taking these steps will better prepare African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds, and possibly any student, to socially engage with their peers and take positive steps towards increasing social integration.

**Future Research**

In addition to these practical solutions, further research is needed about the social integration of African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Leisure and campus engagement played a complex and interconnected role in the lives of these students at this PWI. Young men in this study, through leisure and campus engagement cultivated meaningful friendships and developed social networks while also finding stress relief and a psychological respite. They also experienced cultural dissonance, self-segregation, and ethnic enclosure through leisure that was important to psychological growth and support but, in some cases, created distress in their daily lives and limited opportunities for cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions. Further research is needed to understand each of these aspects in greater depth as well as how leisure contributes to the learning environment of college students.

Cultural dissonance impeded social integration for African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds in this study. Young men used relationships and
experiences developed through leisure and campus engagement, which included self-segregation and ethnic enclosure, to manage some of the negative outcomes related to experiencing cultural dissonance. In some cases, leisure was used after culturally incongruent events or situations occurred. In other cases, campus engagement facilitated self-discovery that helped a student manage cultural dissonance. Understanding how students from low SES backgrounds manage cultural dissonance and the cumulative effects related to this phenomenon are important. Research is also needed to explain how financial issues combined with cultural dissonance relate to accessing leisure and campus engagement during college for African American males and any student from low SES backgrounds.

Further research is also needed on how social networks form for underrepresented students from low SES backgrounds on college campuses. Students in this study arrived on campus with few friends or connections. Through leisure and campus engagement they developed a web of social support with casual connections, meaningful relationships, and social networks. Future researchers may want to explore the compounding racial, cultural, and social constraints faced by any student with multiple identities in developing a social network on campus, specifically examining the role leisure and culture play. Researchers might also examine the role online communities have in providing emotional and social support as well as social network formation. With the ubiquitous presence of Facebook and Twitter and the development of platforms like GroupMe, online communities are growing and becoming more influential on college campuses and in broader society. Exploring leisure, culture, and how students from low SES backgrounds interact with online
communities might facilitate understanding their leisure, campus engagement, and social integration.

Even though the academic experiences of African American males from low SES backgrounds were not directly discussed in my study, investigating how institutions and students view leisure and campus engagement in relation to the learning process should be examined. My findings indicated these young men made few connections with peers in the classroom. Therefore connections made through leisure and campus engagement outside the classroom seemed particularly important. A deeper understanding of leisure related to academic integration might be useful. In *Has leisure got anything to do with learning*, Sivan (2003) found that students categorized the relationship between leisure and learning in four distinct dimensions: *no relationship* (i.e., leisure was time to do nothing related to school), *time for rejuvenation* (i.e., a time to relax and re-energize in preparation for studying), *learning relevant skills* (i.e., through participation in leisure, students developed skills that facilitated learning), and *synonymous* (i.e., leisure was dedicated to learning). Sivan also found that students were blending leisure and learning, developing social networks that fostered academic and social support. Continuing this line of research related specifically to African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds at PWIs could provide insight to both their academic and social integration on college campuses.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to explore how African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds perceived leisure and the role that campus engagement played in their social integration at a predominantly White institution (PWI). To
achieve this purpose I examined students’ perceptions and behaviors related to leisure and campus engagement opportunities (e.g., socializing with friends, student organizations, campus recreation), how these perceptions and behaviors influenced their social development and cultural interactions, and the role these concepts played in their social integration as part of the university community.

This research shed light on the role that leisure and campus engagement played in the experience of these young men and enabled theorizing about the influences of these concepts related to social integration at one PWI:

a) *Leisure spaces foster connections*: Leisure and campus engagement provide space to cultivate relationships that foster a sense of connection and buffer against distress.

b) *Leisure facilitates the negotiation of cultural dissonance*: Leisure and campus engagement facilitate the negotiation of cultural dissonance experienced by African American males from low SES backgrounds.

c) *Leisure creates a sense of purpose*: African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds develop self-concept clarity through leisure and campus engagement that creates a sense of purpose.

This study added to the bodies of knowledge in leisure and college student development by exploring leisure and campus engagement with African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds. Students shared experiences in their own voices about leisure and the college experience. Discussing these concepts directly with young men at a PWI demonstrated that race, culture, and socioeconomic status were intertwined.
Additionally, more questions were raised about the roles leisure and campus engagement can play related to social integration. My research demonstrated leisure and campus engagement spaces were instrumental in cultivating relationships, negotiating cultural dissonance, and developing a sense of purpose. However, leisure and campus engagement also reinforced larger societal issues (e.g., racism, discrimination, classism, internalized racism, stereotyping, White privilege). Even though African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds sometimes lacked a sense of belonging as part of the larger campus community, they were able to develop meaningful relationships, mitigate stress, and gain other social benefits through leisure and campus engagement.

