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"Because God Said So": A Thematic Analysis of Why People Denounce Black Greek-Letter Organizations

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“BECAUSE GOD SAID SO”: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF WHY PEOPLE DENOUNCE BLACK GREEK-LETTER ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

"BECAUSE GOD SAID SO":
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Today, Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) struggle to use empirical data to address financial burden, elitism, hazing, relevance in social justice issues, and the anti-BGLO movement. The anti-BGLO movement frames this study. The movement stems from beliefs that secret societies, fraternities, and sororities are anti-Christian. Society will continue to question the relevance and importance of BGLOs if they cannot overcome the issues plaguing them. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to ascertain why members are leaving BGLOs, in case the organizations find the anti-BGLO movement to be a threat to organizational vitality. Through thematic analysis, 18 YouTube testimonials from denouncers were investigated to answer the research question: What are the most significant reasons ex-BGLO members say they denounce their organizations? The dataset produced 12 themes, scriptural evidence to support the speakers' decisions, and a narrative overview of their journey. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: religion, Christianity, Black Greek-letter organizations, BGLO, sorority, fraternity, denounce, thematic analysis, YouTube, testimonials, confessions, renounce, idolatry, blasphemy

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Table 0.1

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term	Short Definition	Citations
ACHR	American Council on Human Rights	(R. L. Harris, 2005)
African diaspora	The Atlantic trade in African slaves which delivered about twelve million Africans to the Americas over time.	(Palmer, 2000)
Benevolent Society	An organization that gives money to and helps a particular group of people in need.	(Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)
Black Theology	An expression of the Christian faith that challenged the truth of this faith of white supremacy and placed Black people's needs at its center.	(Cone 1989; Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007)
BGLO	Black Greek-letter organization	(Ross, 2000)
Cult	An organized group or one person whose purpose is to psychologically manipulate and dominate the group's strategy.	(Rousselet et al., 2017)
Civil Rights Movement	A series of significant events, including marches, protests, and negotiations to degenerate racism, segregation, and Blacks' unfair treatment, mostly in the south.	(Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007)
Denounce	To pronounce especially publicly to be blameworthy or evil.	(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a)
Divine Nine	The nine organizations that encompass the National Pan-Hellenic Council.	(Kimbrough, 2003)
Eisegesis	Interpretation that reads into the text what the interpreter wishes to find or thinks he finds there.	(J. G. Williams, 1973)
Exegesis	Legitimate interpretation which "reads out of" the text what the original authors meant to convey.	(J. G. Williams, 1973)

Fraternity	A men's student organization formed chiefly for social purposes having secret rites and a name consisting of Greek letters.	(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c)
Freemasonry	One of the world's oldest secular fraternities concerned with moral and spiritual values	(Haffner, 2005)
Generative Learning	A theory that suggests the learning process is based on a memory already stored in our brains.	(Farrell, 2019)
GLO	Greek-letter organization.	(Hatchett, 2002)
Hazing	An initiation process involving harassment.	(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d)
Hermeneutics	The study of general principles of biblical interpretation.	(Britannica, 2021b)
Institutional Church	Churches started by free Blacks before the Civil War.	(Frazier, 1963)
Invisible Institution	Slaves who practiced Christianity within slavery.	(Frazier, 1963)
Jim Crow	The name of a racial caste system which included rigid anti-Black laws.	(Pilgrim, 2000)
KKK	Ku Klux Klan	(Clary, 1995; Tarrants, 2019)
Learning Organizations	An organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.	(Senge, 1990)
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.	(Ross, 2000)
NIC	North American Interfraternity Conference	(North American Interfraternity Conference [NIC], n.d.)
NPC	National Panhellenic Conference	(National Panhellenic Conference [NPC], n.d.)
NPHC	The National Pan-Hellenic Council is the umbrella organization of the major, historically Black Greek-letter organizations.	(Kimbrough, 2003, p. 194)

Pledging	A process formerly undertaken by prospective members of Black fraternities/sororities before being granted full membership.	(J. A. Williams, 1992, p. 12)
Secret Society	Any of various oath-bound societies often devoted to brotherhood, moral discipline, and mutual assistance.	(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-e.)
SYDA	Siddha Yoga Dham of America. A not-for-profit organization whose role is to protect, preserve, and teach Siddha Yoga.	(D. Shaw, 2014)
Sorority	A women's student organization formed chiefly for social purposes and having a name consisting of Greek letters.	(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-f)
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee	(Ross, 2000)
Talented tenth	The one in 10 college-educated African Americans who would become leaders of the Black community.	(E. Wright & Morris, 2021)
Womanist	A strong Black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled as domineering castrating matriarch.	(Grant, 1989)

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to understand the core reasons people denounce Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLO). Chapter I will explain the current anti-BGLO movement and how it inspired this research. Then the Chapter chronicles what BGLOs are and why they are significant to the Black Community. It explains the study's purpose and rationale, and provides the research question that drives it. It also provides this study's significance to theory, research, and change. This chapter outlines my positionality, limitations, and delimitations. Lastly, it foreshadows Chapter II, III, IV, and V.

The Anti-BGLO Movement

This study's topic derived from my interest in a movement against BGLOs. While criticism of BGLOs, White fraternities, White sororities, and secret societies is not a new phenomenon in the 21st century, Christian critics are either becoming more vocal or increasing in number (Clarke & Brown, 2011, p. 69; Haffner, 2005). Today, there are numerous websites, YouTube videos, podcasts, and conferences for people who have denounced or are considering blasting their BGLOs (Out From Among Them, n.d.). According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, to denounce means to "pronounce especially publicly to be blameworthy or evil" and "to announce formally the termination of," which in most cases ex-BGLO members announce their membership terminations because they believe the groups are wicked (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). These activists denounce BGLOs, and although they are not nationally unified, they rally around gaining more members to leave and encouraging prospective members not to join because they experience the organizations as idolatrous and incompatible with Christianity (Clarke & Brown, 2011). They argue that BGLOs require a commitment that conflicts with or supersedes a true Christian's dedication to Jesus Christ. Another common reasoning for this

movement is activists' claim that BGLOs are polytheistic (and thus idolatrous from a Christian perspective) due to the Greek symbolism most of them use (Clarke & Brown, 2011). For example, when I conducted a simple Google search of the terms "denouncing BGLO" in the videos section, there were about 274 results; a broader search using all content forms yielded 2,770 results. During my research, I have uncovered numerous sources for why and how members should denounce BGLOs or fraternities and sororities, including articles from college newspapers, based on Christian reasons; however, the sources for why members should join and stay are minimal. Chapter II will review the foundational works on the anti-BGLO movement and other literature regarding why people denounce organizations and systems.

What Is a BGLO?

The first BGLO, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, was founded in 1904 for Black male professionals who felt ostracized by White and Black communities (Ferry, 2003). In 1906, students started the first collegiate BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., on Cornell University's campus (Ross, 2000). Much like the next BGLO created at a predominantly White institution (PWI), this fraternity created an outlet and haven for Black students often ostracized by racism. Since the founding of the first collegiate BGLO in 1906, eight others, including sororities, have followed suit. Members of BGLO culture now refer to the nine organizations as the "Divine Nine" (Kimbrough, 2003, p. 92). The Divine Nine includes Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.; Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.; Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.; Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.; and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (Jenkins, 2010). The founding dates of these organizations span from 1906 to 1963, the height of

the civil rights movement (Ross, 2000). Chapter II will uncover the ties between these groups, benevolent societies, and civic organizations that thrived during the civil rights movement.

The Divine Nine, which makes up the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), only represent a small percentage of the total number of national sororities and fraternities. Fraternities and sororities represented in the North American Interfraternity Council (NIC) and the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) outnumber the nine NPHC organizations. White students started the organizations in the two former councils and segregated them by race for most of their early years (Brown et al., 2005). At the time of publication of *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*, contributor Craig Torbenson (2005) noted:

> Today there are more than 200 national fraternity and sorority organizations that are classified as social fraternities, in contrast to professional fraternities, honor societies, and recognition societies that also use Greek letters. … About 9 percent of these social fraternities and sororities are considered Black Greek Letter Organizations. (p. 37)

According to Savage and Reddick (1957), Black students founded BGLOs in response to being excluded from White Greek organizations. BGLOs incorporate a culmination of African principles, customs, and social models of exclusive membership, while also mimicking aspects of White secret societies, fraternities, and sororities (Hughey, 2008).

Why Are BGLOs Important?

BGLOs are an important fixture in the Black community because of their connections with religious, service, and civic organizations that aided Blacks through slavery, Jim Crow, and racism in America. Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system which included rigid anti-Black laws (Pilgrim, 2000). Slavery, Jim Crow, and the systemic racism embedded in America are a spectrum of oppression Blacks have endured. Not only do BGLOs have links to organizations that have supported the Black community over a range of time, but those links

influence the work BGLOs have done to uplift Blacks, specifically throughout the civil rights movement, and to gain better socioeconomic opportunities. As previously stated, there are strong ties between Black fraternal organizations and the benevolent societies that aided the Black community in the 19th century (Butler, 2005). Black fraternal organizations, which derived from White organizations that Blacks were not always welcomed in, like the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Elks were not easily delineated from benevolent societies because their activities were similar (Butler, 2005). Since some founders of the first collegiate BGLO were Masons, organizations established after Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity patterned themselves after the organization (Brown et al., 2005). Butler (2005) wrote:

> Apart from churches, fraternal and benevolent societies have long been the largest and most durable organizations in the Black communities. The founders and leaders of these organizations were the vanguard of social change and made significant contributions to the widespread liberation, political, moral, temperance, and social reform movements that characterized the nineteenth-century United States. The fraternal and benevolent societies they created, along with churches, became the center of black life, and their impact lasted throughout most of the next two centuries. (p. 67)

While they were not acting on behalf of their BGLOs, many civil rights leaders were members of BGLOs. Members like Rosa Parks; Martin Luther King, Jr.; John Lewis; W.E.B. Dubois; and Thurgood Marshall may have been influenced by the social action aspect of their organizations (Gasman, 2011). Rosa Parks, an Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority member, refused to give up her seat to a White man on a bus, which sparked the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. Her pivotal role is why she is called the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" (Ross, 2000, p. 234). While Rosa Parks was instrumental in starting the movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., an Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity member, was recognized globally for leadership in the movement (Ross, 2000). This recognition includes but is not limited to receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. John Lewis, Phi Beta Sigma fraternity member, marched alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. and served as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). W.E.B. Dubois, Alpha

Phi Alpha fraternity member, was a historian and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Thurgood Marshall, who was also an Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity member served as head of the legal staff of the NAACP, and won the historic case of Brown versus Board of Education which declared that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional (Ross, 2000).

Members of BGLOs, as elite middle-class Blacks with access to education and professional opportunities, felt a responsibility to serve and help the rest of the Black community obtain more. This notion of "uplift" from the "talented tenth" was an intensely debated issue (Gaines, 1996; Hughey, 2008). Based on Gaines' (1996) account, racial uplift was a self-help ideology expressed through middle-class and racial terms instead of broader egalitarian social terms for culturally elite Blacks. The "talented tenth" was a term that originated in the 20th century that refers to the one in ten college-educated African Americans who would become leaders of the Black community (E. Wright & Morris, 2021). People often saw BGLO founders as the talented tenth, which resulted in them becoming contributors in the civil rights movement (J. Harris & Mitchell, 2008).

BGLOs impacted the civil rights movement through the American Council on Human Rights (ACHR), founded in 1948 (R. L. Harris, 2005). The ACHR originated from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's National Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs. Members started the council to keep the public informed on government affairs, monitor legislation, and lobby for civil rights (R. L. Harris, 2005). According to the ACHR's publication *Congress and Equality*, in 1952, representatives from six of the then eight BGLOs met in Detroit to rally the support of their members for ACHR programming around equality and justice for all. At this meeting, Henry Arthur Callis reminded everyone that "we are representatives of a quarter-million trained men and women who carry still the welfare of 15 million people on our shoulders, whether we liked it

or not" (R. L. Harris, 2005, p. 211). In 1947, Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho sororities joined the other six organizations to fight for equality and justice with the ACHR (Harrison, 1998). The goal of the ACHR was to commit to putting pressure on Congress and the government to change the societal ills of racial discrimination and bring awareness to the basic principles of American democracy through positive action (Scott, 1948).

The ACHR implemented national programs that energized the civil rights movement by inspiring Black college students to work on justice, freedom, and equality through ready-reference guides and local councils. In 1960, the ACHR's objectives were educating the council's members and the public on registration and voting campaigns and eliminating segregation and discrimination based on religion, race, color, or national origin (Parks & Hughey, 2020). The fraternities phased out of the ACHR to support the National Urban League, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, NAACP, and the Congress for Racial Equality; they were all male-dominated organizations led by fraternity members (Gasman, 2011). Eventually, the remaining sororities recommended the ACHR disband in 1963 (Parks & Hughey, 2020).

Although people rarely saw the ACHR and BGLOs on the front lines protesting in the civil rights movement, they focused more on educating the protestors (Gasman, 2011). BGLO members felt an obligation to use their privilege and education to help the African American community. For example, during the 1950s and 1960s, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority members had a traveling theater show promoting interracial understanding. Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity members traveled to Black colleges to educate students on civil disobedience. Members of Delta Sigma Theta sorority joined with four other women's organizations to bridge the racial gap between Black and White women from the North and the South. Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity hosted workshops across Chicago teaching citizens about impending civil rights legislation. BGLOs spent significant time educating Black communities on voting and ensuring they were

registered. Phi Beta Sigma fraternity specifically sent members into the communities to teach people how to run effective political campaigns and identify the best candidates to vote into office (Gasman, 2011).

In addition to teaching Black people and college students about aspects of the civil rights movement, BGLOs often funded those participating in the movement (Gasman, 2011). BGLOs contributed financially to individual Black colleges, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), and directly to citizens on the front lines. The organizations would provide funds to pay for college students' tuition, room and board, and other fees if they were in financial need while doing sit-ins, marches, and protests. Delta Sigma Theta sorority members used their annual Christmas party to raise money and awareness for integrating Little Rock Central High School. The ACHR had an emergency fund for the civil rights efforts and raised $7,500 for the four North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University students in the Woolworth lunch counter sit-in on February 1, 1960. Sigma Gamma Rho sorority sisters used their annual conference to raise money for the victims of the Detroit race riots in 1967. Perhaps the most significant contributions the BGLOs made were the educational and financial efforts to support the struggle for freedom and equality (Gasman, 2011).

While some of the BGLOs made strides providing education and funding for the civil rights movement, many fraternities led the way in the courtroom through civil rights litigation (Parks & Hughey, 2020). Parks and Hughey (2020) outlined a lengthy list of cases tried by Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, Omega Psi Phi fraternity, and Phi Beta Sigma fraternity members. Former associate justice of the Supreme Court and Alpha Phi Alpha member Thurgood Marshall litigated most cases that tipped the scales of justice toward equality. The types of cases the BGLO fraternity men fought include but are not limited to discriminatory salary practices, housing discrimination, police brutality, voting rights, employee discrimination,

wrongful convictions, segregation (businesses, travel, libraries, schools, and sports facilities), and discriminatory admission practices in education. Some fraternity men also organized the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training. Civil and human rights litigation offered a diverse approach to the movement and allowed BGLO members another avenue to exhibit their leadership and scholarship to advance civil rights (Parks & Hughey, 2020).

As members of the Black middle-class struggled for the rights of the Black community, BGLOs provided a network for Blacks of a specific socioeconomic class (Graham, 1999). Graham (1999) writes that his book was an opportunity to share the stories of Blacks who lived in two different worlds and were misunderstood by both. Educated, wealthy Black people were often in a class of their own, ostracized by Whites and disconnected from Blacks. Through BGLOs, they were connected to others in their economic class and the Black community they fought alongside for freedom and equality. I would be remiss not to acknowledge social organizations like the Boulé (Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity) and Jack and Jill of America, Inc. that professional and wealthy Blacks created to provide a network and community for upper- and middle-class Blacks working and living in predominantly White spaces. BGLOs mirrored these organizations because, by the 1930s and 1940s, their programming of large social gatherings became a magnet not only for the intellectually elite but also for the economically privileged. Their lavish events and membership fees distinguished them from nonmembers who may not have been able to afford it. While critics condemn BGLOs for expensive social activities, others argue that they also use their money to establish and support vital programs and initiatives throughout the nation and the African diaspora (Graham, 1999, p. 90).

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it will introduce a new lane of research on BGLOs. This movement is relevant in today's environment because, from an organization development perspective, BGLOs are organizations whose former members condemn the organizations for being the opposite of what they claim to be, which is based on Christian principles. I cannot predict that this movement will gain traction and grow; however, I wonder how or if the organizations will respond to these claims. I am interested to know if the organizations will prove to be *learning organizations* (Senge, 1990, p. 14), consider the accounts of former members, and change. Senge (1990) describes a learning organization as continually expanding its capacity to create its future (p. 14). He also noted that "for a learning organization, 'adaptive learning' must be joined by 'generative learning,' learning that enhances our capacity to create" (Senge, 1990, p. 14). I want to investigate this because if they do not prove to be learning organizations, and the anti-BGLO movement has a negative effect on BGLO membership, then they would have underestimated a threat to their organizations' longevity.

While researchers have conducted studies on BGLOs to tackle the organization's struggle in the 21st century, little research has been conducted on the anti-BGLO movement. Most of the current research on BGLOs addresses hazing, elitism, financial burdens, and BGLOs' relevance to social activism as they fail to address modern-day problems explicitly (Hughey & Parks, 2011). If the movement continues to grow and gain more attention, it could negatively affect BGLO recruitment and retention. The anti-BGLO movement may not be the biggest threat to the organizations; however, in combination with the weaknesses mentioned previously, inaction could be detrimental. Parks (2008) noted critical research on BGLOs may provide both members and nonmembers a clear understanding of the organizations. It could assist the organizations in capitalizing on their strengths while diminishing their weaknesses. Hughey and Parks (2011)

posited the literature on BGLOs falls short of being relevant in relationship with practical issues the organizations now face. They also remarked if BGLOs want to remain relevant, they must become open to using academic inquiry as a tool (Hughey & Parks, 2011).

Therefore, Parks' (2008) interpretation of critical scholarship that will support BGLO advancement confirms this proposed research's significance. I used thematic analysis to buttress forward-thinking organizational practices. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying themes that emerge from the data, without imposing preconceived structure or theory upon those data (Boyatzis, 1998). Because there is a plethora of testimonial videos available online, I critically analyzed them to understand the phenomenon of why ex-BGLO members leave their organizations, and are recruiting others to do the same. I also used a coding team to mitigate my insider bias. Parks (2008) suggested three features define critical BGLO scholarship: critical analysis, peer review, and citation (p. 3). All of which were exercised in this dissertation. He clarified that critically analyzing BGLOs is not a means of persecution, yet it provides a substantial probe into topics indirectly and directly related to the organizations. "Serious questions about these groups must be asked, and serious answers must be sought" (Parks, 2008, p. 3). A thorough literature review did not identify any studies exploring this research question. Traditionally, professionals in history, sociology, higher education, and psychology produce scholarly works on BGLOs, but there is a need for a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary analytic approach (Parks, 2008). Although my professional background is in higher education, I have approached my academic work and this study from an organization development lens. Using both my professional experience and research insights to create this study fulfilled what Parks (2008) commented is a "viable area of research" (p. 12). Hughey and Parks (2011) suggested producing research on BGLOs that critiques their shortcomings and encourages

innovation will strengthen their platform and incidentally force the public to recognize them as actual vehicles of political and human rights change.

Purpose of Study

Before the publication of *Faith and Fraternalism* (Clarke & Brown, 2011), I did not find any empirical analysis of the claims of the anti-BGLO movement that a person cannot truly be committed to their faith while holding membership in a BGLO. Clarke and Brown's (2011) study was the first attempt to determine if there was any validity to BGLOs being anti-Christian. The purpose of this thematic analysis is to provide empirical evidence to investigate the ex-members' and other denouncers' experiences of BGLOs—those experiences which BGLOs often dismiss. As previously mentioned, this new line of study contributes to research on BGLOs to help alleviate modern-day problems. Providing another level of substantive analysis instead of anecdotal vignettes to support the claims of this movement may alert not only the BGLOs but other fraternal organizations and secret societies. Currently, there are hundreds of videos, and numerous social media posts, blog posts, collegiate newspaper articles, and even events where people discuss why they denounce BGLOs, which creates a surplus of data sources for BGLOs to study. I have not found a study analyzing this occurrence. If members continue to leave, hopefully this study will provide insight on the claims of misalignment. The intent of choosing this topic area is to improve the BGLO experience, and diminish a growing organization threat. Still, the core purpose of this study is to gain more insight into the influences for a person leaving and publicly denouncing their BGLO.