Applications to professional practice and future research demonstrate how intentional approaches by college administrators related to campus climate, specifically institutional classism, and more exploration of social integration by leisure and student development researchers might further address the intertwined and compounding racial and socioeconomic issues African American male undergraduates from low SES backgrounds face on today’s college campuses. Leisure and campus engagement have the capacity to create social networks, provide space for cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions, and enable individuals to mitigate and resist negative societal and cultural issues. Understanding how and if these concepts manifest for African American males from low SES backgrounds is needed to address the systemic and persistent issues related to their college success.
References


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Stodolska, M., & Shinew, K.J. (2010). Environmental constraints on leisure time physical activity among Latino urban residents. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, 2*(3), 313-335. doi: 10.1080/19398441.2010.517038


Appendices
Appendix A - IRB Application

North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

GENERAL INFORMATION

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<td>2. <strong>Title of Project:</strong> Leisure and Engagement among Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male Undergraduates</td>
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<td>3. <strong>Principal Investigator:</strong></td>
<td>Anthony Patterson (Tony)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Principal Investigator Email:</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Tony_Patterson@ncsu.edu">Tony_Patterson@ncsu.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Department:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Campus Box Number:</strong></td>
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<td>7. <strong>Phone Number:</strong></td>
<td>919-260-1194</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. <strong>Faculty Sponsor Name if Student Submission:</strong></td>
<td>Karla Henderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. <strong>Faculty Sponsor Email Address if Student Submission:</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Karla_Henderson@ncsu.edu">Karla_Henderson@ncsu.edu</a></td>
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<td>10. <strong>Source of Funding</strong> (Sponsor, Federal, External, etc.):</td>
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<td>IfExternallyfunded,include sponsor name and university account number:</td>
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**RANK:**
- Faculty: [ ] Student: [ ] Undergraduate [ ] Masters [x] PhD: Other: [ ]

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

*Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature*

**Principal Investigator:**

Tony Patterson

A Patt

3/19/14

(typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature (or electronic submission) testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal investigator of record.

**Faculty Sponsor:**

Karla Henderson, Ph.D.

K.H.

3/18/14

(typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

PLEASE COMPLETE AND E-MAIL TO: irb-coordinator@ncsu.edu

Please include consent forms and other study documents with your application and submit as one document. *Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature. For
student submissions this means that the faculty sponsor has reviewed the proposal prior to it being submitted and is copied on the submission.

*****************************************************************
For SPARCS office use only
Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)
☐ Exempt ☐ Approved ☐ Approved pending modifications ☐ Table

Expedited Review Category: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8a ☐ 8b ☐ 8c ☐ 9

Reviewer Name __________________________ Signature ______________ Date ______

North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

   The purpose of this study is to explore how low socioeconomic status African American male undergraduate college students perceive leisure and the role that campus engagement plays in their social integration at a comprehensive research institution. While the persistence and graduation rates of this population lag behind other populations of students including African American females, there is little in-depth research on the role that leisure and campus engagement might play in their college experience. Research with this population will add to bodies of knowledge in the recreation profession as well as higher education/student development by providing insight into the co-curricular and social experiences these students encounter that influence their college success.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

   Dissertation Research

B. SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?

   Between 20 and 30 students

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

Subjects will be recruited through campus based organizations/units (e.g., Black Student Movement, Carolina M.A.L.E.S., Carolina Firsts, Diversity & Multicultural Affairs, Office of Retention) that work with low socioeconomic students and/or African American male students. The researcher will contact these organizations asking for their help in circulating a recruitment announcement (ATTACHMENT ONE) via email. Additionally, the researcher will use word of mouth to recruit subjects if needed.
3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

Potential participants will be recruited using the announcement stating this research is about low socioeconomic status, undergraduate African American males. Potential participants will contact the PI via email and will then be asked if they are a member of the Carolina Covenant program (See ATTACHMENT TWO for text). The Carolina Covenant automatically screens and verifies that undergraduate students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants must be members of the Carolina Covenant, started their higher education at UNC-Chapel Hill (i.e., not a transfer student), and have been on campus for at least four semesters.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

Purposive sampling is appropriate for this study given its exploratory nature. Participants will be selected based upon meeting the above criteria as well as their interest and availability.

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

None

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study:

☐ minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature
☐ fetuses
☐ pregnant women
☐ persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
☐ persons with physical disabilities
☒ economically or educationally disadvantaged
☐ prisoners
☐ elderly
☐ students from a class taught by principal investigator
☐ other vulnerable population.