Research Question and Rationale

My qualitative research study will analyze why members denounce and leave their Black Greek-letter organization (BGLO). The anti-BGLO movement frames this study. The movement stems from beliefs that secret societies, fraternities, and sororities are anti-Christian (Carrico &

Carrico, 1997, 2001; Hughey & Parks, 2011). The current literature on the topic explains how founders started BGLOs, some as study groups, some with benevolent society traits, and some patterned after White fraternities. It also outlines how rituals and practices create misalignment with Christian principles. These factors have caused members to denounce and leave the organizations through social media, blogs, websites, and books. Based on the gap in the literature, my research question is: What are the most significant reasons members say they denounce their BGLOs? While one can assume the reasons are all based on religion, I was not able to identify supporting evidence of this in the literature.

Significance to Theory, Research, and Change

BGLOs have a history of unsuccessful culture change that is significant to this study because it shows how BGLOs have disregarded research on general organizational change and their change efforts in the past. Scholars like Parks (2008) stated how significant the tools of critical analysis and empirical research can be to organizations like BGLOs, so hopefully, the organizations will begin to notice the work researchers are doing to implement improvements. As mentioned previously, these organizations should shift from top-down change, meaning change enforced by the highest leaders, to real-time change that includes diverse stakeholders' views (Kusy & Holloway, 2014). Diverse stakeholders for BGLOs means local chapter members (undergraduate and graduate), national organization leaders, university administration, chapter advisors, chapter intake leadership, prospective members, and researchers. These various representatives include internal and external stakeholders, which fraternal organizations and secret societies may oppose due to their clandestine processes and practices.

Also, all nine organizations agreeing on an equal set of standards for implementing such a sweeping change has not happened before. All of the organizations decided to end pledging in 1990, yet it appears the organizations individually chose how they would do so. The diverse

intake processes across groups exemplify this. This section will discuss two studies that show how BGLOs have failed to use empirical research to inform and improve their policies. J. A. Williams' (1992) research created a framework for Kimbrough's 1999 study that was later published in his book (2003). This current study could do the same in the area of BGLOs' alignment with their Christian principles. If so, BGLOs could enter a new era of updated practices on change management that includes strategic planning on all levels, internally and externally.

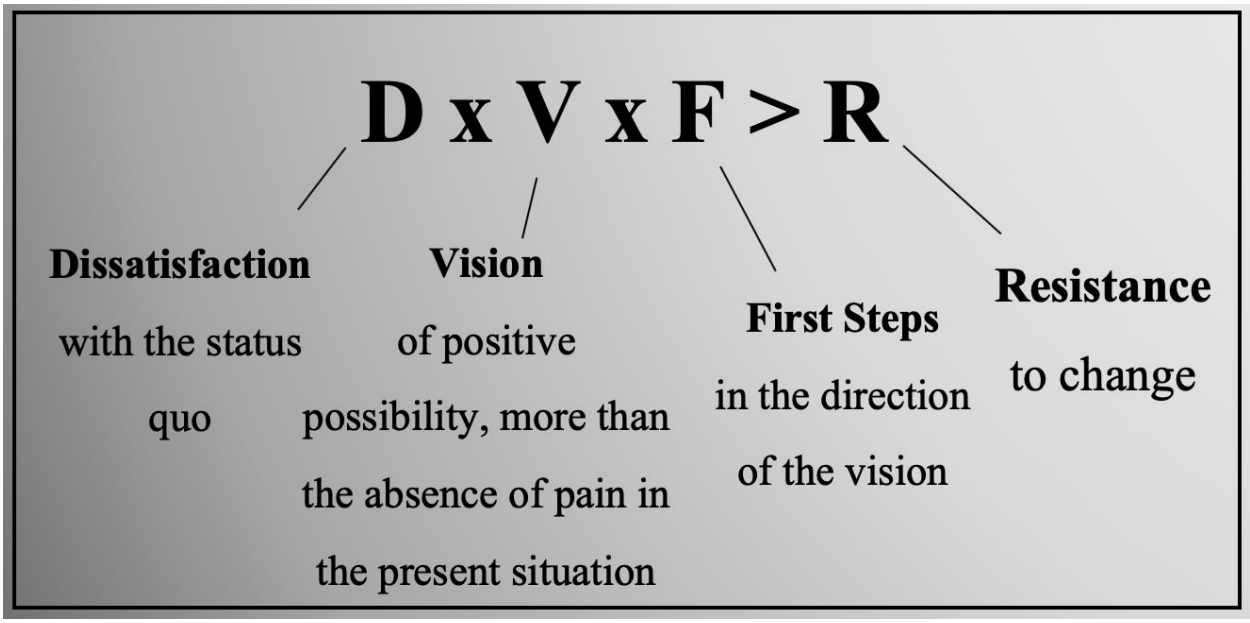
Pledging practices negatively impacted all the organizations; they were almost forced to make changes for BGLOs' betterment and sustainability. There are currently not enough data to support that members denouncing has risen to the level of culture change across organizations. If future data confirm it has become a tantamount threat, BGLOs will need to assess how the previous organizational changes to eradicate hazing were primarily ineffective. The experience can guide efforts in the future. If denouncing proves to be an attrition issue and BGLOs recognize it as a need to address, they will need to use past failures and the suggested theories to inform their strategic plans. The failed culture change is significant to this research, theory, and change as it seeks to address blossoming BGLO issues that BGLOs could learn from while implementing new practices for a successful change in the future. This study is a new line of research in the BGLO arena; therefore, it can serve as foundational guidance for BGLO researchers and change agents.

According to Arnold Beisser (1970), the paradoxical theory of change states that change cannot occur simply by a change agent coercing a person to change. The paradox is that you cannot make someone change; you can only create circumstances conducive for change to occur. This theory supports Beckhard and R. T. Harris' (1987) change formula, which implies that no

matter how much thought or planning goes into the change process, if certain factors do not outweigh the resistance and costs of the change, it will not be successful.

Figure 1.1

Adapted Beckhard and R. T. Harris (1987) Change Formula



Note: Adapted from “Changing the way organizations change: A revolution of common sense,” by K. D. Dannemiller and R. W. Jacobs, 1992, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *28*(4), p. 483 (https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886392284003). Copyright 1992 NTL Institute. Adapted with permission.

The formula in Figure 1.1 shows the level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, multiplied by the desirability of the proposed change or vision, multiplied by the practicality of the change through action steps, has to be greater than the resistance to the change. Therefore, if any of the first multiplication factors are low or are zero, the change will not happen (Beckhard & R. T. Harris, 1987). This formula emphasizes the importance of resistance in the change process. Resistance can occur for many reasons. However, Kusy and Holloway (2014) established a link between

top-down change and resistance:

> We have found that it is almost impossible to do any effective culture change without understanding the views of diverse stakeholders. The 'old' way of doing this incorporated the following model: leaders designed a plan, told others what it was, and tried to get buy-in along the way. Based on strong research evidence, people support what they help create and therefore they must be brought into the process of change in the initial stages. (p. 295)

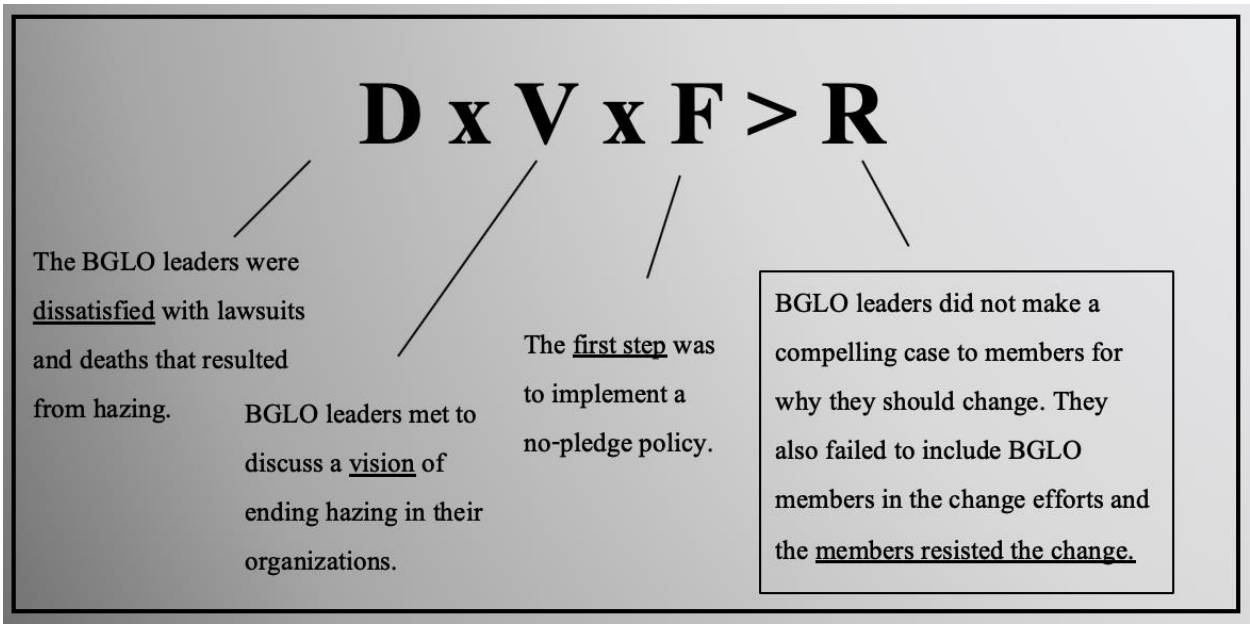
This refers to a project management approach in which managers may attempt change by isolating a part of the organization to improve it. Still, Cameron and Green (2015) observed that "this approach works well with isolated issues, but works less well when organizations are facing complex, unknowable change that may require those involved to discuss the current situation and possible futures at greater length before deciding on one approach" (pp. 109–110). This style of project management, the "old" way of doing things Kusy and Holloway (2014) mentioned, has already occurred within the BGLOs and unfortunately was unsuccessful (Kimbrough, 2003; J. A. Williams, 1992).

One of the most recognized cultural changes BGLOs implemented in unison was banning pledging in 1990. After the hazing death of a Morehouse College pledge, the eight presidents of the then-current NPHC organizations met in February to discuss pledging (Kimbrough, 2003). There were only eight presidents at this meeting because the NPHC had not accepted Iota Phi Theta fraternity yet. Each organization saw an increase in lawsuits and hazing incidents. The leaders saw hazing as the source of all their problems, and the only logical solution was to end it. These factors led them to agree that the clubs would discontinue pledging by the fall of that year. If I were to apply the change formula to this historic event, I would illustrate that the national leaders were dissatisfied with the status quo of hazing potential members to become fully initiated into the organizations because hazing caused lawsuits, and in the worse cases, death. Therefore, they discussed a vision of orienting new members without hazing them. Their first

step towards this was to implement a new policy that banned hazing. Each organization created their own execution plan and the second step is unclear. The national leaders, failed to make the case to the members about the dissatisfaction with the status quo. This failure resulted in resistance overcoming the changes the BGLO national leaders tried to implement as seen in Figure 2. Many students and alumni were vocal about their opposition to the new policy against what they saw as coveted traditions they were committed to continuing (Kimbrough, 2003).

Figure 1.2

Change Formula of BGLO Policy Change



Note: Adapted from "Changing the way organizations change: A revolution of common sense," by K. D. Dannemiller and R. W. Jacobs, 1992, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *28*(4), p. 483 (https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886392284003). Copyright 1992 NTL Institute. Adapted with permission.

BGLO members argued that sheer policy-making was not the solution to hazing and that it would continue, simply at another level (Kimbrough, 2003). The change BGLO leaders tried to implement was that instead of pledging, which included blatant hazing, members would undergo a more educational process called the membership intake process to gain membership into the organizations. The way BGLOs managed this significant change mirrors Rick Maurer's (2010) sentiments about change disrupting the status quo. He suggested:

> Any suggestion of a change disrupts the perfection of the status quo. Even if things look dysfunctional to you or you see possibilities on the horizon, that doesn't mean that others see things that way. Unless you can make a compelling case that a change is needed, you are going to get resistance at every step along the way. It is highly unlikely that six months into a big project, people would turn to each other and say, 'Wow, was I wrong. What would we do without the brilliant leadership of (fill in your name here)? We are so lucky. She saved us once again.' (Maurer, 2010, p. 22)

In 1992 and 1999, researchers conducted quantitative studies that would show BGLO national leaders' decisions to ban pledging and implement a new process did not save the organizations from the horrors of hazing (Kimbrough, 2003; J. A. Williams, 1992). In 1992, John A. Williams performed a national study with 227 undergraduate students from all NPHC regions (J. A. Williams, 1992). These students were or had been officers within their organizations at either a historically Black college or university (HBCU) or a PWI. In addition, almost half of them had attended their national conferences. These factors lead to the assumption that the sample would be well versed in the policies and procedures of the membership intake process. The purpose of the research was to assess the perceptions of undergraduate BGLO members on the no-pledge policy. Some of the themes from the study were as follows:

- BGLO leaders implemented the change too quickly and without input from the members.
- The definitions of hazing were too broad.
- The new process lacked traditional core features of pledging that students felt were important.

- The benefits of pledging were more important than compliance with the new policy and consequences of its sanctions.

The overall low level of endorsement of the impact statements associated with the no-pledge policy by predominantly Black undergraduate fraternity and sorority members suggested that the national leaders have not made a clear case for the no-pledge policy (J. A. Williams, 1992, p. 104). Kimbrough replicated J. A. Williams' study in 1999 and published it in his book, *Black Greek 101* (Kimbrough, 2003). His study occurred almost a decade after BGLO leaders enforced the ban on pledging. Kimbrough (2003) analyzed 185 surveys in his research, compared to the 227 from the 1992 study. He also updated the language used in the scales to fit the present time.

Overall, Kimbrough found undergraduates gained a more favorable attitude toward membership intake. In addition, there was evidence that the undergraduate BGLO culture maintained the belief that there are benefits of pledging. There was a slight decrease in the percentage of members that felt they had control in screening prospective members, a perception that would aid students in justifying pledging. As previously mentioned, students and alumni resisted the change because they felt there were benefits of hazing that outweighed totally removing it from the initiation process. Therefore, this decrease in the percentage of members that felt they had control over screening members is significant because it could result in more members using their lack of control to justify hazing. While the recent study showed that students held more favorable attitudes toward membership intake than found in the 1992 study, over half of them reported they participated in a pledge process, even though they were aware of the no-pledge policy that was at least six to nine years old when they pledged. This proof confirmed that while the policy had become more accepted, it did not translate to fewer hazing incidents. Unfortunately, neither did it prevent hazing deaths (Kimbrough, 2003).

Positionality

Researchers recognize their backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018, p. 8). I was inspired to explore this topic when I was preparing for a speech to prospective BGLO members. The client for whom I was speaking requested that I address why BGLO members are denouncing their organizations at what seems to be higher rates than ever before. I previously did not pay much attention to ex-BGLO members' claims. I assume most BGLO members dismiss ex-members who speak against BGLOs, to demonstrate the loyalty that BGLO culture requires of its members upon initiation. Unfortunately, even I am guilty of automatically tuning out naysayers in allegiance to my organization; however, as a current student of organization development, I see the danger in prematurely dismissing criticism. When I began to do more research, I realized ex-BGLO members allege that BGLOs are not aligned with their espoused Christian principles. This misalignment piqued my interest as a Christian, a current member of a BGLO, and a scholar-practitioner in the field of leadership and organizational change. This misalignment conflict reminds me of Soenon and Moingeon's (2002) multifaceted corporate identity model. The model highlights the difference between a *professed identity*, what an organization professes about itself, and an *experienced identity*, what organizational members experienced (Soenon & Moingeon, 2002).

According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), conducting a detailed reflection of the subjective research process, and expressing an acute awareness of my perspectives and biases can reduce concerns about how my membership in a BGLO can impact the research. Although my identity as a member of both the Delta Sigma Theta and Christian communities will provide an insider

perspective for this study, as a scholar-practitioner, I want to understand denunciation in a way that can better serve the organization. Researchers have yet to produce a rigorous empirical study on how denunciation affects the health of BGLOs. Consequently, the anti-BGLO movement could eventually impact these organizations' recruitment and retention. This assumption guides my interest in assisting as a researcher. However, to my knowledge, the organizations are not currently acting as "learning organizations" by using this research to adapt (Senge, 1990, p. 14).

I have previously mentioned multiple stances I bring to my research, shaping my positions and beliefs as a researcher (Ely et al., 1997). Those stances include insider and outsider roles, which are valuable to this study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Insider research refers to when a researcher has a commonality with or is a member of the population they are studying (Asselin, 2003). Naturally, an outsider would refer to a researcher who does not hold membership in the commonality shared by the participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) discussed the role of the researcher is not the determining factor in the validity of the study. They said the core ingredient is not an insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience (p. 59).

Upon deeper reflection of this insight and my roles, I realized I am both an insider and an outsider in this study. I am an insider because I share the experience of being a Christian led by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. That is a commonality I share with the sample population. In addition, I am aware of BGLO culture and secrets. Unlike the people in the study, I am an outsider because I have not denounced my membership in my sorority, nor do I believe it is inconsistent with my salvation as a Christian woman. As I uncover in Chapter II, members of the anti-BGLO movement assert true Christians cannot be members of BGLOs and whole-heartedly

serve God at the same time. While I believe there is validity to claims that aspects of BGLO culture conflict with Christianity, I disagree that membership in a BGLO ultimately compromises Christianity.

As a Christian, I am aware of the diverse groups of denominations that comprise Christianity. Many sects of Christianity view the Bible, its foundational source of guidance, from varying and even conflicting perspectives. So, I understand how some Christians are BGLO members, and others denounce it. I concur with the aboriginal teachings that suggested people will continually experience the same things in different ways (Stanfield, 2001). As Stanfield (2001) contended, it is not so much the search for the "truth" but the search for—and the honoring of—the different perspectives we all maintain (p. 10). He also illustrated if multiple people sit around a table and converse, a single person at the table is not the proprietor of truth. The truth is at the center of the table because they all co-create the reality of their situation. Therefore, my goal in this study was not to conclude which group—BGLOs or ex-members—is correct. I intended to illuminate aspects on both sides to provide an understanding and begin a broader conversation that will ultimately serve BGLOs in their sustainability.

Limitations

As with all studies, there were research limitations with my study. The methodology used videos that ex-BGLO members have posted online, sharing their testimonies about why they decided to denounce their organization, and conducted thematic analysis to see what significant themes arose. Due to the high rate of videos being posted on the social media platform YouTube, all of the data came from that source. Since YouTube users can remove content at any time, this resulted in attrition in my overall sample, similar to how research participants may end their participation in the study at any time. Due to my active membership in my sorority, and my

connection to that community, I did not analyze videos posted by women from Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. There were no videos of men denouncing Iota Phi Theta Fraternity. These limitations restricted the pool of data from nine fraternities and sororities to seven: four fraternities, and three sororities. Another limitation is included in the speakers' demographics. Due to the decision not to contact the speakers, I collected background information while coding the videos instead of asking them directly. One of the demographic categories includes subjective information; therefore, it is a significant limitation. The category is the spiritual level. I determined speakers' spiritual level by listening for experiences and timelines that would signify if they were new in their faith or established. Again, these data are considered a limitation because it is a subjective finding based on my perception of what the speakers shared in their video.

Delimitations

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), delimitations are boundaries and standards the author places on the study. Therefore, the delimitations of this research include limits on time and participant engagement. The time for the research is limited due to personal academic pursuits. Using videos of testimonials is advantageous because it mitigates the potential for participant or response bias. In an effort to maintain the safeguard on researcher bias, I did not interact with the people who posted the videos, which made up the sample. Restricting the interaction with the research sample created gaps in the demographic data from unknown information.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter II reviews the literature that informed my research. The literature begins with an overview of the history of religion for African Americans from slavery to the founding of benevolent societies and BGLOs. Next, it chronicles the history of BGLOs and the NPHC, incorporating the founding of each collegiate organization. Then the review details the gamut of reasons people denounce other organizations and systems, like religious denominations, cults, gangs, athletic organizations, and hate groups. Lastly, the chapter narrows in to provide the reasons ex-members claim BGLOs are anti-Christian, members should denounce, and prospective members should not join.

Chapter III offers insight on the methodology of the study, thematic analysis. It outlines the rationale and methodological fit for using thematic analysis in this research. The rationale includes the methodology's epistemological approach, strengths, and weaknesses. It also details the design of the study, providing an overview of the study's phases.

Chapter IV exhibits the results of the study. It outlines the speakers' demographics and my method for determining them. It also overviews the themes that answer the research question: what are the most significant reasons people say they denounce their BGLOs? Then it provides a summary of the scriptures speakers use to support their decision and beliefs. In addition to the most pervasive themes and scriptural evidence, the chapter presents a narrative description of the journey the speakers underwent to denounce their organizations.

Chapter V is the conclusion of the dissertation. It interprets and summarizes the findings, provided in Chapter IV. Then, it compares and contrasts those data to the literature found in Chapter II. Lastly, the chapter ends with recommendations for further study, implications for leadership and change, and personal reflections on my dissertation journey.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review starts with a historical overview of African American religious life in America, spanning from slavery to modern-day theological theories. Next, it outlines the history of BGLO beginnings, including details on the influences that shaped the groups' structure. The chapter then takes a macroscopic view of reasons people denounce general organizations like religious denominations, gangs, and athletic systems. Then, the literature concludes with a discussion on the anti-BGLO movement and reasons writers implore others to denounce BGLOs. The section is organized thematically, compiling history and significant concepts related to the research question: What are the most significant reasons members say they denounce their BGLOs? I used the multi-strategy search model to conduct this literature review. First, I met with the Antioch Librarian to glean databases, search strategies, and topic synonyms to yield the best results. Second, I searched those databases and Google with multiple search terms, topics, and phrases. I used the foundational works from previous studies and mined their citations. Lastly, I consulted outside sources for book recommendations from mentors, Amazon, and Google.

The Relationship Between Religion and African Americans

African Americans' religious experience is very nuanced. However, it is a deeply rooted fraction of the Black community. This section overviews the staple attributes that shaped the relationship between Black people and religion.

Slavery to Christianity

The history of African Americans experiencing religion begins with whites teaching Christianity to slaves (Frazier, 1963). Some would say that it started before the Middle Passage as Africans who were forcibly brought to America had religious rituals and traditions that may

have filtered down through generations of slaves. Many slave owners debated whether to teach Christianity to slaves because they wanted to keep them uneducated. Southern Whites especially feared that if they educated slaves, they would band together and revolt against them. The fear of revolt also influenced slave owners' decision not to allow slaves to practice their original religion or use their native language (Frazier, 1963). For a long time, northern Whites debated southern Whites on teaching and including slaves in their faith (Lincoln, 1989).

Fear of a revolt was not the only thing that created resistance from southern Whites (Lincoln, 1989). They also feared the long-standing tradition of releasing slaves after they became Christians would apply to them, and they would lose time of economic productivity to slaves being in church. Once White people established that slaves who became Christians would not have to be released based on their acceptance of Christianity and baptism, southern Whites accepted bringing slaves into their religious fold. As a means to keep slaves ignorant of true Christian principles, slave owners taught slaves the Bible justified slavery, and obedient slaves could build their hope on the afterlife, not freedom while living (Frazier, 1963).

While Whites enslaved Blacks, the enslaved Black people climbed the ranks of ministry within slavery. There were free Blacks starting churches before the Civil War (Frazier, 1963). Frazier (1963) called this the "institutional church" (p. 26). Simultaneously, as the free Blacks were starting their churches, slaves who were Christians practiced within slavery and comprised what Frazier coined the "invisible institution" (Frazier, 1963, p. 23). Once slavery ended after the Civil War, the two merged and were predominantly Baptist and Methodist denominations (Frazier, 1963). Baptist and Methodist denominations tended to be more autonomous and less subject to outside control (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007).

The Initial Black Church

The initial Black Church was vital to the Black community. It was one of the only strong institutions Blacks had to support themselves outside of family (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). The Black Church was instrumental during Reconstruction after the Civil War because many of the black elected officials were ministers. Other than religious positions provided within the church, black men were not able to gain leadership skills. The church was also a haven for Black people to escape racism and being treated as less than human beings. Although Blacks had little money, they tithed what they had to support the church. Black people usually used the tithes, offerings, and donations to help the sick, bereaved, and college students (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). Supporting these efforts through the church may have served as the impetus to organize mutual aid, sickness and burial, and benevolent societies to help Blacks through life crises (Frazier, 1963). As mentioned, Christian charity inspired these types of societies. Preachers also organized secret societies similar to fraternal organizations "to help spread the Christian religion and education," as well as teach their members to "acquire real estate, avoid intemperance, and cultivate true manhood" (Frazier, 1963, p. 42). Some of the societies preachers led were the Knights of Liberty, the first Temple and Tabernacle of the Knights and Daughters of Tabor, and the Order of True Reformers. The Order of True Reformers exhibited how an established organization led by a successful Black religious leader could contribute to the Black community's economic state.

The Black Church and the Civil Rights Movement

After Reconstruction and societal ills removed Blacks from the political process through Jim Crow laws, politics within the church was the primary access Black men had to engage in elections (Frazier, 1963). Blacks primarily participated in elections within the Methodist church

because they elected their church officers, including the Bishop. They not only engaged in elections within their churches but also engaged on a larger scale to elect representatives at conventions. The power that Blacks gained within the Black Church translated to the larger community and society through the civil rights movement.

The civil rights movement is a series of significant events, including marches, protests, and negotiations to degenerate racism, segregation, and Blacks' unfair treatment, mostly in the south (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). The movement's success is attributed mainly to the involvement of religious leaders and the Black Church. Many church-goers joined the campaign for one of two reasons. Their pastors influenced them or their Christian beliefs to serve the underserved aligned with the movement's principles. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an iconic Black preacher who illuminated the Black Church's power in the civil rights movement (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). King was the most prominent figure of the movement (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). Of this movement, about 60 men who were mostly ministers founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Alongside and intentionally not in conflict with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League, these organizations galvanized the Black community to create change in America for Blacks for years to come. The naming of the SCLC was intentional because the morality of the movement and Christian inclusion expanded beyond racial divisions. Including Christian in the name would attract Christians interested in upholding foundational biblical ideals (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007).

Men who gained leadership skills as preachers in the Black Church were the majority of the proponents of the civil rights movement (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). Although King was the face, many other preachers and even Baptist church laymen were the local and national

movement's leaders and foot soldiers, respectively (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). Some of the additional religious icons behind the movement include but are not limited to the marches, the sit-ins, the peaceful protests, and the boycotts were primarily organized and implemented by women of the church who led the auxiliaries. The auxiliaries consisted of the choir, pastor's aid, usher board, missionary societies, and other ministries. Through these ministries and the movement's work, the women sharpened their skills by stepping into a more socialized environment where they could handle finances, public speaking, and work for the less fortunate.

Black Theology

In 1966, the National Committee of Negro Churchmen published a statement on Black power in a national newspaper that delineated the need for equitable power (National Committee of Negro Churchmen, 1966). The statement also called on White churchmen to interact with Blacks authentically with Christian love as if love does not oppose power as some would have characterized the quest for Black power. Subsequent writings after this popularized the use of the term Black Theology (Cone, 1989; Cone & Wilmore, 1979). This term arose from Black academicians and theologians making sense of Blacks' experience, their sacred inheritance, and scripture on racism and Blacks' oppression (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). White theologians, who predominantly controlled seminaries, dismissed Black Theology as invalid (Cone, 1989). Black Theology analyzed the contradiction between the treatment of Blacks and the biblical teachings of Jesus Christ, whose mission was to love everyone equally (Cone, 1997). "This movement contended for an expression of the Christian faith that challenged the truth of this faith of white supremacy and placed Black people's needs at its center" (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007, p. 91). The affirmations that emerged as the center of the Black Theology movement were (a) God as revealed in scripture and in Jesus Christ (the Oppressed One), works primarily for the liberation

of oppressed people; (b) God takes on the identity of those on whose behalf God is bringing about liberation; (c) In the context of racial oppression in America, this means God is Black; and (d) The authentic expression of Christian faith is one that works with the purposes of God, which in the American context is the liberation of Black people (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007, p. 91). Cone (1969) noted Black Theology equates with the liberty and justice that the American constitution guarantees for all. Cone (1997) further argued Black Theology holds Christians accountable to their faith:

> Black Theology seeks to make black religion a religion of Black Power. It does not attempt to destroy Christianity but endeavors to point to its blackness. The task of Black Theology is to make Christianity *really* Christian by moving black people with a spirit of black dignity and self-determination so they can become what the Creator intended. (p. 130)

Nation of Islam

Despite the harsh treatment Christians inflicted on Black people, most Black Americans who profess a religion claim Christianity (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). The Nation of Islam is commonly known as the Black Muslim movement. It gained its popularity as the most attractive religious alternative available to the Black community in America. It inevitably appeals to Black people who struggle with the racists' ties to Christianity and the accommodating posture of the Black Church. The Nation of Islam began in 1930 after splitting from another religious group called the Moorish Science Temple (Karenga, 1989). Messenger Elijah Muhammad, one of the first leaders of the group, influenced a change in Black self-esteem and pride (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). The Muslims were the standard of a new ethnicity of Black people because they were the first to accept that Blackness was an asset (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974).

Muhammad's foundational thought on the socioreligious aspect of Muslims positioned the Nation of Islam diametrically to Christianity (Karenga, 1989); Islam is Blacks' true religion,

and Christianity is the enemy's—White people's—religion. From the beginning, Muslims rejected Christianity and their God for Allah, the Muslim God, who is a Black God (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). The Nation of Islam is the "religion of freedom, justice, and equality" and thus serves Black people's interests better than Christianity, which "is a white man's religion and . . . contains no salvation for the Black man" (Karenga, 1989, p. 293). Malcolm X (Al Hajj Malik Shabazz), one of the Nation of Islam's most eminent spokesmen, critiqued Christianity for its role in racism, slavery, and oppression. Hence, the Muslim community attracted Black Christians who had become impatient and grown weary with the conditions of Christianity (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). Black Muslims see Islam as a natural progression away from the White-centered faith of Christianity.

Although the Black community has not universally accepted Islam, Frazier and Lincoln (1974) list the religion's desires which primarily align with the civil rights movement. These are the top three:

1. We want freedom. We want a full and complete freedom.
2. We want justice. Equal justice under the law. We want justice applied equally to all, regardless of creed, class, or color.
3. We want equality of opportunity. We want equal membership in society with the best in civilized society. (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, p. 200)

Womanist Theology

For a certain period, some theologies were dominated by cultures that excluded Black women to an extent (Grant, 1989). Men dominated Black Theology, and White women dominated feminist theologies (Grant, 1989). The term "Womanist" comes from Alice Walker

describing a mother's black expression to her daughter in her work *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (Walker, 1983). Grant defines a womanist as the following:

> A womanist then is a strong Black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled as a domineering castrating matriarch. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people. (Grant, 1989, p. 213)

As Black Theology is a theology of Black churchmen understanding who they are in Christ, granting Black people freedom, equality, and salvation, the womanist is an extension of Black theology as Black women actualize who they are in Christ (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). Black female theologians contend Christ not only died for the salvation of all people, not just White people. He also was killed for women and not just men (Grant, 1989). For the Black woman, America's oppression is tridimensional because she grapples with racism, sexism, and classism. Furthermore, Jesus, a staple figure in Christianity, endured parallel struggles, thus making him a stronghold of Black women in the Christian faith. From a macroscopic view, the source of Black women's understanding of God has been twofold: first, God's revelation directly to them, and second, God's revelation as witnessed in the Bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience (Grant, 1989, p. 215).

History of BGLOs

BGLOs have a rich history spanning from 1904 until today. This section will provide insight on the beginning of the organizations. The first BGLO, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, was founded in 1904 for black male professionals who felt ostracized by White and Black communities (Ferry, 2003). In 1906, students created the first collegiate BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., on Cornell University's campus (Ross, 2000). Since the founding of the first collegiate BGLO, eight others, including sororities, have followed suit. All nine organizations are now known as the "Divine Nine" (Kimbrough, 2003, p. 92). The Divine Nine includes Alpha

Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.; Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.; Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.; Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.; and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (Ross, 2000).

Phi Beta Sigma member Alain Leroy Locke coined the racial milieu of BGLOs the "New Negro" ethos because the impetus for BGLOs was intertwined with the Black Church, benevolent and secret societies, White fraternities, and collegiate literary societies (Parks & Hughey, 2020). Many of these organization's founders grew up exposed to all of the previous organizations, if not as members. After learning from Black churches and civic organizations in their hometowns, they unknowingly modeled BGLO organizational missions on African core values they experienced through the church and benevolent societies (Harper-Dickinson, 2005). The Black church inspired BGLOs to include ideals of siblinghood, civic action, and community service (Parks & Hughey, 2020). In addition, benevolent societies and the Black fraternal organizations influenced BGLOs' founders with the organizational mission and ritualistic practices that emphasized spiritual guidance, social change, and assistance with living needs (Butler, 2005). The benevolent societies included free Blacks and some still enslaved, which had to be underground or secret societies because slave owners feared symbolism and rituals they did not understand. Some of the more notable benevolent organizations include the Free African Society of Philadelphia, African Union Society, Brown Fellowship Society, African Society for Mutual Relief, Female Anti-Slavery Society, Moral Reform Society, and the Union Benevolent Society (Butler, 2005).

White men also created racially exclusive secret societies that Blacks had to circumvent to become members (Trotter, 2004). Secret fraternal orders were part of the ancestral and

historical memory bank of enslaved Africans and therefore had long been an influential part of the African social, economic, political, and cultural landscape (Butler, 2005, p. 71). Black men had to seek charters from European bodies from England to start Odd Fellows and Freemasonry chapters, which became the Prince Hall Masons. Similar to the benevolent societies, these fraternal organizations helped Black members even more than the Whites because they provided protection from misfortunes and poverty and supported social change like antislavery movements in the 19th century. During the American Revolution, African Americans created many Black secret societies in response to Black oppression. These societies included the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (1843), The Knights of Pythias (1864), and the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World (1898). Freemasonry is inherently linked to Christianity, which filtered principles of truth, community building, charity, and brotherhood into the Black secret society model (Butler, 2005). It is important to note that while Freemasonry has links to Christianity, it is often mistaken for a Christian organization, but it acknowledges and accepts men of any religious faith (Haffner, 2005).

As Freemasonry would play a role in White fraternities, Black secret societies did the same for BGLOs (Butler, 2005). According to Parks and Hughey (2020), Black secret societies were intricately involved in the Black collegiate fraternities' development in three different ways:

- Just as Black secret societies were created to give members a sense of social relationship and responsibility to one another under the theme of racial uplift, Black fraternities were created in response to racial hostility experienced by Black members of colleges and universities.
- Black secret societies provided Black fraternities with an effective organizational structure to carry out their mandates.

- Black fraternities were organized under the same multidimensional purpose of providing mutual support to members and the greater Black community. (p. 10)

Skocpol and Oser (2004) argued African Americans formed more fraternal organizations than their white counterparts because of inadequate access to education, restrictions on civil rights, and "grinding poverty" (p. 418). Blacks also utilized these organizations more often as instruments for social activism (Skocpol & Oser, 2004).

The first White collegiate fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa, founded in 1776, patterned itself after Freemasonry (Carrico & Carrico, 2001). Freemasonry's teachings and practices of the secret fraternal (men-only) order of Free and Accepted Masons are the most significant worldwide secret society (Britannica, 2021a). Freemasonry has almost since its inception been under scrutiny from organized religion (Britannica, 2021a). To add to the debate on Freemasonry and Christianity Haffner (2005) explained:

> There nevertheless remains a basic problem in a Christian approach to Freemasonry. It has some characteristics of a religion, yet it is of itself incomplete. Whilst it sets morals and standards which are—certainly when taken as a whole—a challenge to any man, they fall short of the ultimate standards demanded by most faiths, especially those of the true faith revealed in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. (p. 17)

Like Freemasonry, Phi Beta Kappa has a secret sign, word, grip, jewel, and obligation (Carrico & Carrico, 2001). Members can recognize each other in any company and any part of the world with these practices (Carrico & Carrico, 2001). There are also distinct similarities between the handshakes and oaths of Phi Beta Kappa and Freemasonry (Carrico & Carrico, 2001).

Those exact resemblances trickled into the first collegiate BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha. While modern members may be unaware of the connection to Masonic rites, the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha were well-versed in them (Harper-Dickinson, 2005). According to Gloria

Harper-Dickinson (2005), it is unclear how many of the founders were Masons. Still, the handshake was remarkably similar to Prince Hall Masons' greeting, and it had to be changed because of the resemblance. "Recent research shows that Masonic societies, African secret societies, Kemetic (Egyptian) and West African cosmology and pedagogy, and African aesthetics have all contributed to the core values and ritualistic behavior of BGLOs" (Harper-Dickinson, 2005, p. 13). An empirical study revealed that members of the BGLOs subscribed to the premise that the organizations were founded on Christian principles (Clarke & Brown, 2011). Participants stated the following, "Delta Sigma Theta was founded on Christian principles and remains at the core of the Sorority," and "we are founded on Christian principles and our oath and traditions point out conduct becoming just like the Bible" (Clarke & Brown, 2011, p. 74). Other than the Christian principles the organizations are founded on, all NPHC organizations' commonalities are sisterhood/brotherhood, scholarship, and service (Ross, 2000).

Alpha Phi Alpha was founded at a PWI where Blacks observed White fraternities and sororities gain privileges like housing, study groups, and social networks (Roberts & Wooten, 2008). Just as White fraternities provided a social escape for White students, Black fraternities "filled a niche in the college experience" for Black students (Torbenson, 2005, pp. 56–57). In addition to benevolent and secret societies, and White fraternities, BGLOs also patterned themselves after literary societies that were prevalent at Black colleges in the mid-to-late 19th century (Parks & Hughey, 2020).

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity started as a group of young men who met as a literary society (Wesley, 1991). Literary societies added a component of intellectualism, and a structure with mottoes, initiation rites, and distinguishing badges (Parks & Hughey, 2020). They gave Blacks

the social and political opportunities White people often excluded them from, particularly on White college campuses. White fraternities, Freemasons, and secret societies set the pace for Black fraternities. Upon discussion of transitioning from a literary society to a fraternity, the members began researching the use of Greek letters to name the fraternity (Wesley, 1991). The majority of the members voted to start a fraternity under a Greek name, except one. He resigned because he was not aware of a historical context that would justify African Americans basing an organization in Greek culture. Some of the founders worked in White fraternity houses and were familiar with the Greek system. Thus, seven men voted to formally create Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity in 1906 at Cornell University (Wesley, 1991). The fraternity's unique ideals are manly deeds, scholarship, and love for all mankind (Ross, 2000).

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority

During her junior year at Howard University, Ethel Hedgeman Lyle was inspired to start the first BGLO sorority (Parker, 1999). She was currently dating her high school sweetheart, George A. Lyle, a founder of Alpha Phi Alpha, who she later married. She was motivated by Lyle and Tremaine Robinson, a faculty member who told Ethel about her experience in a sorority at Brown University. Ethel gathered eight other women on campus, and they created Alpha Kappa Alpha. The Greek letters in the name stemmed from the motto "by culture and by merit" (Brown et al., 2005). In 1913, the chapter voted to change the name, colors, and motto. However, they were unsuccessful in the changes and left the organization to start a new sorority. Alpha Kappa Alpha then became the first BGLO to become incorporated that year (Giddings, 1988).

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity

To create community while being isolated at a predominantly White college, two transfer students from Howard University began an organization called Alpha Omega at Indiana

University (IU; Crump, 1991). Black students curtailed the hardships of succeeding at IU by banding together through this group (Parks & Hughey, 2020). Exposure to Greek life at Howard influenced Elder Watson Diggs and Byron K. Armstrong to start a fraternity. The two leaders were intentional about the club's foundation because Diggs took a Greek heraldry class, and Armstrong studied Greek mythology (Parks & Hughey, 2020). The first name of the fraternity was Kappa Alpha Nu (Crump, 1991). After hearing White people referring to the organization as Kappa Alpha Nig, as in nigger, members changed the name to Kappa Alpha Psi. The founders created the fraternity to encourage achievement and include people regardless of status and wealth. Christian ideals are at the club's foundation, and the motto is achievement in every field of human endeavor (Crump, 1991).