7. If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

The purpose of this research is to learn more about the experiences of low socioeconomic status African American males. Students in this population might have circumstances that differ from higher socioeconomic status peers during their time at college. Gaining a better understanding of their experiences from their perspective is at the core of this research.

C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

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1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects. In order for the IRB to completely understand the experience of the subjects in your project, please provide a detailed outline of everything subjects will experience as a result of participating in your project. Please be specific and include information on all aspects of the research, through subject recruitment and ending when the subject’s role in the project is complete. All descriptions should include the informed consent process, interactions between the subjects and the researcher, and any tasks, tests, etc. that involve subjects. If the project involves more than one group of subjects (e.g. teachers and students, employees and supervisors), please make sure to provide descriptions for each subject group.

Participants will be recruited through campus based organizations where a larger percentage of members are African American males and/or are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The PI will ask the program coordinator or primary contact to send a recruitment email (SEE ATTACHED) to African American males.

The email will:
- offer basic information about this study including the purpose and confidentiality of participation
- discuss benefit to the population being studied and any participants including a $50 gift card incentive
- provide an email address for potential participants to schedule a time and place for an interview

During the interview the PI will:
- review the informed consent forms, answer any questions, and obtain the participant’s signature
- give a signed copy of the consent form to the participants and remind them about their confidentiality
- start the interview by stating the date and time, the participant’s number (assigned by PI), and first name
- refer to the participant by his/her first name, but will not use last name
- use the interview guide to ask questions and frame the interview

At the conclusion of the interview, the participant will be reminded that the PI may contact him/her for a follow-up interview if deemed necessary for clarification or additional information. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant in the study. The key as to which participant corresponds with which pseudonym will be kept in a locked file drawer at the PI’s home. If a follow-up interview is required, the PI will remind participants of the continued confidentiality of the study and their participation in it.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

Interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes hours. Participants may be contacted for a follow-up interview if necessary. The PI anticipates any follow up interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS
1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

No risks are anticipated.

2. Will there be a request for information that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

No

   a. If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

      Not Applicable.

   b. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

      No.

3. How will data be recorded and stored?

   Interviews will be recorded on digital recorders. Transcripts of interviews will be made and stored on the PI’s hard drive and a flash drive during the course of the study. Participant’s actual names will be replaced by pseudonyms during transcription to assure confidentiality. The flash drive will be stored in a locked file drawer in the PI’s home.

   a. How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials?

      Pseudonyms will replace actual participant names during transcription process. These pseudonyms will be used for all publications or presentations of study information.

   b. How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

      Participants will be identified by pseudonyms in any publications or presentations. Direct quotes from participants will be identified with these assigned assumed names. Some descriptors of the individuals may be used but will be generic and not traceable to a particular participant.

4. If audio or videotaping is done how will the tapes be stored and how/when will the tapes be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

   Interviews will be transcribed and rechecked for accuracy in transcription. Copies of audio tapes may be retained (without personal information) as raw data for future research use.
5. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

No.

E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This does not include any form of compensation for participation.

1. What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

As part of this study, participants will explore their behaviors and perceptions about leisure, campus engagement, and social networks. This type of reflection might be beneficial as they move through the remainder of their collegiate experiences. Indirectly, the data shared by participants will help researchers, faculty, and administrators better understand the co-curricular, extra-curricular, and social needs of low SES, African American male, undergraduate students. Based on this information further research will be conducted and current programs and services might be enhanced.

F. COMPENSATION

Please keep in mind that the logistics of providing compensation to your subjects (e.g., if your business office requires names of subjects who received compensation) may compromise anonymity or complicate confidentiality protections. If, while arranging for subject compensation, you must make changes to the anonymity or confidentiality provisions for your research, you must contact the IRB office prior to implementing those changes.

1. Illuminate compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.

Once a participant completes the interview he/she will receive a $50 gift card. If the participant does not complete the interview the PI will not give the participant any compensation.

2. If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.

Not applicable.

G. COLLABORATORS

1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on Cover Page) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number.

Not applicable

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.
Only the PI, academic advisor, and dissertation committee will have access to the transcripts of data. Pseudonyms will replace actual participant names on the transcripts prior to sharing these data with committee members.

**H. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**
1. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project? **No**
2. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? **N/A**

**I. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**
1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.
2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.
3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

**J. HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING**
*Please consider taking the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.*
Appendix B - IRB Interview Guide

**Background information:**
- Please tell me a little about how long you have been at Carolina?
- Tell me a little about your family?
  