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity

After Alpha Phi Alpha was founded at Cornell University, and Kappa Alpha Psi was founded at Indiana University, Omega Psi Phi became the first Black fraternity founded at an HBCU (Dreer, 1940). With the help of a renowned faculty member, three students made many attempts to create a nationally recognized fraternity at Howard University. The administration was open to allowing the students to establish a group, but only locally. The students, dissatisfied with this decision, persisted with requests until the administration accepted their constitution, intending to become a nationally incorporated fraternity. Omega Psi Phi's central tenets are scholarship, manhood, perseverance, and uplift (Parks & Hughey, 2020).

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

Delta Sigma Theta's founding is unique because its founders were initially members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (Giddings, 1988). Dissatisfied with their current sorority status, in fall of 1912 the chapter's entire membership with 22 women voted to change the name, motto,

and colors. They also wanted to incorporate to expand the sorority beyond Howard University. The group's goal was to focus more on social issues affecting the campus and community than members' internal affairs. Alumni members of the sorority found out about the potential changes and gave the chapter members a deadline to stop their restructuring efforts. Instead of accepting the club without changes, in 1913 the members decided to leave and created Delta Sigma Theta. Their first notable engagement in social action was the Women's Suffrage March, three months after they began (Giddings, 1988).

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity

Creating Phi Beta Sigma started with a high schooler who had conversations with a Howard graduate about Greek life (Savage & Reddick, 1957). This conversation occurred in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1910, when only Alpha Phi Alpha and Alpha Kappa Alpha were on the campus. Abram L. Taylor, along with two other friends, did not bring his vision to fruition until 1914. The founders created the group on the principles of brotherhood, scholarship, and service. The founders wanted fraternity candidates to be chosen based on their own merits versus skin tone, hair type, or socioeconomic status. After gaining traction as an official organization, Elder W. Diggs, founder of Kappa Alpha Psi and president of the fraternity at the time, sent a letter to Phi Beta Sigma, inviting them to merge. After thoughtful consideration, they declined to join (Savage & Reddick, 1957).

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority

Abram L. Taylor's next vision was finding a young woman to start a sister organization for Phi Beta Sigma (Ross, 2000). He appointed a new member, Charles R. Samuel Taylor, to lead this vision. Charles Taylor was dating Arizona Cleaver, and she became the one to gather 14 other young women interested in starting a new sorority. Students ridiculed them as the "praying

band" because of their religious nature. They wanted to create a new sorority because they felt the focus of sororities should have been more towards poverty, health concerns, racism, and societal ills, and less towards elitism. The 15 interested women eventually dwindled to five, and those five founded Zeta Phi Beta Sorority in 1920. Their founding principles were scholarship, sisterly love, service, and finer womanhood (Ross, 2000).

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority

Sigma Gamma Rho started as a self-help group for Black school teachers and education majors at Butler College (now known as Butler University) in Indianapolis, Indiana (Pruitt et al., 2008). Butler University is a PWI where students faced harsh racism at school and in the community during the first years of the sorority. The seven founders focused heavily on education because of how they started, yet they also wanted to address self-help activism, racial autonomy, and service. After deciding to become an official sorority, they eventually expanded to include women outside of education (Pruitt et al., 2008).

Iota Phi Theta Fraternity

The last BGLO of the NPHC was founded in 1963, during the civil rights movement (Ross, 2000). The 12 founders of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity were nontraditional students (Slade, 1999). They were older than their peers, had families, full-time jobs, were commuters, and some of them served in the military. As more mature men than most college students, they understood that hazing was more detrimental than fundamental to Greek organizations. Much like other preceding organizations, the founders started Iota because they wanted to establish something new that would directly address the climate of racial injustice and civil rights. The principles of the organization are scholarship, leadership, citizenship, fidelity, and brotherhood among men.

The founders started the fraternity at Morgan State University, and the NPHC did not accept it into the Council until 1996 (Slade, 1999).

National Pan-Hellenic Council

Five of the Divine Nine organizations chartered the NPHC in May of 1930 (National Pan-Hellenic Council, n.d.). Those organizations were Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, Kappa Alpha Psi, and Omega Psi Phi. Alpha Phi Alpha and Phi Beta Sigma joined in 1931 and Sigma Gamma Rho in 1937. There was resistance to allow Iota Phi Theta membership in the NPHC because of disbelief the fraternity would rise to the level of the other eight fraternities (Kimbrough, 2003). The officers of the NPHC debated inducting the fraternity because it could set a precedent for including other minority groups. However, in 1997 Iota Phi Theta Fraternity was the only organization that met the application requirements of the NPHC and was the last group to join. The purpose of the NPHC is to foster cooperative actions of its members in dealing with matters of mutual concern (National Pan-Hellenic Council, n.d., Mission and Objectives section).

Denouncing Organizations and Systems

Due to the dearth in research on why ex-BGLO members denounce their organizations, I will explore why a person would denounce any organization. Because people often compare fraternities and sororities to cults, organizations that endure the same historical dissent are denounced as well. “An organized group or one person can be considered a cult if that person’s purpose is to psychologically manipulate and dominate the group’s strategies” (Rousselet et al., 2017, p. 27). The review revealed organizations people have denounced include but are not limited to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the college and professional football system, Scientology, cults, gangs, Ku Klux Klan, Siddha Yoga Dham of America (SYDA), and other religious movements.

The historical overview of BGLOs in this literature review demonstrates the major differences between the nature of cults, violent gangs, hate groups, and BGLOs, nonetheless, there is value in gleaning information from a broad perspective. In Chapter V I will compare and contrast the reasons ex-members leave the organizations outlined in this chapter, and why ex-members denounce BGLOs specifically.

Reasons members are known to denounce their organizations are religious or ethical conflict, relationships, reduction or loss of autonomy, social disillusionment, members wanting better conditions for others, abuse, and violence. One inference from a study on cults is some members who had negative experiences within the group defected to an anticult movement rather than resolving issues within their respective groups (Lewis, 1986). Researchers have produced empirical studies on why people leave Protestant churches. However, I did not uncover empirical work on people that denounce the church. A journal article that reviewed coexistent research on disaffiliation from the Protestant church used a Gallup poll to determine the most frequent reasons people leave the church (Perry et al., 1980). The reasons include incompatibility of the church with their lifestyle and conflict with the church, the theology, or its members (Perry et al., 1980). In this section, I will detail some examples of people denouncing their organizations for these reasons.

Religious and Moral Conflict with Organizations

In 2017, researchers conducted a study to identify vulnerability factors involved cult members' commitment, retention, and protective factors involved in their departure (Rousselet et al., 2017). Interviewees used a semi-structured method to assess the clinical profile, experience in the group, and characteristics of the cultic group. The interviewees were 31 former cult members. Among many factors, one of the reported factors that encouraged members to leave

the group was lack or loss of faith in the group's doctrine or creeds. The personal conflict with the group is a finding that was comparable to another study (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008). The 2008 study of former new religious movement (NRM) members' mental health sought to investigate the NRM ex-member longitudinal process (joining, belonging, and leaving the NRM), compare ex-members to current NRM members, and compare ex-members to normative data. As far as the reasons for leaving are concerned, many study participants reported that they decided to leave the group mainly because of ethical conflicts, like incoherence between doctrine and facts or between doctrine and their own beliefs (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008).

The conflict between personal beliefs and organizational beliefs influenced John Clary to denounce the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) (Clary, 1995). John Clary is the former imperial wizard, the highest national position in the organization. He exposed the sociopolitical ideology and racist religious doctrine of White supremacy combined with the fear, personal insecurity, and racial hatred that drives the KKK. In his book, *Boys in the Hoods*, Clary told his story of how his father taught him racist behaviors from as early as five-years-old. As a teenager, he sought membership in the KKK youth group to find a familial bond after his father's death. Clary detailed numerous incidents, including the ones that led to his departure. For some, departure and denouncing occurs all at once. However, Clary made up an excuse to leave the KKK, became a minister, changed his lifestyle, and then denounced the group in his book. He also publicly denounced the organization by doing various television interviews. Although there are many reasons I will uncover throughout this review, one major reason that led Clary to denounce the KKK was his newfound faith in the word of God. After leaving, he began to read the Bible and compare it to the teachings of the KKK. The Bible uncovered many discrepancies. He wrote:

> Understanding that the Bible had been distorted when it was presented to me, I began to see scripture in a new light. All the verses I used to quote were taken out of context in the Klan literature that supported our racist views. As a Klansman I had carried a Bible around to occasionally look up a verse that appeared in Klan literature, but I didn't know the God who had penned the scriptures. Realizing I had no relationship with God, I knelt down and cried out for new life. (Clary, 1995, p. 145)

Clary denounced the KKK because he sought a relationship with God after the conflict of racism and Christianity had been revealed (Clary, 1995). Thomas Tarrants is another former Klansman that denounced the KKK due to religious conflict (Tarrants, 2019). While serving time in the Mississippi State Penitentiary for a failed bombing of a Jewish civil rights leader, Tarrants began to read books that showed him a new perspective on life. He eventually began to read the Bible, which rid him of the hatred in his heart. The most profound change he saw was how he thought about his past behavior. He stopped desiring to live such an evil life. He knew there was no repair for the hurt and harm he caused. He could only forge a new path forward. Tarrants stated:

> I now wanted to live for God. I wanted to draw near to him and to follow Jesus. I didn't know how to do this, but the enlightenment and encouragement I received from reading the Bible fed and intensified this desire and gave me direction. (Tarrants, 2019, p. 127)

One day Tarrants read a passage from the Bible that spoke to him regarding his attitude towards Black people (Tarrants, 2019). The scripture read:

> If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God who he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (*New King James Bible*, 1999, 1 John 4:20–21)

> He realized that he based the errors of racist thinking and hatred on lies and distortions.

Not long after his transformative experience, Tarrants wrote letters to his former KKK associates. He tried telling them how hypocritical it was to be a KKK member while also claiming to be Christian. They disagreed and tried to have him killed by other prisoners (Tarrants, 2019).

After denouncing Jehovah's Witnesses for various reasons, Mark O'Donnell learned that speaking out against other Witnesses seemed to be more of a sin than actually sinning (Quenqua, 2019). According to Jehovah's Witnesses rules, speaking out against Jehovah's Witnesses or sinning would often cause members to be shunned and disfellowshipped by the church and their families. Former Jehovah's Witnesses killing themselves creates the moral conflict that causes ex-Jehovah's Witnesses to denounce the religion (Quenqua, 2019).

In 2018 Amber Sawyer and other former Jehovah's Witnesses denounced shunning practices after learning about a murder-suicide of a family ostracized by Jehovah's Witnesses (Baldas, 2018). In the wake of the killings, many ex-Jehovah's Witnesses began to post on Facebook, online forums, blogs, and YouTube about how shunning pushes the most vulnerable people over the edge. Another source from the article was a woman who publicly denounced the Jehovah's Witnesses' shunning practice once she learned that the shooter in the murder-suicide of the 2018 case in Keego Harbor, Michigan, was an ex-Jehovah's Witness. Afraid of repercussions from family, this woman requested anonymity, but was addressed by her pen name: Spencer Tyler. Hearing the news that the victim was an ex-Jehovah's Witness made her cringe because she believed ostracism played a role in the killing. According to Baldas (2018), Tyler and Sawyer were not the only ones who left the religion because of the personal conflicts with the religion. Lauren Stuart, the shooter in the murder-suicide, and her husband Daniel left the Jehovah's Witnesses faith over doctrinal and social issues. They left because they wanted to send their children to college, but the church discourages college because it is considered spiritually dangerous (Baldas, 2018).

Relationships Impact Organizational Entries and Exits

Based on the literature reviewed for this study, relationships can influence a person's reason for joining and leaving an organization (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008; Rousselet et al., 2017). There can be relationships within and outside of the organization that contribute to a person denouncing. "In a study aimed to identify vulnerability factors that contribute to the commitment to and retention in the group, as well as protective factors that are involved in the departure, researchers found that some situations can influence members to leave because of the relationships with other members or their ties to the cult leader" (Rousselet et al., 2017, p. 27). Researchers discovered comparable data in a study intended to explore cult members' experiences on leaving (Danley, 2004). This study's data showed the opinion of one's family regarding his or her cult involvement also appears to be a reason members leave the cults they belong to. One's family's opinion may influence them to leave a cult. In that same study, members reported that they left their cult primarily due to unworthy leadership. Other people left their cult because they did not think their cult leader deserved their time and devotion (Danley, 2004). Cult leaders can be seen as imperfect or lead in a contradictory manner (Rousselet et al., 2017).

A member could leave because they conflict with the group's hierarchy (Rousselet et al., 2017). Cult members also could leave because they lose their place in the hierarchy (Rousselet et al., 2017). In a study on the factors that contribute to gang exit (Bubolz & Simi, 2015), researchers discovered on the surface or "front stage" gang networks may appear loyal and supportive of one another; however, members frequently turn their back on fellow gang members when they are needed most (p. 337). This violation manifested as a contributing factor to a gang member leaving the group (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). Gangs and churches experienced similar

turning points that influence a member's departure. Hypocrisy among church members and contradictions between their attitudes and the group's beliefs were factors noted as important, if not the major reported motives for doubt and apostasy (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008).

In the study performed to ascertain the factors involved in the retention and commitment of cultic groups, researchers found that family members belonging to the cultic group can promote cult commitment through social learning (Rousselet et al., 2017). If the family does not promote the cult, they can act as the reverse and promote leaving the group to get reacclimated to society (Rousselet et al., 2017). John Clary's case corroborates this finding because his father and uncle raised him in the KKK (Clary, 1995). At a low point in his life, feeling he had no true family, he sought the KKK for that. Then as the hatred and division within the KKK turned him away from the group, he realized how those he spewed hatred on did not return the same hate. Those relationships began to grow. An excerpt from an article (Bellamy, 2002) on Clary's experience detailed one of the relationships that influenced him, when he met Rev. Robert Watts at a radio station:

> Clary expected Watts to hate whites as much as Clary hated blacks. But when Watts walked into the broadcast booth, he smiled and told Clary he loved him. Clary, then the Klan's grand dragon, was stunned. He had set a fire that damaged Watts' church in McAlester, Okla.—a crime for which he was never prosecuted. It was that night that Clary first began to doubt his racist convictions. In another decade, he left the Klan as an imperial wizard and, a couple of years after that, he began his itinerant ministry against racism. (Bellamy, 2002, para. 2)

Clary mentioned when he heard the Klan and the skinheads say they wanted to kill all the Blacks, he used to think of Rev. Watts and think, "Do you really want to see this man hurt? . . . He was such a good man that I started doubting all these things I was supposed to teach" (Bellamy, 2002, para. 16).

Ken Parker had the same experience soon after participating in a riot in Charlottesville, Virginia, as a neo-Nazi member of the KKK (Franco & Radford, 2018). After the police determined the rally was unlawful, he and his group of neo-Nazis went to a parking garage to regroup. Parker met a filmmaker at the rally named Deeyah Khan. She was working on a documentary called *White Right: Meeting the Enemy*, a piece on hate groups. He recalled Khan's kindness in a moment of his weakness. He said he pretty much had heat exhaustion after the rally because they liked to wear black uniforms, and he drank a big Red Bull before the event. He was hurting, and Khan was trying to make sure he was okay. She was completely respectful to him and his fiancée the whole time. That experience made him question why he would hate people just because they had darker skin or believed in a different god than he did. Those questions kept weighing on Parker, and he eventually formed a relationship with a Black neighbor who was a pastor. After Parker got acquainted with his neighbor, he invited Parker to his church for Easter. Six years after joining the KKK, and seven months after the Charlottesville riot, Parker decided to denounce the Klan. He left the KKK as he testified at church (Franco & Radford, 2018).

A church to testify to about your conversion was not a luxury that Thomas Tarrants had as he came to turn away from the KKK through an inward, spiritual church he discovered through reading the Bible (Tarrants, 2019). He wrote about how he made friendships with the same people he once hated after his conversion. He noted that to love God and follow Jesus meant to reject hatred toward anyone. Instead, he was to love his neighbor and even his enemies. Shortly after that, God brought Black and Jewish people into his life in a more personal way, allowing him to do so. Once the authorities released him into general prison, he never looked at Black people the same. His hatred for Jewish people had also vanished even though it had been his strongest hatred he harbored in his heart. He learned that it had been based on anti-Semitic

lies and propaganda that he discovered were false even before coming to Christ. Of the various relationships, Tarrants highlighted one with a Black man. He wrote (Tarrants, 2019):

> An intelligent, cultured, and well-educated man, Doug was also a writer and an excellent classical pianist. He was passionate and outspoken in his racial and liberal political beliefs, but this did not hinder our friendship. For some reason, Doug genuinely liked me; I liked him too. Once again, a personal relationship shattered stereotypes I had once held so tightly. (p. 145)

While in jail, Tarrants made friends with men he probably never would have, had it not been for his conversion. His new acquaintances included an FBI agent, a liberal civil rights leader, a Jewish leader, a militant civil rights lawyer, a hippie drug user, and a radical leftist. This unexpected direction his life had taken caused him to build a platform on racial reconciliation, something completely opposite of the KKK (Tarrants, 2019).

While Tarrants came to denounce his former organization after building relationships outside of his former organization, some ex-Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the severing of relationships within Jehovah's Witnesses and families is what led them to denounce the religion. After losing his daughter to suicide, stemmed by conflict with the church, Dave Gracey began to rebel against the church (Baldas, 2018). The church shunned him after outing it for being responsible for his step-daughter's rape. After repeatedly being shunned, Gracey and his wife left the church. Gracey considered himself agnostic after those events and began to focus on helping the rest of his family to escape the Jehovah's Witnesses. Gracey commented:

> I want to expose this religion for what they really are. It is a cult that splits up families and separates people from life . . . They seem nice on Saturday morning when they are peddling their Watchtower, but they are insidious. (Baldas, 2018, "He lost his daughter" section)

Another ex-Jehovah's Witness, Spencer Tyler (pseudonym), revealed that the organization takes your family away from you (Baldas, 2018). Kerry Kaye experienced the loss of family as well. After being forced not to talk to her father because of shunning practices, she

left the religion. Then she made it her mission to help other people. She spoke against the organization because of anger stoked from seeing the church destroy entire families, an experience she knew firsthand (Baldas, 2018).

Reduction or Loss of Autonomy

Several ex-members of NRM, participants of the 2008 study by Buxant and Saroglou, reported high constraints and demands by the group as reasons for exit, which suggests subjective feeling of reduction of autonomy during membership. The reduction and loss of autonomy are apparent in at least five examples of denouncements explored for this study. Data from a study on leaving cults showed that once a person realizes they have a lack of autonomy and freedom, and the cult leader exhibits hypocritical behavior, they are more influenced to leave the cult (Danley, 2004). In cults that members decided to leave, the members had lost their personal freedom and could not make friends with their peers. In addition to losing autonomy, they also lost their identity and the opportunity to have a spouse and family if they wanted to stay in the cult (Danley, 2004).

A study of apostates from the Church of Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Institute noted that for the apostates, the facade of a rational and practical philosophy that promotes human freedom conceals a darker side. An apostate commented, "Personally I believe Scientology is a total and totalizing philosophy that involves all aspects of its members' past, present, and future lives, and strives to exert strict control over every sphere of existence and, consequently, over society in general" (Pannofino & Cardano, 2017, pp. 10–11). In an article published in *The Guardian* (L. Wright, 2011), Paul Haggis shared the story of his experience and knowledge of accusations against the church of Scientology. He detailed how he resigned from the church and confronted the leader about the accusations of

indefensible civil human rights violations. One of the stories, extracted from court documents, illustrated the reduction of autonomy amongst the members. The documents described practices that confined members to a discrete desert location where leaders forced employees to participate in physically violent activities. The church employed some of the members. Those employees lacked money, credit cards, savings, and prospects of employment. Two members explained they "literally had to escape" (L. Wright, 2011, para. 55).

"Making an escape" were the same words used to describe leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses (Baldas, 2018, "I've been sick over this" section). Kerry Kaye, a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, said those words. She left after she felt like she lost her independence. She claims the practice of shunning is a fear tactic to keep members within the cult and under its control. When the church told her father that he needed to choose his job or the church, he decided to keep his job and disassociated. Kaye was forced not to speak to her father for almost two years. According to Bromley (1998), when people narrate their exit, they use a metaphor of captivity and describe the gradual loss of freedom.