  *Prompt if needed:* Do you have any siblings?
  *Prompt if needed:* What does your parent(s)/guardian(s) do for a living?
- What was your community/neighborhood like during high school?
- What are some typical activities or things you were involved in during high school (with family, friends, and individually)?
  
  *Prompt if needed:* Did you participate in high school clubs, sports, the arts, or similar activities?
- What was it like to come to Carolina out of high school?
- How did you get yourself involved in campus activities?
  
  *Prompt if needed:* What did you do for relaxation or fun when you first got to campus?
  
  *Follow up:* Can you describe any challenging AND/OR surprisingly easy encounters you had?

**Campus knowledge and perceptions:**
- Describe some of the things you do when you are not in class or studying.
  
  *Follow up:* How did you find out about that/these?
- How would you would like to spend your time?
  
  *Follow up:* What prevents you from doing these things? Why is that? What do you gain? OR What would you rather be doing?
- When you think back to the summer before Carolina is this what you thought college would be like?
  
  *If needed?* How so, please explain.
• How would you describe the experience of “getting involved” on campus?

_Prompt if needed:_ Was it easy to find things to do? Did certain offices or students help you?
_Prompt if needed:_ Did you avoid any offices, services, and/or types of students?

**Co-curricular, social and/or other types of involvement:**
• Tell me a little more about the types of activities you have been involved with at Carolina?

• How did you learn or hear about campus opportunities or services?

• Tell me about how your involvement in these activities and/or organizations is going today?

• How does what you do now differ from what you did when you first came to Carolina? Can you share why you continue to do the things that you do?

• _If needed:_ Why did you stop doing certain activities?

• _If needed:_ Why are you not involved with programs or opportunities on campus?

• _If needed:_ Can you share more about the types of activities you do that are not campus based?

• Describe how “involved” you are with these experiences?

_Prompt if needed:_ Do you just attend things? Do you coordinate the group in some way?

• How would you “like” to be involved with these groups or activities?

_Prompt if needed:_ Would you like to participate or be engaged in a different way?

• _If needed:_ Can you discuss the similarities and/or differences in how you participate in activities today versus when you were in high school?

**Personal growth and development:**
• How would you describe the way you feel when you participate in these experiences?

• Please tell me a little about how you personally benefit from these experiences?
Prompt if needed: Are you meeting new people? Relaxing?

- Can you discuss how these benefits have changed during your involvement?

  Follow up: If so how and what do you think caused the change?
  Follow up: If not, why do you think that is and are you ok with that?

- What are some things you have learned or gained from being involved on campus?

- Describe how these experiences have influenced your time at Carolina?

- Please describe the relationship these experiences have with your academics, if any?

- How do these experiences have help you interact with your peers? The campus? And/or the community?

  Prompt if needed: How has being involved help you connect with fellow students?
  Prompt if needed: How has being involved help you connect with the campus?

- Please share a little about the types of relationships you have made with individuals? With organizations or groups?

- What types of activities do you consider recreation?

- Describe what leisure is for you?

- Do you feel you had more recreation and/or leisure opportunities before coming to Carolina?

  Follow up: Why do you think you that is?

- How do you see the experiences we’ve been talking about today? As recreation? As leisure? As something else?

- Is there anything you’d like to share about your involvement on or off campus related to recreation and/or leisure that we have not discussed?
Appendix C - IRB Recruitment Materials

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: African American Males needed for a Research Study

Dear student,

I am conducting research on the college experience and low socioeconomic status (SES) African American Men. If you meet the criteria below and can spare about an hour out of your day to share your experience please contact me by September 30, 2014. If you complete the brief interview you will receive a $40 gift card to the campus bookstore.

Who: Low income, African American Male, undergraduate students

What: Participate in a research study sharing information about your college experience.

Interviews will last about 1 hour.

Where: A mutually agreed upon location such as, the Stone Center or other campus building.

Compensation: A $40 gift card to the campus bookstore!

Do you meet the above criteria? Can you spare about an hour out of your day?

Contact Tony Patterson via email at Tony_Patterson@ncsu.edu or by texting/calling 919.260.XXX

This study is being conducted as doctoral research through the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at North Carolina State University. Participation in this study is voluntary, and will not impact your enrollment, academic or extracurricular programs in anyway.
Appendix D - IRB Interview Informed Consent

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Leisure and Engagement among Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male Undergraduates

Principal Investigator: Tony Patterson       Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Karla A. Henderson

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

• You are being asked to take part in a research study.
• Your participation in this study is voluntary.
• You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty.
• The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue.
• You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study.
• Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate.

In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

To explore the campus involvement of low socioeconomic status African American male undergraduate college students

What will happen if you take part in the study?