Enduring a manipulative leader's control is an experience shared by Daniel Shaw (2014) in a group he considered to be cultic, Siddha Yoga. In the Hindu tradition, an ashram is a retreat where people go to live, work, and pray with a guru idolized as a living saint. Shaw lived and worked with the organization known as SYDA, short for Siddha Yoga Dham (home) of America. Shaw stayed within this organization in New York and other locations and witnessed abuse, manipulation, and loss of autonomy, which eventually caused his departure. Shaw realized that he could not speak out against the ashram's negative aspects because he noticed a bait and switch operation occurred. Once they surrendered, the organization baited community members, then things switched to make them masochistically submit to the cruel and controlling leaders. SYDA

leaders told Shaw to never tell anyone about the abuse that was consistently happening. Then, he also realized they emphasized idolization over self-realization as promoted. The promotion of denying oneself for the guru's gain led Shaw to leave SYDA yoga (D. Shaw, 2014).

Member of the National Football League, Dave Meggyesy, discussed feeling confined similarly while he was an adult at a football camp (Meggyesy, 2005). Meggyesy authored a book that denounced the football system for several facets of both college and professional football. The reduction of autonomy was one of them. He noted the way that the coaches treated team members was absurd. His teammates, who were all adults, some with highly regarded jobs during the offseason, were all treated like kids while being bed checked at night. They found themselves reacting like kids. According to Meggyesy, in professional football, as in high school and college, the only way the coaches could establish their authority was to treat their players as boys. He described an awakening after a five-day workshop that led him to understand more accurately how his identity in football impacted his life. Meggyesy believed he played the role of a football player, and it was all a fraudulent act. It kept him from responding and communicating personally with other people (Meggyesy, 2005).

Gary Shaw also denounced football upon his exit as a college player (G. Shaw, 1972). Like Meggyesy, reduction of autonomy was one of the many facets of the football experience that influenced his decision to denounce and author a book. Shaw recorded the similarities between the control of the football system and other systems that people struggle with:

> Separating myself from others' rules, and learning to live by my own feelings takes time and effort . . . past a certain point this new sense of relying on my own feelings was disorienting and frightening. My response was to frantically grab for more rules. This, it seems to me, is the crux of the big-time football player's predicament. All of his values, his reactions, his ways of measuring himself as a man, were given to him. So here is his dilemma: if he clings to these criteria, he's headed for a narrow constricting life based on some masculine myth about winning; and if he cuts loose, rejects the values, the rules, the measures that he's built his whole life on up to that point, he's at a complete and painful

> loss. In a sense, the meaning has been taken from his life, and listlessness and anxiety are all but inevitable. It's a jeopardy that's not restricted to football players. The combat veteran who leaves the army, the person who leaves his religion, the long-term prisoner getting out of jail—anybody whose whole set of rigidly determined values and performances are taken away—they are all at the same kind of loss. (G. Shaw, 1972, p. 280)

Shaw realized after leaving that he had been indoctrinated to a system that required him to be dependent on others' control (G. Shaw, 1972). Interestingly, the epiphany of loss Shaw described is similar to the same loss that some fraternity and sorority members who denounce their organization may feel after leaving.

Social Disillusionment of the Organization and Its Leaders

Before leaving, another facet that influences members to denounce an organization is the experience of disillusionment caused by members' actions within the organization. Two of the studies previously reviewed in this essay found disillusionment to be a factor for leaving a cult or NRM (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008; Rousselet et al., 2017). Interestingly, the literature on deconversion or disaffiliation in general emphasizes the social disillusionment aspect of this experience. It provides evidence that hypocrisy among church members and contradictions between their attitudes and the group's beliefs are important, if not the major reported motives for doubt and apostasy (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008). Reasons for leaving were comparable to those found in previous studies: acknowledgment of contradictions between group doctrine and events, personal conflict with the doctrine, and disillusionment (Rousselet et al., 2017).

Danley (2004) also indicated discrepancies between the words and actions of both the cult leaders and the cult members in various instances emerged as a theme in their study on leaving cults. Another article on gang exit interprets personal and organizational disillusionment as unmet expectations, coupled with realizing that an expectation will likely never come to fruition (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). Based on another study (Stets & Tsushima, 2001),

disillusionment was interpreted from the perspective of identity theory, where unmet expectations produce a psychosocial emotional state of discontent. The disillusionment helps individuals reframe gang life as "exploitative" or generally disadvantageous to their success in meeting identity standards (Bubolz & Simi, 2015, p. 339). At this point, members come to see gang life as a "dead end" (Bubolz & Simi, 2015, p. 339). The experience of disillusionment, anger, and social stress results in a reduction in gang identity's relative importance. The shift in the relative order of a gang identity is crucial to gang exit (Bubolz & Simi, 2015).

A crucial component to the process of a former KKK member becoming disillusioned about the KKK was reading (Tarrants, 2019). One particular author, James Burnham, exposed the fallacies of anti-Semitic ideology ingrained in Tarrant's mind with no investigation or analysis. Burnham's book *Suicide of the West* (1964) helped Tarrants recognize that he had become an ideologue. Burnham defined:

> An ideologue—one who thinks ideologically—can't lose. He can't lose because his answer, his interpretation and his attitudes have been determined in advance of the particular experience or observation. His thoughts are derived from the ideology and are not subject to the facts. There is no possible argument, observation or experiment that could disprove a firm ideological belief for the very simple reason that an ideologue will not accept any argument, observation, or experiment as constituting disproof. (Burnham, 1964, p. 108)

After Tarrants read about the ideologue, he had an epiphany, realizing history had not validated any ideas that the KKK had about the Jewish conspiracy. Burnham disproved the racist arguments about the civil rights movement as well. Tarrants realized that all of the ideology the Klan promoted evolved around vicious lies that conjured hatred and anger. Uncovering these lies propelled him to further seek more truth. Once he completed the book by Burnham (1964), he began studying the Bible and learned that the KKK was not aligned with Christian principles. An interesting fact to note is although the members knew their actions were breaking the law, they

never considered that their acts were sins according to the Bible. Learning the Bible allowed Tarrants to understand how uninformed they were about God (Tarrants, 2019).

John Clary experienced disappointment, not in the ideals but in the members of the KKK, after a meeting of different units within the organization ended in chaos and fights (Clary, 1995). In his book, he noted that this event totally disgusted him. The KKK was so hateful toward others that hatred affected their organization internally, and various groups within the Klan could not get along when they met. After that, Clary decided to leave only six months after being named imperial wizard (Clary, 1995). Gary Shaw had a similar experience of revealed hypocrisy that he discussed with a teammate from his college football team before deciding to denounce the football system (G. Shaw, 1972). Shaw became furious when he remembered all the horrific personal experiences he and his teammates endured through football. The coaches stripped them of dignity and humanity, presented a false narrative that would have outsiders believe they were truly considered students, and psychologically abused them. Those factors contributed to Shaw and his friend deciding to end the mayhem (G. Shaw, 1972).

After reading how the Jehovah's Witnesses' doctrine prevented abused children in the church from getting help, Kimmy O'Donnell admitted the scales fell off her eyes, which is a religious phrase referring to an awakening (Quenqua, 2019). Her husband, Mark O'Donnell, had been revealing contradictory practices of the church to Kimmy for some time, but it was reading the doctrine which she had also been a victim of for herself that convinced her to leave the church. Mark began to study the church's literature, which made predictions about the world coming to an end. The signature publication of the church was called *The Watchtower*. It changed its predictions about the apocalypse numerous times. The Overlapping Generations theory, revealed in 2010, claimed the end of the world would come before the death of everyone

who lived simultaneously with people in 1914. Mark did not accept the revised predictions easily. While pondering alone, he started realizing he could no longer believe in Armageddon. Nonbelievers he met were just as worthy of God's mercy as Jehovah's Witnesses. After that, he began to discuss his thoughts with his wife, Kimmy, and they eventually left the church together (Quenqua, 2019).

As mentioned in a study on people who renounced religions, once a person becomes a Jehovah's Witness, after a while, the ability and will to perceive errors and contradictions are almost totally stifled by the constant study of the governing body's magazines and publications. The study consists of the passive and uncritical acceptance of everything the society says (Pannofino & Cardano, 2017). A subject of this study submitted in an interview:

> I've passed the last twelve years or so letting my mind and my life be controlled by absurd rules and principles laid down by an entity that I now like to call *Matrix*. At least at the beginning it was a nice bunch, helpful and very intelligent people who were always ready to put God ahead of everything: I was in Eden!!! But it didn't work ... as I moved forward in my 'spiritual progress,' I moved backward in my ability to reason. (Pannofino & Cardano, 2017, p. 8)

Once the organization's novelty subsides, members are exposed to accusations of the group pursuing worldly interests, amassing money, seeking political clout, and thirsting for power. As people expose this religion as nothing more than fraudulence posing as morality at the direction of a powerful leader, members realize the organization's true identity. Then the contradiction between the doctrine and the group's actions is understood to be hypocrisy and reviewed from a more critical and ethical lens than before. What finally influences the member to leave or renounce the organization is the attempt of a repressive leader to deceive and coerce members to pursue material gain rather than spiritual. Thus, although the leave-takers generally dispute the truthfulness of the belief system, the decision to disaffiliate is not only a matter of recognizing a doctrinal error but is made when the groundlessness of the spiritual message is seen alongside a

failure to uphold moral expectations or, in other words, a breach of the pact of trust that, at the beginning of the story, bound the convert to the group (Pannofino & Cardano, 2017).

Ex-members Seeking Better Conditions for Others

To seek justice for the abuses a person has endured and to prevent others from enduring the same things are also reasons people denounce organizations and systems. One could assume that because Mark O'Donnell has done an immense amount of work building a network of ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, whom he has connected attorneys and journalists with, he wants to help those who are still in the church who have been abused (Quenqua, 2019). Before society recognized him as a notable expert amongst ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, Mark reached out to someone else who encouraged him. After that, he was directed to a Facebook community, where he began to post his story and get feedback, which gave him a new sense of purpose (Quenqua, 2019). A pivotal moment for Daniel Shaw in the SYDA organization was hearing of the mistreatment of a young woman he knew and the following cover-up (D. Shaw, 2014). He explained how hearing of her story brought him into full consciousness with an open mind. The desire to want better for his friend demanded that he not turn away from the abuse she endured (G. Shaw, 1972).

After deciding they no longer wanted to allow the football team members to be mistreated, Gary Shaw and his friend commented, "We're going to expose this shit and clean it up" (G. Shaw, 1972, p. 252). Exposing and impacting the entire system was Shaw and his colleague's goal as they set out to get professors, doctors, and even players from other schools to cosign their lament. While trying to improve things, they sought to get others involved; however, they were met with resistance due to the fear of consequences people would face from speaking against the football system. Another factor of resistance was, although others agreed there were

abuses and depersonalization, they still clung to the basic tenets of the system (G. Shaw, 1972). The purpose of Meggyesy's book *Out of Their League* was similar in that it was to stimulate change in the NCAA-directed college football programs and the NFL (Meggyesy, 2005). He wanted to help eliminate what he saw to be major inequities, mistreatment, and exploitation of football players—young athletes like himself who loved the game of football (Meggyesy, 2005).

Abuse and Violence

This literature review uncovered that some of the most blatant reasons for a person denouncing their organization is abuse and violence. According to Almendros et al. (2009), the imposition of certain norms and restrictive ways of behaving that might even become abusive was why members might have left their cult. The variations of abuse include physical, psychological, sexual, and human rights abuse. These types of abuse showed up in the football system, Jehovah's Witness church, cults, SYDA, and the Church of Scientology. This section will review the various forms of abuse that influence a member's decision to leave or denounce an organization.

Gary Shaw detailed a football drill from college designed to be so physically and psychologically abusive that players would quit and give away their scholarships because coaches could not take them away (G. Shaw, 1972). The drills were called "Shit Drills" (G. Shaw, 1972, p. 153). Coaches passed these drills off as teaching fundamentals. However, players knew the difference was part physical, part psychological. When players would get injured, they were not allowed to go to the doctor unless the team medic decided the injuries were serious enough. The coaches would verbally harass, demean, and humiliate the players during these drills. They were also isolated from the rest of the team. The badly injured players who could no

longer work out were forced to wear a certain type of jersey, which further isolated and embarrassed them (G. Shaw, 1972).

In the Church of Scientology, there were accusations of physical abuse by the leader upon the church staff and forced violence amongst members at a location where they were being confined (L. Wright, 2011). The leader of the church would abuse the staff, and the staff engaged in violence as well. It became a part of the culture. There were accusations of much of the violence occurring at a desert location called the Gold Base. Members of the church were forced to play musical chairs for an opportunity. The members began to fight during the game because they were so desperate, powerless, and dependent on the church leaders for their livelihoods (L. Wright, 2011).

The physical and psychological abuse portrayed in both church and football ripples into human rights abuse, mistreating people as if they are less than human. There are three quotes from *Meat on the Hoof* (G. Shaw, 1972, p. 150) juxtaposed to exhibit the abusive system:

> Let us treat men and women as if they were real—perhaps they are.
>
> —Emerson

> In Spring training my sophomore year, I broke my neck—four vertebrae. 'Hey Coach,' I said, 'my neck don't feel good.' 'There's nothing wrong with your neck, you jackass,' he said. So, the numb went away a little, and I made a tackle. When I went to get up, my body got up but my head just stayed there, right on the ground. The coach says, 'Hey, get this jackass off the field.' So the trainer put some ice on my neck and after practice they took me up to the infirmary for an X-ray. The doctor said, 'Son, your neck is broken. You got here ten minutes later, you'd be dead.' Dead! Man, that scared me. I mean those colleges let you lie right out there on the field and die. That's something to think about.
>
> —Charley Taylor of the Washington Redskins
> recounting his college days at Arizona State

> The health and safety of our players are always utmost in our mind.
>
> —Coach Darrell Royal

As in the football system, abuse was a common theme throughout the literature reviewed on former Jehovah's Witnesses for this study. Those forms of abuse manifested as physical and sexual. Mark O'Donnell, a former Jehovah's Witness, built his notoriety as an activist and blogger who reports on child abuse cases surrounding Watchtower, the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses (Quenqua, 2019). He did this for years under a pseudonym because he was still a church member when he started. His wife, Kimmy O'Donnell's mother abused her as a child. She remembered the elders of the church being more protective of the organization than her. When she was a 12-year-old, she wanted to get help, but church leaders told her that she could not tell the police she was abused because it would look bad for the church. They also warned her against counseling because counselors might get authorities involved and blame the Jehovah's Witnesses (Quenqua, 2019).

Getting the authorities involved was also a benefit that Debbie McDaniel says elders denied her (Lin, 2019). In 2013, after McDaniel left her Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in McAlester, Oklahoma, she went to the police and told them members had been stalking her every move. A comment she made regarding the church allowing molestation for years sparked an investigation into a sexual abuse case for her and two other people with similar allegations. She asked the church elders why the police never followed up on her allegations over the years. It was not until after McDaniel left the church that she realized the church elders never reported to the police. James Alexander, a former Jehovah's Witness elder who resigned and asked to use a pseudonym, corroborated this story by sharing his experience as an elder. He said he saw Jehovah's Witnesses interact with children even after child sex abuse allegations had been made against them. In one case, he called Watchtower about a man and fellow Jehovah's Witness who was accused of sexually abusing his children and was instructed to keep quiet. Months later, after

the children's mother had already spoken to the police, Alexander called Watchtower back. He said they told him to destroy any notes he took regarding his initial call. At the time, he did as he was told because he was fully indoctrinated; however, a few months later, he began to "wake up" (Lin, 2019).

There was also abuse within the ashrams of SYDA Yoga (D. Shaw, 2014). D. Shaw recounted stories of sexual abuse that he suppressed in his mind because he knew communicating about it with other members would be heretical. He heard many horrific rumors of one of the predecessor gurus that, contrary to his claims of celibacy and renunciation, up until he died in his 70s, he was relentless in sexually preying on female followers, many of whom were girls not of legal age. When some followers exposed him publicly, he lied and attempted to cover up the scandal with threats of violence to the whistleblowers. The guru D. Shaw served under denied and covered up this aspect of her predecessor's behavior. D. Shaw eventually recognized the guru's behavior toward her followers embodied the hallmarks of abuse: the use of power to intimidate, seduce, coerce, belittle, and humiliate others—not to strengthen, uplift, and enlighten, as advertised, but for the baser purposes of psychological enslavement and parasitic exploitation (D. Shaw, 2014).

The Dissent of Black Greek Letter Organizations

There is a paucity of literature regarding the anti-BGLO movement. Only three self-published books address the topic directly, and three other books have mentioned aspects of the campaign. Two of the most cited sources in this section were self-published books by former members of BGLOs (Gray, 2004; Hatchett, 2002). Those two books' primary focus is to discourage people from joining and encourage members to denounce the organizations. From the literature I reviewed on dissenting against Greek-letter organizations (GLOs), the main reasons

were the origin of GLOs, idolatry, false prophets, hazing, secrecy, and rituals. I will explain the information present on each reason.

BGLO Origins

Some anti-BGLO activists argue that the origin of Greek-letter organizations (GLOs) is inconsistent with Christianity because of the inheritance of structure from the Freemasons. Due to the lineage of GLOs descending from Masonry, Hatchett (2002), a former member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, proclaims that GLOs are satanic because Masonry is derived from silly myths, idolatry, and occultism. He notes there would be no use for his literature if research pointed to GLOs being founded solely and directly on biblical principles. Therefore, if they deviated from their original purpose, they could repent and realign with their original purpose. But since the research does not affirm the origin to be solely biblical and is recognized to be transfused with Greek mythology, Hatchett claims it is demonic and doomed from the start. He asserts Christ's salvation for modern people does not cover those within GLOs because, unlike man, who originated from God and goodness, GLOs originated from Satan and sinfulness. Thus, there is no redemption or salvation for organizations that develop from evil because there is no hope for transformation into their claim. Hatchett (2002) claimed:

> A believer, nation, church, or Christian organization gone bad can be made right again because Jesus is the root. A sinner can be made right because God is their origin and redeemer, but an organization not founded in Christ alone has no chance for a covenant blessing. (p. 52)

Gray (2004), an ex-member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, investigated the ties BGLOs have to Freemasonry and connects those teachings from White fraternities to Black fraternities and sororities. "The modern Masonic fraternity began as one whose founders sought some secret or philosophical way to become masters of their own soul. This same ideology was the sum total of the ancient Egyptian religious system" (Gray, 2004, p. 31). Organizations that have patterned

themselves after Freemasonry cannot reject the wealth of knowledge that is readily available simply because it does not align with the modern-day mission's philosophical view. Gray concluded that if Freemasons had no reverence for God, there could not be reverence for Christ in today's Masonic organization. An expert in the Masonic doctrine also demonstrated the lack of reverence for Christ by admitting that Jesus was like Buddha, Allah, Mohammed, and Socrates, nothing more than a great teacher of morality. The two authors mentioned in this section provided comparative perspectives that BGLOs having a direct link to Freemasonry in their founding contradicts the argument that they are not anti-Christian because they were founded on Christian principles (Gray, 2004).

Idolatry Within BGLOs

Hatchett (2002) claims that GLOs idolize themselves and gods through their symbolism and doctrines, which hold their symbols in high regard. GLOs specifically participate in idolatry through songs, chants, poems, symbolism, and rituals. Hatchett provided examples of mottos, ritual readings, and historical quotes that allude to members being mentored or led by Greek gods/goddesses, as well as members being in the dark and then coming into light through initiation processes. Then he individually condemned each example by comparing it to biblical scriptures. Each one of the BGLOs aligns itself with a god or goddess, which is considered an abomination and against God's commandment not to put any other gods before him (Gray, 2004). Contrary to Hatchett (2002) and Gray (2004), author Shahid Allah cautioned against denouncing and eliminating BGLOs altogether. Instead, Allah (1992) suggested removing the idols that do not represent Christianity or the Black community. Allah suggested using the Black goddess Neith for the sorority Delta Sigma Theta, which includes Minerva, the Greek goddess of

wisdom, in its shield. The author also mentioned the bird included in Zeta Phi Beta's shield, yet another symbol other than the cross of Christianity (Allah, 1992).

Hatchett presented excerpts of idolatry through literature from Phi Beta Sigma, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Alpha Delta Pi, and more (Hatchett, 2002). He dissected each example to prove the language the organizations use mimics worship. He used a litany of scriptures to support his theories against the idolatry he exposed: Psalm 46:1, Luke 10: 27–28, 1 John 5:21, and 1 Timothy 4:7 (*New King James Bible*, 1999). While Hatchett (2002) gave examples of language from rituals that mimic idolatrous worship, members of BGLOs may liken this to school songs and the Pledge of Allegiance. Gray commented, "one nation under God" supersedes the Pledge of Allegiance and shows that we are a nation subject to God and his supreme authority. That's one distinct difference that exists between our country's national pledge and a fraternal pledge" (Gray, 2004, p. 48).

Greek Preachers and False Prophets

Many notable Christians are members and serve in religious roles (like chaplains) within the organizations, but Hatchett (2002) denounced members that are considered to be a minister, pastor, deacon, or prophet. According to Hatchett, the religious leaders within the organizations are leading their followers down an unrighteous path. Gray (2004) alluded that a pastor or clergyman's membership in a Greek organization or a Masonic lodge could impair the church they lead and the ministry. This sentiment is supported by the second foundational work on denouncing BGLOs because Hatchett (2002) condemned Greek life members who are Christian leaders and church members on all levels. He deemed them false prophets as he said they "deny and disown Jesus by teaching and doing things contrary to God's word" (Hatchett, 2002, p. 307). Hatchett claimed that BGLOs use various forms of religions, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and

Buddhism, and cannot be Christ-centered. The author encouraged members of churches that have leaders in GLOs to confront them about their membership; he also provided steps and resources for discussion points for the confrontation (Hatchett, 2002).

Hazing

In 1990, the NPHC, comprised of all nine BGLOs, banned pledging. After the NPHC abolished pledging, the new membership intake process began, which forced hazing underground (Hatchett, 2002). Banning pledging made hazing worse than it was when it was mainly physical because the wrongdoing was transferred from affecting the body to affecting the mind and spirit. Gray (2004) contended the hazing ban is a bandage and is not large enough to cover the wound that has spread throughout the entire collegiate fraternal system. She resolved the only thing that could end the illegal activity of pledging and hazing is biblical wisdom and truth. According to Hatchett (2002), associating with organizations that haze is unholy, and Christians should not partake in anything sinful. Hazing is witchcraft (Hatchett, 2002).

Secrecy

GLOs are sometimes called cults or secret societies and even compared to the KKK (Gray, 2004). Although the groups may be known as secret societies, the events of the groups conducted in secrecy often are the worst public aspect of them; these aspects include hazing injuries, deaths, drinking binges, emergency room visits, and lawsuits (Gray, 2004). Secrecy is a significant characteristic that allows GLOs to hide and conceal that which is not aligned with the Christian principles the organizations claim to espouse (Hatchett, 2002). Hiding rituals, commitments, oaths, and mottos from potential members endangers their emotional, physical, and spiritual lives. Encouraging them to research the organization while keeping vital components of the organization away from them until they commit is deceptive. In Freemasonry,

as well as in some BGLOs, secret grips, mottos, signs, and obligations are known only to members worldwide. Although outsiders have not exposed a blood code with savage penalties in connection with GLOs, secret societies are "susceptible of being perverted to unholy and dangerous purposes" (Carrico & Carrico, 2001, p. 23). GLOs intentionally create secrecy for fear of being shamed for blatant misconduct and brainwashing (Hatchett, 2002). "GLO's do not want anyone to see or hear their secret practices, because they know it's ungodly, and are afraid of it being revealed and rebuked by the True Church" (Hatchett, 2002, p. 31).

Rituals

In *Wrongs of Passage*, author Hank Nuwer (1999) offered insight on cults possessing special secrets published in a book that some may regard as a notable revelation. He contrasted GLOs by suggesting that while they may also have secret rituals and documents created by the founders, they do not equate these documents and rituals to a divine revelation (Nuwer, 1999). Gray (2004) connected the rituals of BGLOs to African traditions. Young women and men would leave their villages in different groups to come back and be presented as a contributing citizen. The initiation process contained events and activities that would have them return with scars proving their worthiness as a society member. This process mirrors the hazing and initiations of BGLOs today, and Gray (2004) argued that it must stem from a "belief system that's devoid any real Christian perspective" (p. 79). While Nuwer (1999) stated rituals would be harmless if they remained symbolic and were limited to formal readings and initiation rites, Gray (2004) and Hatchett (2002) rebutted participating in any symbolism that is connected to anything other than Christ is a sin against God. Hatchett (2002) exhibited photocopies of rituals from fraternities and sororities to expose the rituals' and biblical principles' contradictory nature. He compared them to a cult as well. After reviewing how each BGLO except Iota Phi Theta

references an Egyptian or Greek god or goddess in its rituals, Gray (2004) noted the struggle for African Americans to gain civil rights in America is just as crucial as the severance of ties to African religious obscurity and joining with Christ. In conclusion, Gray and Hatchett maintained BGLOs contradict the notion they were founded on Christian principles by including Egyptian and Greek gods and goddesses in their rituals and practices (Hatchett, 2002).

Conclusion

This literature review aimed to evaluate sources related to religion in BGLOs, specifically in response to the anti-BGLO movement. As expected of a nascent area of research, there were not many empirical findings. Many sources regarding why people denounce organizations that I analyzed were firsthand accounts from people who denounced various organizations. It is imperative to note very few researchers have synthesized and quantified why someone would denounce something of which they were once a part. One book (Hughey & Parks, 2011) includes a chapter with a study from a survey and interviews, demonstrating Christians' demographics and experience in BGLOs. Other than that, there is no empirical work to support the claim that BGLOs are anti-Christian.

Another gap in the literature is the lack of a publicized response of the national organizations individually or collectively. While there are Christian traditions, leadership positions, and theologians within BGLOs, there has not been an official address invalidating the claims that Christians cannot and should not be members of these organizations. This review studied three self-published books that dissent against BGLOs. There are also blogs, websites, school newspaper articles, and social media posts that have not been explored.

Chapter III will overview the two methodologies I considered performing, and why thematic analysis was the most fitting. The chapter also presents thematic analysis' strengths, weaknesses, data source and phases—concluding with the ways I created a reliable study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

As discussed in Chapter II, the literature identified why people should denounce or not join BGLOs, but it has not addressed why members currently denounce BGLOs, and no empirical data exist to prove the literature and the phenomenon are congruent. A plethora of data are available to address the proposed research question of why people denounce their BGLO. This chapter will show how the research design derives logically from the question based on the literature, the topic's novelty in the research field, and the raw data available to investigate. This chapter begins with my positionality, which provides transparency on my biases. Then it explains the rationale for thematic analysis and the methodology's strengths and weaknesses. The methodology overview is followed by an overview of the study's design, which includes the data source selection, sample, and collection. Finally, Chapter III concludes with an outline of the phases of thematic analysis and how I created reliability.

Positionality

I was inspired to explore this topic when I was preparing for a speech to prospective BGLO members. The client for whom I was speaking requested that I address why BGLO members are denouncing their organizations at what seems to be higher rates than ever before. I previously did not pay much attention to ex-BGLO members' claims; however, when I began to do more research, I realized that ex-BGLO members were alleging that BGLOs are not aligned with their espoused Christian principles. This misalignment piqued my interest as a Christian, a current member of a BGLO, and a scholar-practitioner in the field of leadership and organizational change. This misalignment conflict reminds me of Soenon and Moingeon's (2002) multifaceted corporate identity model. The model highlights the difference between a

professed identity, what an organization professes about itself, and an *experienced identity*, what organizational members experienced (Soenon & Moingeon, 2002).

Although my identity as a member of both the Delta Sigma Theta and Christian communities may introduce bias into this study, I want to understand denunciation to serve the organization better as a scholar-practitioner. Senge (1990) describes a *learning organization* as one that continually expands its capacity to create its future (p. 14). He also notes that "for a learning organization, 'adaptive learning' must be joined by 'generative learning,' learning that enhances our capacity to create" (Senge, 1990, p. 14). While researchers have yet to produce a rigorous empirical study on how denunciation affects the health of BGLOs, the anti-BGLO movement could eventually impact these organizations' recruitment and retention. This assumption guides my interest in assisting as a researcher. To my knowledge, the organizations are not currently acting as learning organizations by using this research to adapt (Senge, 1990, p. 14). Conducting this study may enable me to serve as a change agent.

Rationale for Methodology

According to Edmondson and McManus (2007), methodological fit refers to several elements' coalescence, including the prior research on the topic, research question, research design, and further implications. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is little empirical research on denouncing BGLOs, secret societies, or fraternities and sororities in general. A book on BGLOs included surveys and open-ended interviews about religion in BGLOs (Hughey & Parks, 2011). Besides this study, I reviewed three self-published books that dissent against BGLOs and provide many firsthand accounts and research on why people should denounce these organizations. Therefore, this research area is considered "nascent" (Edmondson & McManus, 2007, p. 1158). As previously stated, when seeking methodological fit, prior work in the field is

something a researcher should consider (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). In a developing area of research, a qualitative methodology is likely to be a good fit; choosing qualitative methods for a novel question allows the researcher to gain insights into a phenomenon through exploratory study. Using a purely quantitative process would be premature in the current study because there are no predetermined scales, tests, or questionnaires that have been tested for validity in this area of research (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to consider a qualitative method for my study.

As I prepared to share information on people denouncing BGLOs, I discovered a plethora of content available for study. A simple Google search of the terms "denouncing BGLO" returned over 200 results in the videos section; a broader search using all content forms yielded over 2,600 results. Some of the video results consist of ex-BGLO members sharing their stories about why they denounced their organization. This untapped content led me to explore using content analysis or thematic analysis to answer my research question. These two approaches are similar but are distinct in significant ways.

Thematic analysis focuses on identifying themes that emerge from the data without imposing preconceived structure or theory upon those data:

> Thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations. To others, if they agree with the insight, the insight appears almost magical. If they are empowered by the insight, it appears visionary. If they disagree with the insight, it appears delusionary. Observation precedes understanding. Recognizing an important moment (seeing) precedes encoding it (seeing it as something), which in turn precedes interpretation. Thematic analysis moves you through these three phases of inquiry. (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1)

Thematic analysis is a method that utilizes a variety of epistemological approaches that enable the researcher to systematically and accurately interpret observations of organizations, people, situations, and events (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017; Riger &

Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). In thematic analysis, the data and the output of the analysis of those data are qualitative.

In contrast, content analysis allows scholars to translate qualitative information into *quantitative* information (Boyatzis, 1998). This translation relates to the main difference between thematic analysis and content analysis. The quantification of themes by measuring the frequency of different categories is possible in content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Neuendorf (2017) describes content analysis as follows:

> Content analysis may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics. It includes both human-coded analyses and computer-aided text analysis (CATA). Its applications can include the careful examination of face-to-face human interactions; the analysis of character portrayals in media venues ranging from novels to online videos. (p. 2)

Content analysis originated from studying news articles and communications archives (Schreier, 2013). As used in the early stages of the methodology, many researchers using content analysis use the method as a quantitative way to evaluate texts through frequency counts (Payne & Payne, 2011). The academic community accuses researchers using content analysis of dismissing the data's meaning when using word or topic counts (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The frequency of a word, phrase, or topic may imply greater importance but does not equal a greater significance because various reasons can contribute to a frequency other than importance (King, 2004; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Analyzing the frequency of themes can be considered *manifest content analysis* (Payne & Payne, 2011, p. 4). Manifest analyses look at the implicit meaning behind a text (Payne & Payne, 2011), while latent analysis examines the actual words or phrases used without interpreting them. Thematic analysts include both latent and manifest analysis simultaneously, but content analysts are advised to choose which to consider before analyzing the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Because this study is new to the field of

research on BGLOs, I took an exploratory path. It will be beneficial to include both latent and manifest analyses instead of choosing one as I explore. The flexibility of thematic analysis allows that approach since I was unsure of what the findings would be. Therefore, content analysis was not a good fit for my study. To answer my research question, I conducted qualitative interpretive research using thematic analysis with a constructivist approach.

Constructivism is usually associated with qualitative research (J. W. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This worldview is formed by understanding the meaning of phenomena, the participants, and their subjective views. Participants providing their understanding gives meaning of social interactions that are shaped by their own personal histories. In constructivism researchers start with participants' views and build "up" to patterns, theories, and generalizations (J. W. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 40). By studying the background of BGLO origins, and why people denounce them, I get to make meaning of participants' subjective experiences that are often negotiated socially and historically (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018). They are also shaped by cultural norms that operate in their lives (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018).

Strengths of Thematic Analysis

The two main strengths of thematic analysis are flexibility and accessibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The worldview or theoretical framework used in thematic analysis can differ depending on the study's research question. This range of frameworks demonstrates the flexibility of thematic analysis. This methodology is recommended for researchers early in their career because its flexibility and accessibility make it a process that is not bound by stringent procedures, yet it still provides an approach that is rigorous and systematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004; Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Thematic analysis is accessible because it does not require technological and theoretical methods to produce an intuitive qualitative study

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although the methodology is criticized as too easy to grasp, if researchers follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, they can still create a reliable and valid study.

For the scholar, thematic analysis allows the collection or use of qualitative information to facilitate communication with a broad audience of other scholars or researchers, including those who may use different methods (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). Communicating the in-depth facets of the research like values, beliefs, and motives that explain certain behaviors is a qualitative strength that, in this study, is more valuable than the quantitative nature of the frequency and intensity aspects found in other methodologies (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Researchers also value thematic analysis because it gives people who are generally marginalized in particular research areas the opportunity to have a full voice, in their exact words, unfiltered by quantitative boundaries (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). Often, Greek members dismiss ex-members or outsiders who denounce fraternities and sororities, as I did. This research will give those people a platform to be included in the story of organization development for BGLOs.

Weaknesses of Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) concepts on the pitfalls of thematic analysis are what guided my research design as I attempted to skirt the issues I discuss in this section. The first potential weakness of thematic analysis is that researchers may neglect to analyze the data and instead simply re-present the data extracts with little to no narrative interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers should support data examples with analytic commentary that explains rather than paraphrases. The second weakness is similar in that it shows a lack of analysis. It occurs when researchers report the interview questions as the themes that emerged from the data. Since I did not interview the speakers, this potential weakness was not a concern. The third is a

misinterpretation of the data. The researcher should address all contradictions in the data that may not align with her claims. Boyatzis (1998) claimed that sometimes researchers can project their theories or ideologies when they conceptualize the raw data. Ensuring the main argument is consistent with data promotes the research's credibility.

According to Boyatzis (1998), a significant obstacle to effective thematic analysis is the researcher's mood. If a researcher becomes fatigued or suffers from sensory overload, they can experience frustration and confusion with the raw information or concepts. Fatigue can decrease her ability to conduct thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The researcher's mood could be what causes her to create an unconvincing analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While analyzing my data, combatting fatigue was a challenge that I addressed by taking breaks from analysis. Hence, the fourth weakness is a lack of consistency between the themes and the analysis. Researchers fail to produce a holistic analysis, including a detailed description of more than one aspect of the data. The themes should work together and should not overlap to appear coherent. Lastly, a weak thematic analysis exists when the research question, theoretical framework, and or form of study are not aligned. A good thematic analysis needs to make sure the information's interpretation is consistent with the theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 95).

Overview of Study Design

Because there is little prior research on why people denounce BGLOs, I took an inductive approach to analyze the data. Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit them into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven. Using a data-driven approach versus a theory-driven approach increased reliability once I began the coding phase (Boyatzis, 1998). Due to the nascent nature of this topic and the flexibility of

thematic analysis, I used both manifest and latent analysis to gain a robust understanding of the phenomenon of denouncing. I used semantic content to examine the underlying ideas, conceptualizations, and ideologies that informed the data. I used a coding team to support and strengthen my findings. The coding team was composed of two doctoral level researchers who are members of BGLOs, the Christian community, and have coding experience. Using a team of researchers was vital because they confirmed and balanced my coding. Review by multiple researchers helped validate that the dataset's groupings are consistent with the raw data.

Data Source Selection

The population I chose to work with included online videos posted by people who denounced their NPHC fraternity or sorority. There are currently nine international BGLOs; four sororities and five fraternities. I used a purposeful sample (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling refers to selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated (Patton, 2015, p. 264). The top results of my online query were videos from YouTube. Because my research population was small, all of the videos I used came from that platform.

I deliberately chose to use existing data from YouTube instead of data solicited through surveys or interviews for various reasons. Those reasons include time constraints, accessibility, and protection against response bias. Response bias occurs when participants respond in a way that they think is socially acceptable or to fulfill what they believe the purpose of the research is (Hanasono, 2017). People who denounce their organizations often do so publicly with intentions to encourage others to follow. If I interacted with them directly, the motive to influence me to denounce my membership personally could potentially overtake the research.

Data Collection

Patton (2015) described homogeneous sampling as selecting very similar cases to study characteristics they have in common (p. 268). With this description in mind, the videos' criteria consisted of videos lasting no longer than 1 hour and 30 minutes of one woman or man describing why they denounced their BGLO. Some videos included panel discussions with multiple ex-members; however, excluding those and selecting videos with one person as the speaker created consistency. Homogeneous sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2015). *Purposeful sampling* is choosing information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Purposeful sampling contrasts with quantitative sampling strategies because the sample size aims to be large enough to generalize to the larger population. Small samples that are genuinely in-depth have provided many of the most important breakthroughs in our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015, p. 312).

I identified videos for my research by searching the terms "denouncing BGLO," which was instrumental in my informal study to prepare for a speech. I also searched "denouncing [insert BGLO]." YouTube has a recommendation feature that suggested related videos, which served as a helpful tool. As I searched, I compiled a list of the videos, noting the uploader username, video title, number of views, date, length of the video, and link. I initially collected 40 videos and organized them into five rounds. I organized them into rounds based on various priorities. I wanted to prioritize representation, first; meaning I wanted the first few rounds to have as much equal representation as possible of each organization in the sample. Also, I placed videos in round 1 if they were longer, and were not a part of a series. I chose videos that were lengthier for the first round to obtain more detailed information. I chose videos that were not

parts of a series because I wanted to capture complete thoughts and sentiments. After I compiled the list, I watched the videos to ensure each met the selection criteria.

The selection criteria included the following:

- There is only one speaker.
- The speaker must state the name of the BGLO that they denounced or it must be in the title or description of the video.
- They must provide reasons for denouncing the BGLO.
- The video is no longer than 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Although I did not interact with the video uploaders directly as participants of the study, I still considered ethical principles regarding protecting them. Ethical principles in research mostly stem from beneficence, respect for people, respect for the law or public interest, and justice (Legewie & Nassauer, 2018). In research, it is common to get informed consent from participants. Informed consent is when investigators inform participants of potential risks associated with being a part of a study and the participants have the opportunity to consent to take on the risks or not. Gaining consent is not always feasible, particularly in ethnographic studies that involve observing human behavior in public or semipublic places.

Accessible online video content on YouTube can be considered public because account holders have the option to make videos public, which means non-restricted, or private, which means only certain people can view the video. Uploaders also have the opportunity to see how many people have viewed the video. “On platforms such as YouTube, maximum visibility can be expected to be either the users’ explicit goal or an accepted fact” (Legewie & Nassauer, 2018, p. 10). According to Legewie and Nassauer (2018), if the purpose of the video is maximum

visibility, lack of informed consent is less problematic than videos published to restricted or private audiences.

There are two types of potential risks of including a video in this study. They both revolve around adding exposure to the video by studying it. Adding exposure to the video could cause more isolation or ridicule from the BGLO community. This risk is low because, although the research may drive more attention to the video, the academic audience of the study is likely smaller than the initial intended audience. After watching potential videos for my dataset, I gathered the intent of posting was to reach a broad audience while sharing testimonies on leaving BGLOs. If the video already had hundreds of thousands of views, the risk of additional exposure to the research community lessens.

While it is not a criterion, I considered the number of views a video had when collecting the data. I assumed the intent of posting the testimonial style video was to gain maximum exposure, and inform others of BGLOs and denouncing. Therefore, conducting this research without informed consent posed a very minimal risk, and I did not contact the person directly. Due to time constraints, I did not investigate the authenticity of the ex-members affiliation with BGLOs. Pattesron (2018) noted the tension of honoring the YouTube uploaders within her dissertation dataset, while forgoing contact with them. Her experience inspired my process in that I decided to call the YouTube uploaders speakers instead of participants since they did not consent to participating in my study. As an additional layer of protection, as required by my institution’s review board, I anonymized the data so that I am the only one who knows the identity and organizations of the speakers.