• You will be asked questions about your campus involvement and other experiences you have outside of the classroom.
• The interview will be digitally recorded, and will take 1-2 hours to complete.
• A follow-up interview of 1-hour or less may be needed.
• Interviews will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon public location.

Risks No foreseen risks are associated with this study.

Benefits

• Students may gain a better understanding of their collegiate experience.
• Knowledge gained will assist educators in developing ways to enhance the college experience for this population.

Confidentiality

• You will not be identified by name or with enough details that someone could identify you.
• Interview recordings will be typed, and you will be assigned a different name.
• This assumed name will be used in all oral and written reports, to assure that your real identity remains unknown by others.
• The information gathered will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law.
• Data will be stored securely in a locked file drawer maintained by the researcher.
• Copies of the audiotapes will be kept on a password protected computer for possible future research use.

Compensation

• You will receive a $40 gift card from the campus bookstore when you complete the interview.
• If you do not complete the interview, you will not receive the gift card.
• You will not receive any additional gifts for participating in a follow-up interview.

What if you have questions about this study?

• Contact the researcher, Tony Patterson, by calling 919.260.XXXX

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Subject’s signature_____________________________ Date ________________

Investigator’s signature_________________________ Date ________________
Appendix E IRB Approval Letter

From: Jennifer Ofstein, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: April 11, 2014

Title: Leisure and Engagement among Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male Undergraduates
IRB#: 3926

Dear Anthony Patterson,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTE:
1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ofstein
NC State IRB
Appendix F - IRB Study Procedures Addendum

STUDY PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED:

In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects. In order for the IRB to completely understand the experience of the subjects in your project, please provide a detailed outline of everything subjects will experience as a result of participating in your project. Please be specific and include information on all aspects of the research, through subject recruitment and ending when the subject's role in the project is complete. All descriptions should include the informed consent process, interactions between the subjects and the researcher, and any tasks, tests, etc. that involve subjects. If the project involves more than one group of subjects (e.g. teachers and students, employees and supervisors), please make sure to provide descriptions for each subject group.

Participants will be recruited through previous contacts with interviewees as well as through campus based organizations where a larger percentage of members are African American males and/or are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The PI will directly contact previous interviewees (as was indicated as a possibility in the initial interview) and will also ask the program coordinator or primary contact to send a recruitment email (SEE ATTACHED) to African American males who did not participate in the first round of interviews.

The email will:
- offer basic information about this study including the purpose and confidentiality of participation
- discuss benefit to the population being studied and any participants including a $40 gift card incentive
- provide an email address for potential participants to schedule a time and place for interviews and the focus group

During the interviews and focus group the PI will:
- review the informed consent forms, answer any questions, and obtain the participant’s signature
- give a signed copy of the consent form to the participants and remind them about their confidentiality
- start the interview and focus group by stating the date and time, the participant’s or participants’ number(s) (assigned by PI), and first name(s)
- refer to the participant(s) by his/her first name, but will not use last name(s)
- use an interview guide to ask questions and frame the interviews and focus group

At the conclusion of the interview and focus group, the participant(s) will be reminded that the PI may contact him/her for a follow-up discussion if deemed necessary for clarification or additional information. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant in the study. The key as to which participant corresponds with which pseudonym will be kept in a locked file drawer at the PI’s home. If a follow-up interview is required, the PI will remind participants of the continued confidentiality of the study and their participation in it.
Appendix G - Focus Group Guide

Purpose
The purpose of the focus group is to examine my initial research findings and gain a deeper understanding of emerging themes from the data. I will let participants know that I will anonymously share my interpretations and analysis from previous interviews and ask them to provide any thoughts to confirm and elaborate on these findings or to share alternative opinions and experiences.

Creating social connections:
My initial interviews indicated that involvement in campus programs and leisure experiences were important to making social connections. If this was the case for you, describe how these connections occur and how they impact your college experience?

Follow up: What were the cases when social connections did not occur as a result of participation?

Many participants mentioned how initially overwhelming college seemed and how they felt isolated and unsure about how to get involved. If you had these feelings, describe the role campus programs and leisure experiences played in alleviating these feelings?

Follow up: If this was not your experience, in what ways accounted for your ability to quickly engage?

Participants discussed the importance of having social connections to help manage stress associated with college. But many students also noted that these same connections and involvement were sources of stress. Describe how you use campus programs and leisure experiences to alleviate stress?

Follow up: What other ways enable you to handle personal and academic stress at UNC?

Discovery…self, place, purpose:
Many men talked about the need to get out of their comfort zone to meet new people and try new things. If that was the case for you, please share your experience and the role, if any, campus programs played in addressing these feelings?