Overview of Study Phases

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis guided my research. Although the outline of this process is linear, researchers often implement it through an iterative procedure that progresses over time and oscillates between phases (Nowell et al., 2017). This section will discuss the phases I executed based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), using more than one researcher to review the groupings, otherwise known as coders, helps validate that the codes align with the raw data. Therefore, I consulted with my methodologist on a complete list of candidates' traits and criteria for consideration as coders. Then I utilized my network, including the Antioch community of faculty, students, alumni, and other scholar-practitioners. Five of my cohort members responded to my request for coders. I ultimately chose the two who were members of BGLOs and had experience coding. After confirming coders, my methodologist and I met with them to discuss how to code for this study, which was primarily driven by an emergent analysis. The coding scheme must be so structured and so reliable that, once they were trained, coders from varied backgrounds and with different orientations will generally agree on its application (Neuendorf, 2017). During this process, I used Dedoose, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to streamline the coding process, and organize the data digitally instead of manually. I considered each video one unit of analysis.

Phase 1: Familiarize Yourself with the Data

After determining the sample to analyze, the first step was reading, re-reading, and taking notes on the data. Becoming familiar with the data before coding is ideal (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since I used videos, I watched each video at least three to four times. I watched them once before transcription and once afterwards to check the transcripts for accuracy. I also

watched the vides to notate ideas and essential concepts. I used a transcriber and a transcription service instead of personally transcribing the data, due to time constraints. After I received the transcripts, I will thoroughly review them to check against the videos for accuracy. I also anonymized the transcripts to protect the identity of the speakers and organizations. This included redacting their names, schools, organizations, and identifying factors like colors, symbols, rituals, and monikers. The process of watching the videos, annotating, and reading the transcripts informed the early stages of my analysis. Once I have verified the transcripts, I shared them with the two other coders to review and begin taking notes.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Phase 2 started once we were familiar with the data and had a general idea of pertinent information and what it could mean. Initially, codes are attached to units of data that could vary in size (i.e., phrase, sentence, or paragraph), but usually, codes encompass a complete thought (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 809). According to Boyatzis (1998), the unit of coding also refers to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that a researcher can assess in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (p. 63).

The knowledge I gained through the literature review process could have potentially influenced me to take a theory-driven approach. A theoretical approach would require me to base my codes on theories that I have built off the literature or theories from prior research (Boyatzis, 1998). In contrast, inductive analysis does not force data into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Because denunciation of BGLO's is still a developing field of study, I wanted to remain as open as possible to new learnings. Therefore, my coding process was inductive.

A distinction of thematic analysis is using both latent and manifest content while coding. During this phase, the coding team and I focused on collecting both while ensuring not to interpret manifest data too soon. Refraining from interpretation early in the process kept the raw data close to their original intent and increased the potential for higher interrater reliability (Boyatzis, 1998). My coding team and I coded transcripts individually and met weekly to discuss our codes. Because we were working on a large amount of text, I used coding software called Dedoose to organize and sort the data after each meeting with the team (King, 2004). During these meetings we would compare and contrast our findings, synthesizing our ideas of the excerpts.

We coded the transcripts in rounds. After the first round, I organized the codes into groups like descriptors, which would later become my demographics, experience, latent and manifest content. I began to merge codes that were similar by re-reading the excerpts to get to the root of their meaning. Dedoose provided an easy way to analyze the data by allowing me to toggle between different aspects of coding and potential themes. The team worked with me on round two and I coded round three alone. Throughout both rounds, I continued to merge and define the most prevalent codes.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

This phase began once the coding team had coded all of the data. At that point, I organized the codes based on similarities to start forming themes. I looked for patterns and compared codes to compose themes. I created a thematic map to provide a visual representation of the initial candidate themes. At this point, there were some codes that were not coded or grouped in more than one theme. Although there were codes with no clear place in a candidate

theme, I did not discard them because they may become helpful in the final phases of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) explained there are multiple steps and levels of this phase. The first is identifying what themes have supportive data within them, what themes I should dismiss, and what themes overlap so much I should combine them. There should be a clear distinction between the themes, and the data of each theme should be coherent. Next, there are two levels of review and refinement in this phase. The first level I performed was reviewing the data extracts within each theme to ensure they form a consistent pattern. I did this with each theme, deciding which themes need to be reworked, if there were data extracts that simply needed to be moved to other themes, or if there were data that need to be discarded from the theme entirely. This phase was the time to address those conflicts before finalizing the list of themes and thematic map.

Once I was satisfied with my candidate thematic map, I moved to the next level, which emulated the first level on a larger scale. At this level, I reviewed the entire dataset to ensure the themes accurately reflected the data. When I checked the transcripts, I looked for missing data I should have coded to include in themes. This level aimed to confirm my thematic map's validity from the evidence's holistic perspective and correct it if it did not.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming the Themes

In this phase, I updated my working definitions of each theme. I revisited the data extracts and verified the "internally consistent account" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Defining the themes allowed me to explain what the themes are and what they are not. Once I clearly defined the themes, I began to draft the narrative analysis about the highlights of the themes, how the themes relate to each other, and how the themes and data relate to the research question. I

was sure not to paraphrase the themes, which is a common mistake in thematic analysis. With this in mind, I considered the themes both individually and in totality. During my review, I intentionally searched for themes that should be demoted to a subtheme to refine my thematic map. A subtheme is a theme within a theme that can help create structure or hierarchy within a complex dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, I met with my dissertation chair, methodologist, and coding team multiple times, brainstorming on the themes' names, changing them if they are not concise and relatable enough for readers to understand their intent readily.

Phase 6: Produce the Report

I considered writing the thematic analysis's final report as the closing argument phase of making a case. Instead of only providing the evidence as data extracts, the researcher must embed them into an analytic narrative that tells the results' story in its entirety (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, I brought together the data, analysis, and prior research that will exhibit a "concise, coherent, non-repetitive, and interesting account" to convince the reader of the study's validity (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Trustworthiness

Patton (2015) wrote any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of openness, being careful to fully document methods of inquiry and their implications for resultant findings (p. 58). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) presented a list of recommendations to ensure the reliability of a thematic analysis study. These recommendations guided my research to offer a trustworthy addition to the academic literature on BGLOs. One suggestion supported by qualitative research literature is to use multiple coders to increase consistency between the raw data and codes (Boyatzis, 1998; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Maier, 2017). Before coding, I double-checked my data transcripts to confirm the videos were transcribed accurately. I reviewed

the transcripts and listened to the videos multiple times to thoroughly understand the data. As previously mentioned, I had a team of coders I worked with to establish reliability and agree on codes. Another suggestion is for researchers to know their biases and report them in the study. I did this by exposing my position on this topic (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I also provided direct quotes, which shows readers the quality of my coding, theme generation, and conclusions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 813). Another way I provided trustworthiness is by creating memos throughout the process. According to Given (2008), memo writing is helpful for various reasons including identifying analytic gaps, engaging the researcher with the data, providing material for other chapters, and encouraging researchers to develop ideas throughout each phase (p. 375). The memos I created marked major decisions in the coding process and theoretical underpinnings of the findings.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodological fit of thematic analysis versus content analysis for the proposed study. Once the rationale for thematic analysis was explained, I outlined the methodology's strengths and weaknesses. Next, this chapter outlined the data source, criteria, and collection. Lastly, there was an overview of the phases of thematic analysis, and the proposed steps to create a reliable study. The next chapter will outline the findings.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question: What are the most significant reasons people say they denounce their BGLOs? Due to the nascent nature of the research, a qualitative methodology such as thematic analysis was befitting. A coding team and I analyzed YouTube videos by coding and creating themes based on the excerpts therein. This chapter begins with an overview of the speakers' demographics and how I determined these. Next, I identify and review the domains with the themes included in each. Then it provides a vignette of themes that answer the research question. The chapter also outlines the scriptural evidence speakers use to support their beliefs and decisions. In addition to the results that answer the research question, in this chapter I present a supplementary finding that clarifies the journey speakers go through when deciding to denounce their organizations. In conclusion, the chapter will summarize all of the results from the study.

Demographics

Due to the nature of the study in which I had no contact with the speakers, I gathered demographic information while coding the data. There were 17 speakers in total. I reviewed 18 videos, so one of the speakers appeared twice in the dataset with two different videos. The demographics provide vital background information to the study including the years in the organization, organization type, intake level, and spiritual level. Table 4.1 lists the demographics for each of the 17 speakers, including the categories that I could not determine based on the data. I denote this by marking it unknown.

Table 4.1

Speaker Demographics

Name	Years in the Org	Org Type	Intake Level	Spiritual level
Speaker 1	< 10 years	Fraternity	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 2	> 10 years	Sorority	Unknown	Est. in the Faith
Speaker 3	< 10 years	Fraternity	Undergrad	Est. in the Faith
Speaker 4	< 10 years	Fraternity	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 5	Unknown	Fraternity	Unknown	New in the Faith
Speaker 6	< 10 years	Sorority	Graduate	Unknown
Speaker 7	< 10 years	Sorority	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 8	< 10 years	Sorority	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 9	< 10 years	Sorority	Undergrad	Est. in the Faith
Speaker 10	< 10 years	Fraternity	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 11	< 10 years	Sorority	Unknown	New in the Faith
Speaker 12	Unknown	Fraternity	Unknown	Unknown
Speaker 13	< 10 years	Fraternity	Undergrad	Est. in the Faith
Speaker 14	< 10 years	Fraternity	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 15	< 10 years	Sorority	Undergrad	New in the Faith
Speaker 16	< 10 years	Sorority	Unknown	New in the Faith
Speaker 17	> 10 years	Sorority	Undergrad	Est. in the Faith

The years in the organization refer to the number of years the speaker was a member before they denounced. I determined whether speakers were members for less or more than 10 years in the organization based on when they were initiated to when they denounced their membership. Some speakers stated how many years they were a member; for example, Speaker 16 said, “So, I was a [sorority member] for three years only, from 2013 ’til 2016.” For others, I determined the number of years based on deduction. For example, Speaker 3 said, “I was a spring 2020 initiate.” This speaker posted their denouncement video the same year, which means they were a member for less than a year before they denounced. Thirteen speakers were members for less than 10 years, and two were members for more than 10 years before denouncing. I could not determine the status of two of the speakers.

The organization type shows if speakers denounced a fraternity or sorority. There were eight former fraternity members and nine former sorority members. Based on my selection criteria, speakers had to either mention the organization they were denouncing or state it in the video title. The intake level refers to whether they were a member or initiate of an undergraduate chapter or graduate chapter. Eleven speakers were initiates of undergraduate chapters. One speaker was a graduate chapter initiate and I could not determine the intake level of five speakers. To determine the demographic information, I listened for clues that signified their intake level, like where their BGLO experience took place, when they were initiated, or if they were a student or alumni. Some of the examples below give insight on the speakers' intake levels.

- "We were a small sorority; we're on the campus of a PWI, primarily white institution" (S17).
- "And so, when I had graduated, the opportunity presented itself again to me to be a part of this organization" (S6).
- "I am a student at the [university name]. And this video will be about my denouncing [my sorority]. So, I crossed my freshman year" (S15).

Lastly, I looked at the spiritual level of the participants. I used clues similar to the organization status to determine this. If speakers mentioned certain things that signified they had an established level of spirituality, I categorized them as established in the faith. If they did not have an established spirituality, I classified them as new in the faith. Examples of established relationship signifiers include, but are not limited to, a speaker mentioning when they got baptized or gave their lives to Christ. I also determined this if they did not have a personal relationship with the Lord. The following excerpts exhibit how I was able to determine a

speaker's spiritual level. Some mentioned not having much experience performing Christian rituals, the time frame for when they rededicated their life to Christ, and when they were baptized. These are the types of phrases that helped me approximate their described levels of spirituality:

- So, I'm like, okay, I ain't never fasted a day in my life, never done any of this. I just know that I feel the urge to get—you know, get it right and just to have a relationship with the Lord. (S7)

- I've been a Christian for—well, I rededicated my life for about let's say—I gave my life back to God in 2017. So, it will be two years this December, I believe is when I gave my life back. (S1)

- And now, mind you, prior to going to college, I had just got baptized, you know. I had made a personal decision to just really want to take my relationship with God to another level. … So throughout being in [the sorority], all that stuff, I knew God. (S9)

Of the 17 speakers, 10 were new in the faith, five were established in the faith, and I could not determine the spirituality level for two of the speakers. See the demographics in Table 4.1.

Results

Themes

This study's results emerged as a product of qualitative coding that consisted of highlighting information that directly and indirectly answered the research question, and information that seemed vital to the study. Braun and Clarke (2013) proscribed five questions for thematic analysis: What does this theme mean? What are the assumptions underpinning it? What conditions likely gave rise to it? Why do people talk about it in this particular way? and What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic (p. 94)? These questions led my analysis process. After I analyzed the codes and organized them into themes, the coding team and I reconvened to brainstorm on the most reflective names that captured the essence of the passages. The purpose of this meeting was also to create succinct theme names easily understood

by the readers. During this session, we would reiterate certain excerpts and ideas present in the coded passages to determine the best fit. The results from that brainstorming session were that some of the themes remained the same as the code names; however, most of the code names evolved into more complex terms.

There are 12 themes separated into two domains. The two domains are internal and external. Internal refers to the group of themes about the speakers' beliefs and occurrences. The external themes concern the BGLOs' actions. The theme names were created to have consistent language with the with the other themes within their two domains. Once I had a potential slate of themes, I met one last time with my methodologist. We met to review the themes and revisit the names of two out of the 12 that needed reworking. During that meeting, my methodologist served as a sounding board and consultant as I explained the excerpts that made up each theme. To revise two of the names, we repeated the same style of brainstorming session as I had with my coding team. Finally, I shared the updates with my team to get their input and final decision on the last two names. The thematic maps in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the progression of theme development throughout Phases 4 and 5 of the thematic analysis. Figure 4.1 shows 12 potential themes with eight subthemes.

Figure 4.1

Thematic Map 1

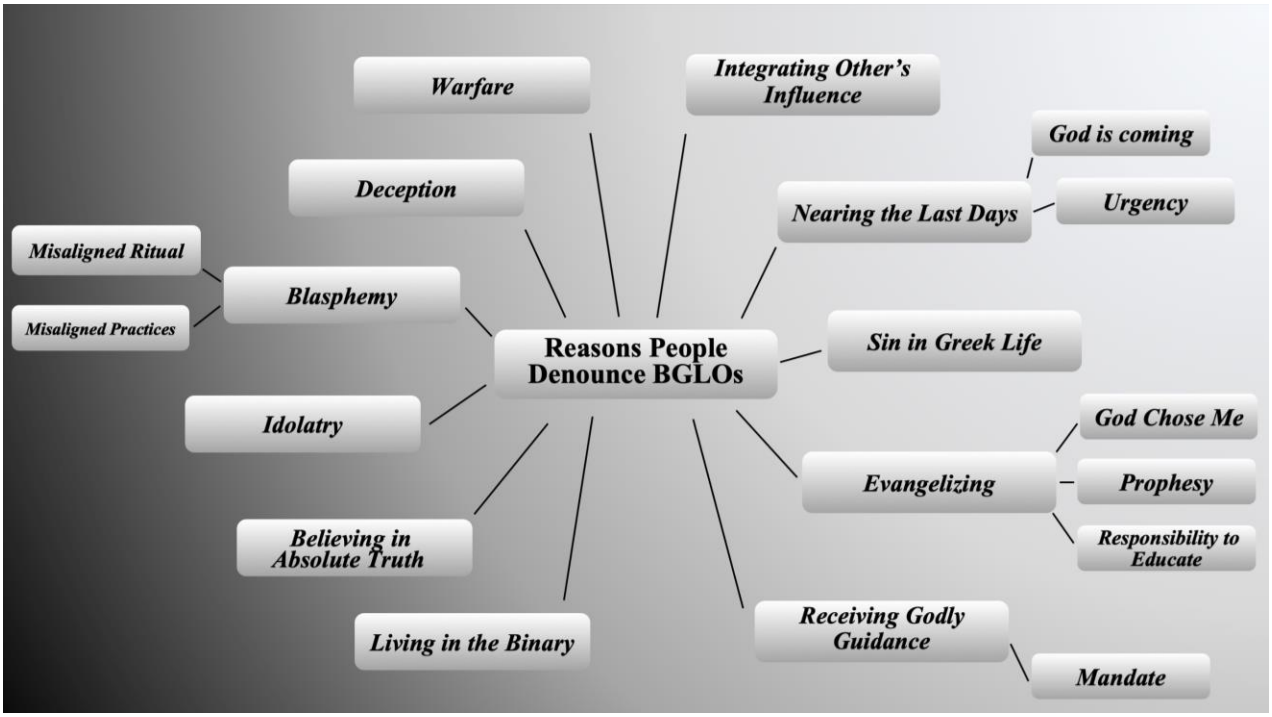
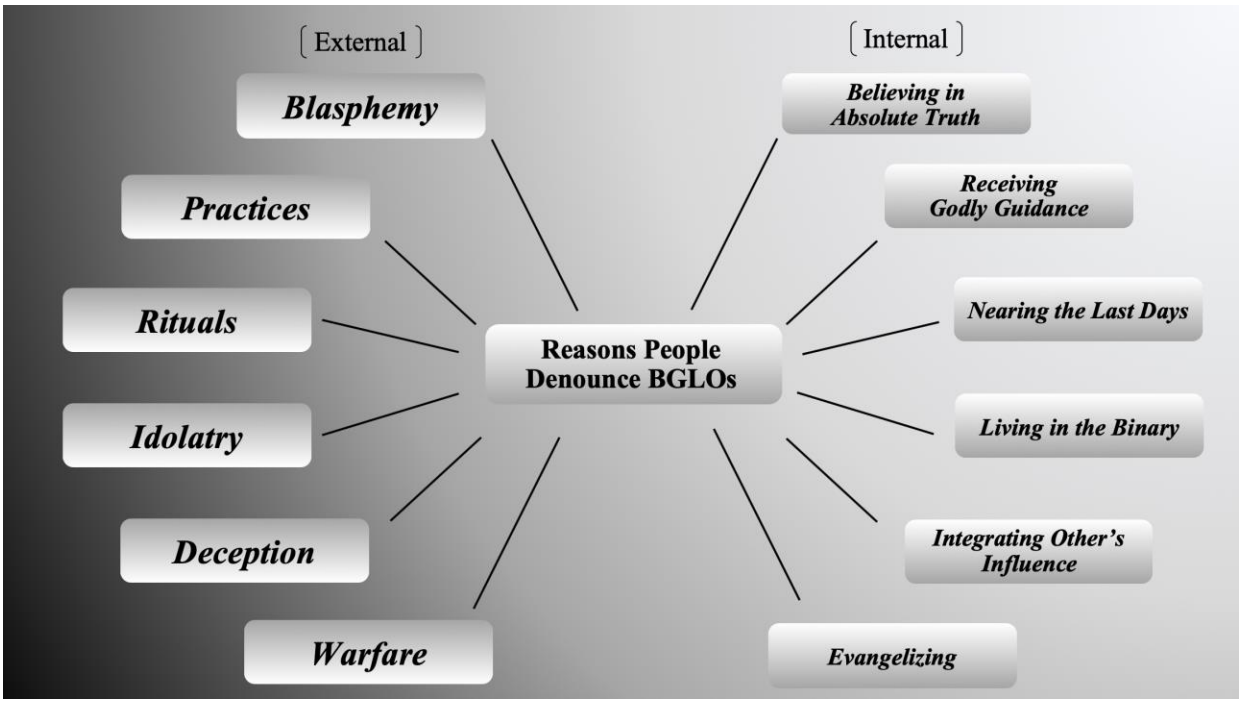


Figure 4.2 demonstrates that some of the themes and subthemes from Figure 4.1 are no longer present. During the analysis, *God is Coming*, and *Urgency* merged into *Nearing the Last Days*. *Mandate* joined *Receiving Godly Guidance*. The codes *God Chose Me*, *Prophesy*, and *Responsibility to Educate* all integrated into *Evangelizing*. *Sin in Greek life* and *Denouncing Worldly Activities* merged into one code and integrated into *Blasphemy*. That left the 12 final themes separated into the internal and external domains seen in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

Thematic Map 2



External

The first domain of themes I will review are the external themes. The external domain refers to themes that occurred externally to the speaker. These are things pertaining to the organizations and not the speaker. The themes I included in this domain are *Blasphemy*, *Practices*, *Rituals*, *Idolatry*, *Deception*, and *Warfare*.