Carolina is a large university and campus environment where fitting was initially difficult for many men. How important is it to fit? How were you able to feel comfortable and find your place on campus?

Participants discussed developing a sense of perspective about other people through campus involvement. If this was the case for you, how do you think campus programs raise this awareness within you?
Most interviewees discussed coming to college with few expectations or goals. However through campus involvement realized why they were here and what they wanted to do after graduation. How did this process evolve for you?

Follow up: What role, if any, did campus involvement play?

**Being an African American Male:**
Several men talked about how they experienced and unwelcoming environment on campus. The feelings usually were in subtle ways based on interactions with peers or just not really feeling connected to the larger community. What was your experience regarding an unwelcoming environment?

Follow up: What did you do to address these possible feelings when you experienced them on campus?

Many men felt the Black community on campus was supportive but also limiting and potentially constraining in some cases when it came to social involvement. What role did the Black community play in your involvement and social interactions?

Follow up: What role might this community have played for others in your similar situation?

During my analysis only a few men overtly discussed issues related to their socioeconomic background. What difference, if any, did your SES status make in your adjustment and engagement in campus life?

Follow up: Explain how your experience may have been like or unlike other men similar to yourselves.
FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: African American Males needed for a Research Study

Dear student,

I am conducting research on the college experience of low socioeconomic status (SES) African American men. Since I was a low SES African American undergraduate student a number of years ago, I am professionally (and personally) interested in this topic. I have collected data from a number of individuals and have begun my analyses. I would like to visit further with men I interviewed who originally met the criteria listed below as well as to get new input. Your participation will be invaluable as I complete my research. If you meet the criteria below and can spare about an hour out of your day to share your experiences, please contact me by February XX, 2015. If you participate in the interview you will receive my heartfelt thanks and a $40 gift card to the campus bookstore. Additionally, I will ask that each participant respects the confidentiality of the focus group.

Who: Low income, African American Male, undergraduate students

What: Participate in a research study sharing information about your college experience.

Focus group will last about 1 hour.

Where: A mutually agreed upon location such as, the Stone Center or other campus building.

Compensation: A $40 gift card to campus bookstore!

Do you meet the above criteria? Can you spare about an hour out of your day?

Contact Tony Patterson via email at Tony_Patterson@ncsu.edu or by texting/calling 919.260.XXXX

This study is being conducted as doctoral research through the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at North Carolina State University. Participation in this study is voluntary, and will not impact your enrollment, academic, or extracurricular programs in any way.
Appendix I - Focus Group Informed Consent

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Leisure and Engagement among Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male Undergraduates

Principal Investigator: Tony Patterson
Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Karla A. Henderson

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

• You are being asked to take part in a research study.
• Your participation in this study is voluntary.
• You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty.
• The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue.
• You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study.
• Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate.

In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

To explore the campus involvement of low socioeconomic status African American male undergraduate college students

What will happen if you take part in the study?

• You will be asked questions about your campus involvement and other experiences you have outside of the classroom.
• The interview or focus groups will be digitally recorded, and will take 1-2 hours to complete.
• A follow-up interview of 1-hour or less may be needed.
• Interviews or focus groups will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon public location.

Risks
No foreseen risks are associated with this study.

Benefits

• Students may gain a better understanding of their collegiate experience.
• Knowledge gained will assist educators in developing ways to enhance the college experience for this population.
Confidentiality

- You will not be identified by name or with enough details that someone could identify you.
- Interview and focus groups recordings will be typed, and you will be assigned a different name.
- This assumed name will be used in all oral and written reports, to assure that your real identity remains unknown by others.
- The information gathered will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law.
- Data will be stored securely in a locked file drawer maintained by the researcher.
- Copies of the audiotapes will be kept on a password protected computer for possible future research use.
- Focus group participants: Please respect the confidentiality of the focus group. I will do all that I can do to assure confidentiality from each participant but it cannot be guaranteed.

Compensation

- You will receive a $40 gift card from the campus bookstore when you complete an interview or focus group.
- If you do not complete the interview or focus group, you will not receive the gift card.
- You will not receive any additional gifts for participating in a follow-up interview or focus group.

What if you have questions about this study?

- Contact the researcher, Tony Patterson, by calling 919.260.XXX

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Subject's signature ________________________________ Date ________________

Investigator's signature ________________________________ Date ________________
Appendix J - IRB Study Addendum Approval Notice

Received via email

January 30, 2015

Dear Anthony Patterson:

IRB Protocol 3926 has been approved

Title: Leisure and Engagement among Low Socioeconomic Status African American Male Undergraduates

PI: Henderson, Karla

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. This protocol will expire on and will need continuing review before that date.

NOTE:

1. You must use the approved consent forms (available in the IRB system with the documents for your protocol) which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us.

Thank you,
The IRB Team
# Appendix K - Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>Second semester sophomore who is an out of state student. He was raised in a mid-sized city. He tutors middle school students and enjoys service and volunteering. Occasionally plays intramurals, and is part of an NPHC fraternity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas*</td>
<td>Senior who is a first generation college student raised in a single-parent home. He spent his high school years in a small, rural town. He self-identifies as an activist and is involved with several student organizations including student government. Enjoys reading and being physically active.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booker*</td>
<td>Senior who is an out of state student raised in a single-parent home. He is a first-generation college student who joined and quit several professional organizations and one club sport. Spent first semester senior year abroad. In his last semester he was not involved with any organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taliaferro*</td>
<td>Senior, in-state student who is first-generation. Member of student government, an ethnic organization, and an a cappella group all four years of college. He enjoys cooking, watching television, and playing videogames with friends. Wants to attend graduate school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington*</td>
<td>Senior, in-state student who is first-generation. He is from a single-parent home, raised mostly by his grandparents. He is from a small, rural town. Participates in intramural sports regularly and is a member of an organization that mentors youth in a juvenile detention center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin*</td>
<td>Senior, in-state student who is first-generation. He plays intramural sports regularly, attends university athletic events, and exercises regularly. Member of an organization that mentors youth in a juvenile detention center and a separate organization that tutors middle school students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther*</td>
<td>Junior, in-state student who is first-generation. Member of an NPHC fraternity, ethnic organization, two professional organizations, university sponsored admissions representatives, and two a cappella groups. He exercises regularly and enjoys informal recreation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
King* Junior, in-state student who is first-generation and from a small, rural town. Member of an NPHC fraternity, ethnic organization, media organization, and an organization focused on minority male persistence. He enjoys playing basketball and reading.

Junior* Junior, in-state student. Member of an NPHC fraternity, club sports team, campus activities board, an organization that is focused on creating an inclusive environment on campus and service learning.

Malcolm* Senior, out of state student from a mid-sized city. Participated in a club sport as a sophomore. Member of ROTC, organization that mentors youth in a juvenile detention facility, and a media organization. He enjoys running and exercising.

Barack* Junior, in-state student. Member of an ethnic organization, an organization sponsored by the university that supports student innovation, and service learning. He is also in several informal groups and enjoys photography and regularly participates in intramurals.

Nelson* Second semester sophomore, in-state student. Member of a university supported leadership program that works in the local community. He enjoys running for exercise. Plans to attend graduate school

George Senior, in-state student from a small, rural town. Member of student government, a professional organization, a social justice organization, university sponsored admissions representatives, and recently started an organization that provides a free service to students in need. Plans to attend graduate school.

Carver* Senior, in-state student. Member of two service organizations. Enjoys meeting friends for meals and going shopping. Engaged to be married and lives with his fiancée.

Colin* Junior, out of state student from a large city. Member of the campus activities board, university sponsored admissions representatives, and was previously a member of an ethnic organization and a philanthropic organization. Plans to attend graduate school

Powell* Junior, in-state student and first generation. Member of an organization that mentors youth in a juvenile detention facility and he recently started an organization that supports men of color on campus. Enjoys exercising and playing basketball with friends.
| Mandela* | Junior, out of state student. Member of student government. Heavily focused on academics and intentionally limits campus engagement. Plans to attend graduate school. |

*Note.* * = part-time job.

1\*NPHC = National Pan-Hellenic Council
2\*ROTC = Reserve Officer Training Corps
Appendix L - Focus Group Reminder Message

Gentlemen,

First of all thank you for agreeing to participate in my focus group tomorrow. I look forward to speaking with you about your experiences at MTU.

The purpose of our discussion is for me to share a few of my findings from data collected during one on one interviews. My research is about the leisure and campus engagement of African American males at comprehensive research universities. I would like to know your thoughts on my findings and utilize your input to gain a deeper understanding of them or to provide alternative points of view.

Location: Campus Building conference room (please meet in the lobby)
Time: 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

There will be seven other men in the group and I need all of you there promptly at 2:00 p.m. The focus group will last for about an hour to an hour and a half. I will go over informed consent and expectations for confidentiality and participation before we begin.

If you have any questions please contact me via email at TPatterson15@gmail.com or my cell # is 919-260-XXXX. Calling or texting is also works.

Regards,
Tony Patterson
Appendix M - Social Capital and Black Engagement Advanced Memo

December 30, 2014

Most of the participants are developing social connections in various ways during campus involvement and other leisure activities. These connections and networks are in many cases providing support and an opportunity for the men to bond with peers from similar backgrounds or who have similar interests and/or perspectives. One benefit of time spent in these groups serving as a distraction from the stress related to their academic pursuits in a range of ways - allowing them to share difficult experiences in a safe space, have projects that take their minds off class, to just have fun and relax with friends.

Some men did have difficulties getting involved with student organizations and campus opportunities beyond their first semester. They tried joining one or two organizations like the Black Student Association, Club Soccer, or predominantly White a cappella groups and either did not connect with other members or were not successful during try-outs/auditions. These early difficulties seemed to make these men a little hesitant to try and join other groups until self-reflection took place. Men discussed reassessing their goals and values (i.e., what was important to them, why they were in college) before moving on to find other groups. For instance the student who did not make the predominantly White a cappella group found two other predominately Black, singing groups realizing that what he valued most was singing with a supportive group of peers not necessarily being in a higher profile group.

However when guys did not make teams like Club Soccer they did not have the option to join an alternative group and had to assess how important soccer was for them. One student “felt lost” after not making the team and spent a year working out, training and focusing on soccer not pursuing other group involvement outside of class. He did try-out again his sophomore year and was successful in making the team. However once he was on the team he never felt part of the team and the game that he had loved playing began to feel more like work. He eventually quit the team at the beginning of his junior because the team was not enjoyable, the commitment was distracting from his academics, and he realized he would most likely not play professional soccer. He began to search for other student groups (e.g., Investment Club, Finance Club) to help him determine what he might want to do after graduation.

Another student decided to “move on” from trying to play soccer at the club level. While he felt he was good enough to make the team and he was over looked because he did not know the right people he (similar to the student trying out for the a cappella) loved playing the game and being part of a team. He decided to just play free play soccer and pursued other groups never trying out for Club Soccer again.

While these men did experience difficulty initially connecting with groups over experiences they felt passionate about because of reflection, self-assessment, and valuing their own experiences they were able to recover and find new opportunities. The men who went
through try-outs and auditions with predominately White groups did not remember these experiences fondly. They did understand these were competitive situations but in each case they did not feel like they were assessed fairly and in the case of the a cappella did not feel they were really considered. So while the men did find other opportunities any future significant memberships were within the black community on campus.

This seems to be the case for most of the men. Few discuss sustained involvement in predominately White student organizations, campus opportunities, or informal groups. The few men that do (e.g., Club Lacrosse, Student Government, Honor System) don’t feel a strong bond or connection in these groups often feeling isolated and alone. They find support and talk about significant friendships and experiences in other groups.

Even though, these men are developing networks of friends and social connections it seems like they are building bonding social capital and not necessarily capital that connects (i.e., bridging) them to other opportunities. For instance the men in Student Government and the Honor System feel their experience will look good on their resume and they like giving back to campus in this way but do not necessarily feel they are connecting to their peers.

The lack of bridging social capital formation could be because they are mostly connecting with students from similar situations and backgrounds in predominately Black groups and during informal campus opportunities. A couple of students did talk about how the connections they made did allow them to make connections with other peers and administrators to accomplish campus goals (e.g., getting funding for events, help from a certain advisor, access to the Chancellor) but these examples were few. For the most part these men are finding support, stress relief, and camaraderie.

In some cases, campus involvement and leisure activities did add to the stress of students. A few report getting too involved and prioritizing student group activities ahead of academics. The negative aspects associated with this (not performing well in class, not leading a healthy life style) manifested in different ways. Some men did not do well on early assignments, realized the imbalance and corrected the situation in time to do well in classes, others talk about getting an “F” in a course and that was when they changed behavior still others realized that living off of “red bull” was not producing their best work in class or in their involvement and that needed to change.

This situation typically happened when a student was over committing to lots of groups and was not comfortable saying “no” or was unsure what he wanted. Although it also occurred to a couple of students when they were deeply engaged in one or two groups that they truly valued. In the former scenario once students understood what was important to them they easily and quickly made adjustments. However in the latter scenarios, students struggled with the changes they had to make but eventually made them understanding that their main purpose at college was to get a degree.
It does seem like these men are developing bonding social capital and these experiences are meaningful in forming supportive friendships and networks as well as helping them build self-efficacy. While campus engagement and leisure activities can exacerbate stress during college the response should not be to eliminate it. The connections these men are making during campus engagement overall are needed to mitigate that distress (negative stress) AND then through eustress (positive stress – e.g., attending a group meeting or a rehearsal where informal, supportive social interactions might occur) help a young man get through distress. Making sure men understand the signs related to distress are clearly important as well as providing guidance on how to use supportive networks to navigate challenging times during college.