Blasphemy.

> There's nothing good from these organizations. And how do I know this? The word of God. Galatians chapter 5 verse 19, 'now the works of the flesh are manifest. The works of the flesh are manifest. All of these are the evidence of who belongs to Satan. Sexual immorality, moral—depravity, promiscuity, drunkenness, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, out lashes of anger, selfishness, ambitions, dissensions, fractions.' Unfortunately, that describes a lot of churches, too. But most definitely when it comes to these organizations, every one of these fruits of darkness are evident. (S2)

Speakers ran the gamut of why the organizations are misaligned with Christian beliefs. Their comments were based on the Bible and their understanding of how faithful Christians and believers in Jesus Christ should behave.

> What does the Bible say that goes against Greek life? Well, if you read the Bible, then you can see that it talks about Greek life in the most negative way. It really states all the things not to do that goes on in all Greek life. (S14)

The first quote demonstrated that a massive underpinning of this theme is that sin is rampant within Greek life and Christians should have no parts in it. They noted that because there is exposure to sinful activity within the organizations, having faith in Jesus Christ and participating in BGLOs is incongruent. This theme indicates that speakers believed they cannot be in BGLOs because their foundation, what goes on inside them, and their perceptions do not align with the Bible. Therefore, they had to denounce.

Assumptions underpin this theme that a Christian does must align perfectly with the Word of God, honor God, and direct others to Jesus Christ. If a Christian's actions and involvement in things outside of the church are not meeting these assumptions, then that person is either not a true Christian, does not believe in Jesus Christ, or will not make it into Heaven. Religious superiority is likely a condition that has given rise to this theme. The speakers seemed to strive for perfection in Christianity. They talked about things contrary to Christianity in BGLOs because they strongly desired to be right with God. In this theme, speakers talked about how the imagery of crests, shields, and mascots represent anti-Christian tyrants and myths they disprove with scripture.

> So basically, I started looking at the [mascot], and I looked it up. And the first thing it was is, you know, it's the head of a human, and it is the body of a [animal]. … They say this guy is a—is one of those—is one of those tyrants. You know, they said he was a heretical ruler. … And I don't know if anybody know what heresy is, but the definition of heresy is belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religions, especially Christian, which means this dude was against being a Christian, which number one, stands for everything that I am. (S1)

Some speakers blatantly labeled the organizations as demonic and evil. Speakers stated that the exclusionary nature of organizations with selective membership does not represent God because He accepts and loves all people. Speakers also believed that secrecy does not align with Christianity because of biblical teachings about negative things done in secrecy being exposed. The following excerpts demonstrate how negatively speakers regarded BGLOs, their traditions, and the effects of involvement:

- And what the Bible is saying is that like it's better to not know these bad things and to seek the forgiveness of God than to know these things are bad, know these things are demonic, know that these things give glory to another god, know that these things are bowing down to founders, know that these things are praying to an [immortal essence] that literally no one has defined to me ever. Then – and still call yourself a Christian and be in it. (S15)
- "Would you eat a cake and [sic] it had a fly in it or a maggot? Would you eat it? That's what we're doing when we're taking God's stuff and then mixing it up with wicked stuff." (S2)
- "Why does it say we're eating foods prepared by the gods? And who are these gods? This is just straight blasphemy. It praises man and praises the fraternity all while basking in the illusion that it serves Christ when it doesn't." (S14)
- "Matthew 7:15 says, you shall know a tree by its fruits. If it's producing bad fruit, it's not God's. Like drunkenness, sexual sin, pride, rivalries, orgies. These are the fruits of these fraternities and sororities." (S13)

Speakers focused on the negative aspects of the organizations versus the positive aspects. hey firmly believed that those negative aspects are so impactful that they outweighed the good parts. They genuinely believed that because bad things happen within the organizations, those negative things are the sum of the whole. Two subthemes from this theme emerged as highly significant. Therefore, I will highlight them next.

Sub-theme: Practices.

> It is well known, especially in undergrad, you know, the partying, the drunkenness, the sexual promiscuity, the strife. And I know that graduate chapter strife, jealousy, envy; all of those works of darkness are evident. (S2)

The nationally incorporated organizations may not officially condone the misaligned practices and protocols that are parts of the BGLO culture. Members still participate in practices that organizations do not promote. They may also be violations, according to their handbooks. This sub-theme means that former members believed the customs, traditions, and practices of BGLOs are not becoming of Christianity at its core. Therefore, they must denounce, even though the organizations themselves formally condemn some of these practices. There is a difference between practice and policy. The BGLO practices, while unofficial, are deeply rooted in the culture of Greek life. The undergraduate Greek life experience likely incubates this view. Some examples of misaligned practices violate the organizations' codes of conduct, which means the organizations do not agree that these practices should occur either. A code of conduct consists of a set of rules the members must follow. The speakers did not acknowledge that in some cases, the organizations condemn the practices and traditions the speakers claim are not aligned with Christian values. Speakers mentioned hazing and party culture as BGLO practices that are anti-Christian.

- If your organization is an organization that does hazing or that tries to put your body to the test to see if you are worthy enough and you can withstand like the heat of what a man or a woman can put you through to become part of it, completely contrary to the will of God and that's against his word. (S10)

- The Bible says that you know, you're supposed to love the Lord God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul. But then we're singing songs that say all of my love, my peace, my happiness I'm going to give it to this organization. You see how the two contradict. (S11)

- Like [my sorority], I really liked us for being [the ideal sorority]. But we're [ideal], but we're out here making [alcoholic drinks] and doing the lustiest of strolls and steps and everything, but we're [ideal]. (S16)

Speakers assumed the practices are inseparable from the identity of the organizations. Additionally, members cannot exist within the organization without participating in the unofficial practices. Speakers talked about the practices as policy, probably because it is often difficult to separate the unofficial customs from the things approved and condoned by the organization, specifically for young adults and new members.

Sub-theme: Rituals.

> There were rituals we literally had that forced us to kneel down and eat food and drink to the god of the fraternity which is against God's order in Acts 15:29. But the thing is it's not just [my former fraternity]. It's all fraternities, and sororities have to get on their knees. If you don't believe me, ask them and watch their expression. (S13)

This sub-theme, Rituals, includes rituals that are not aligned with Christian principles or beliefs. The rituals contrast the practices because according to the speakers, the rituals are activities that the national organizations officially implement. This theme means that when speakers compared the organization ritual book to scripture in the Bible, they perceived the two to contradict each other. The crux of this theme is speakers' assumptions that people who were not Christians wrote the rituals maliciously; they hypothesized that if the people were Christians, demonic spirits influenced them when they wrote them. Their belief denoted that people worship Satan and become spiritually attached to the organization instead of God.

A myopic view or unawareness of the organizations' origins, influences, and ritual developments could create conditions where speakers would not understand and therefore reject anything outside their beliefs. Speakers talked about the rituals contradicting the Bible because they are committed to convicting BGLOs of negligence with members' souls. This sub-theme is significant because, in contrast to practices, rituals—specifically the initiation rituals—are the only thing that all members of BGLOs experienced. To become a member, every person must participate in an initiation ritual that adds to the severity of the misalignment with Christianity for the speakers. Many speakers took the rituals, read them, and then provided scripture to indicating that the rituals evil, as seen in the following excerpts.

- All members shall say behold, behold as the candidate's blindfolded is withdrawn, [candidate] sees [the organization slogan referencing illumination]—in large letters just over the altar. So, we're at an altar saying [the organization slogan referencing illumination]. But right here, it says in John 8:12, God says I am the light of the world. (S1)

- And even in terms of the ritual, like taking the oath. The oath, the Bible says we should not ever take oaths or swear by anybody's name. And let our yes's be yes's and let our no's be no's and anything beyond that it comes from the evil one, right? (S10)

These quotes demonstrate how speakers experienced competing commitments to the rituals and the word of God. They expressed having participated in ceremonies that they no longer believed were favorable in the eyes of God.

Idolatry.

> 'When you get saved, don't you pronounce out of your mouth that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of your life and you're going to give your whole being, your whole heart, and mind to him?' I said yes. So, he said, 'Did you not do the same thing when you crossed into your fraternity?' I said, wow. He said, 'You sing hymns to God, right? Did you not do that when you became a part of the fraternity?' I said yes. 'You do prayers and chants to God in church, right? Did you not do the same thing in the fraternity?' (S13)

This theme means speakers believed BGLOs are idolatrous in their imagery, rituals, and practices. Speakers discussed how members unknowingly worship idols by participating in the rituals and wearing the symbols, shields, and crests representing various gods and goddesses. Speakers also stated how members and people who want to join BGLOs idolize the organization. The assumptions underpinning this theme are that any action that mimics worship, mentorship, or adoration for something other than God is idolatry. Some talked about how idolatry is blatant because members pledge their lives and devote so much time and effort to the organizations.

> It's obviously, praise and worship to the fraternity. And the definition even says its worship for a certain deity that you make a sacrifice to. And the sacrifice that every Greek has made was pledging their time, and then they go on to pledge their time more to the fraternity as they get initiated as a member. (S14)

The polytheistic nature of some of the rituals and imagery motivated speakers to say the organizations idolize or give honor to more than God. Although some rituals include references to God, others may esteem the organization or past members, like its founders, signifying idolatry. Speakers believed the organizations are idolatrous if God is not the only spiritual entity being praised, honored, and revered throughout the rituals. Speaker 15 mentioned:

> Three different spirits are being addressed. There is the Almighty God, there is the [immortal essence], and then there is [the sorority]. … And it just raises the question. If we were talking about the one true God, Jesus Christ, number one, the prayer to the [immortal essence] would have ended in Jesus name as well.

Speakers talked about idolatry intensely because many biblical stories depict God punishing idolaters. Speakers referenced staple scriptures to support this theme like, "God is a jealous God," and "idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God." Biblical stories about idolatry are likely caused the speakers' perceptions. Throughout the commentary, speakers expressed how rituals and practices exuded idolatry.

- [The room setting refers to having sorority paraphernalia that represents contributing members of the sorority.] … we knelt before this image multiple times, and we also bowed before it. And we all know what happened to the children of Israel because of their idolatry. We know that the Lord severely punished them. (S8)

- That is completely idolatry. And the Bible says that idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. (S15)

A common thread throughout the testimonials is speakers comparing BGLO customs to their biblical knowledge. An intensive research study on what the Bible says about idolatry could position BGLOs as a culprit once you compare biblical stories to rituals and practices.

Deception.

> So now if Satan wants to drag us into worshiping him, but he knows that we love the Lord, he's going to have to do it—do it in a way that we don't even understand that it's being done right before our eyes. … And they'll believe in their heart that they're actually worshipping the God that they love. (S11)

This excerpt refers to the fact that speakers believed that Satan or the organizations intentionally deceive members by making fraternities and sororities anti-Christian, while claiming they were founded on Christian principles. This theme means speakers think BGLOs are a pawn in Satan's larger scheme to get people to worship him instead of God. They are convinced the trickery is intentional. Speaker 8 said, "Like Satan has really deceived so many of them because some people don't know." Speakers had the underlying assumption that evil spirits control the BGLOs, and BGLOs must trick members into thinking they are participating in an organization with Christian foundations. Otherwise, Christian members would not knowingly and devotedly engage in idol worship and environments conducive to sin. Speakers thought that secrecy was the vehicle through which BGLOs deceive their members.

> Now, some people are still going to go because he's just a mastermind in deceiving people. So, some people are still going to go for it. But for some people, they're going to be free. … They're no longer going to be walking in darkness. But he don't want that. So, he wants you to keep it secret. (S8)

Speakers thought that if everyone were able to review and study the rituals and policies before taking oaths to abide by them, they would less likely be forced into doing something they do not know. Speakers talked about this concept of deception with confidence because they were convinced BGLOs and their members are driven by evil forces. They argued that people should read the rituals before participating without knowing what is happening and what they are signing-up for. This is an example of how speakers said members are deceived by blindly agreeing to the organization's oaths and laws. Speakers noted their revelations about the deception and desire to prevent others from making what they call a mistake.

- I recognize now that I was deceived, that I took part in deceiving others as I brought them into these organizations, and now I'm willing to do whatever I need to do to snatch people from the fire to expose these lies and dispose these evil organizations. (S17)

- If the Almighty God doesn't even call us to worship him in blind faith, then why do all these things without knowing their purpose? Why do all of these rituals without knowing what they actually mean? (S15)

- So, basically, we're praising this false idol the whole time. And a lot of people don't know because of how it's been dressed up nice. And you really don't know until you're inside of the fraternity and you're a member. (S14)

Satan tricking people into worshipping him is one of the main motives speakers had for denouncing and informing others why BGLOs are anti-Christian. Their goal was to help bring other into what they thought was the light of truth.

Warfare.

> So just think about when you sign your name in that book, it's spiritual. It's not just a physical act, but it's something that's happening up in the spirit. And remember, like we're not wrestling against flesh and blood. We're not. So, he knows things are going to happen up in the—the real fight is in the spirit. It's in the spiritual realm. (S8)

Speakers believed that there are evil and demonic spirits attached to BGLOs. Some are unknown and some come from Satan or Greek mythology. They referred to spiritual warfare that most members are unaware of when they participate in BGLOs. Spiritual warfare is a concept

that Christians refer to as a battle against evil spirits. Speakers used the rituals and imagery as evidence that BGLOs are attached to and engage with spirits throughout their membership. Speakers may have assumed the organizations are inherently flawed because of this spiritual attachment. Based on writings in their ritual book, Speaker 2 said, “They claim it’s a spiritual organization from the foundation. So, what spirit is that?” They may also assume the organizations intend to trap members into believing they have Christian foundations. At the same time, they are attached to Satanic spirits as a part of Satan’s plan. Speakers may have thought the organizations were spiritually bound to unknown and evil spirits because they have literal understanding of both the rituals and scripture. Speaker 1 talked about how they encountered confusing references to spirits in their ritual book:

> We all know about spirits. So, spirits are things that we don’t even know that we connect with. And it says the spirit of the [the organization]. So that automatically, my antennas went up, and I was like so what spirit are they talking about?

The speakers may not have sought other sources of understanding outside of the words from the ritual and scripture. They may have believed that spirits are attached to these organizations because they did not consider the history of how and why they were founded or the context in which certain scriptures were written. The rituals that reference any spirit, deity, or being other than God or Jesus Christ prompted them to say the organizations operate in opposition to Christianity, which puts members’ souls and lives at stake. The following scriptures exhibit these ideas.

- There are some things that could oppress us, you know, from the pits of Hell the lies of the enemy, the one that forces demonic spirits, but they have no authority, no power over your life unless you give that to them by me saying [the fraternity] is the life. I gave every spirit behind that organization the power and the authority to torment me. (S12)

- Ask God to show you the spirit that's operating behind these fraternities and sororities. Test every spirit by their spirit. He will show you that he's not the spirit that's operating behind it. (S8)

- God, did you tell me to denounce my letters? And he said, 'yes, because it's not of me. Just because they speak about me does not mean it's of me.' And that's when it hit me because even demons know scripture. And if y'all don't know about spiritual warfare like for real, for real spiritual warfare is real. This is not for play, play. (S6)

Speakers talked about the spirits attached to BGLOs as if the organizations are after mindless control over the members. Suppose speakers were not open to widening their understanding to all aspects of BGLO existence and theology on spiritual warfare and demonic spirits. In that case, they may have limited their perceptions of the organizations.

Internal

The following themes are classified within the internal domain because they were personal experiences or the speakers' internalized beliefs. The themes that are in this domain include *Believing in Absolute Truth, Receiving Godly Guidance, Nearing the Last Days, Living in the Binary, Integrating Others Influence,* and *Evangelism*.

Believing in Absolute Truth.

> It's sad because unfortunately, people don't understand there is absolute truth. For all of those and all of you who believe that there is no absolute truth, that the truth I make it, please go stand on top of the Empire State Building and jump off, go jump. There's no absolute law, right? Yes, you're not going to go do that, right, because there is a law. It's called gravity, and you're going to find out when you jump what's really true or not. So, there is absolute truth. The Bible is absolute truth. … I believe by faith that word of God is truth, and I'm going to follow it. (S2)

This theme is derived from the speakers' notion that there was only one way to interpret the Bible, and their interpretation was the only truth. Speakers provided scriptural evidence to support their beliefs about why other BGLO members should denounce their membership. They believe their interpretation of the Bible, scripture, and Jesus Christ as an example is the only truth that is accurate and matters. Speaker 2 said, "You know, Jesus Christ is the truth. Those

who belong to him will hear this truth, and those who don't won't. Simple as that. So, open your ears to hear the truth today." Speakers assumed there was no alternative interpretation or understanding of the scripture. "I tried to manipulate so many different ways, but the word is the word, and I cannot manipulate the truth," said Speaker 10. They weighed the scripture as absolute, implying that the way speakers believed they should apply the Word of God was the only way possible. The following excerpts show how speakers believed that their version of the truth was the only plausible version and anything contrary to it results in a negative outcome.

- You can think I'm crazy or whatever like that, but I know the truth, period, and I'm standing on the truth. If you ain't trying to hear the truth, then it is what it is, my baby. (S6)
- Either you get with the truth, or you get left, simple. (S3)
- All roads do not lead to Heaven. If you're seeking truth, and truth alone, no matter where you start, you're going to end up in Jesus because you're going to realize that everything else that you were a part of was wrong, and you're going to find out that Jesus Christ is the true and only way of salvation. (S16)

This rigidity could stem from religious experiences that do not allow error and nuance. A religious school of thought centered around preachers of fire, brimstone, or Hell reinforces this way of thinking. The strategy behind this type of preaching is to scare congregants into living righteously by highlighting the consequences of living in sin, which means going to Hell.

Receiving Godly Guidance.

> You have to write a letter. And I wrote one sentence, and I told them God told me to denounce, period. I literally put a period at the end of the sentence. And I said God bless, sincerely, and put my name at the end. (S9)

The coded passages in this theme include how the speakers decided to denounce because God guided them. The speakers used language to describe the instructions they heard from God as a mandate. They felt like it was mandatory to follow his voice. The speakers outlined the process from (a) hearing the instructions from God, (b) deciding to obey or disobey, and (c)

grappling with the consequences of their decisions. The speakers understood they would face persecution from BGLOs if they obeyed God's guidance and denounced. They also understood they would face persecution from some Christians or even God if they disobeyed and stayed. In the end, they saw obedience as the more rewarding choice. Another assumption is that the promptings they received were from God and not their consciences. Yet, some speakers assured that they heard from God and not their thoughts.

> Now I was getting like these thoughts that I just couldn't shake. And I knew that this was the Holy Spirit because this wasn't me. And at this time, I hadn't given my life to Christ. So—and I knew that, because obviously like this is not me, like reciting the things to my own head, asking myself questions, like I knew that this was the Holy Spirit. (S15)

Speakers mentioned confirmations of what they heard through dreams and personal revelations. Speaker 5 said, "So, first I'd like to share the dream that I had and kind of breakdown from a scriptural sense what actually was going on. So, the Holy Spirit told me to write this particular dream down." Some speakers talked about how they sought and prayed for confirmation after being prompted to denounce. A person has to be spiritually open, impressionable, and vulnerable to believe they heard from God or experienced a revelation from God. Some speakers pointed out that there were times when God spoke to them, and they rejected or ignored the message until it was unmistakably a spiritual encounter with the Lord. Here are some examples of speakers explaining how they received promptings from God to denounce.

- And I kept feeling like God was saying, look, there's something like this familiar theme kept coming up. There's something between me and you. There's something between me and my relationship with God that's putting up a barrier. (S17)
- I am making this video about denouncing [my sorority] solely because God told me to. (S16)

- And I heard as loud as day an audible voice say ‘get up,’ and I’m like hmm, hmm, hmm. And it said ‘get up!’ And I was like, get up? I paid my money. Like I got to go through it now. I done paid my money. So that was—one, that was the voice of the Lord telling me to get up. I didn’t know this at this time. (S7)

- Like that whole summer when people kept asking me, ‘oh, why’d you denounce,’ why? Because God said so. That’s just—I just had to leave because God said so, and I didn’t want to find out what would have happened if I had stayed. (S11)

Speakers said the spiritual experiences they described were exceptionally personal and convincingly led by God. They may have felt their encounters were undebatable, and no one can prove it did not occur how and why it did. They did not talk about it as if it were a fluke because receiving guidance from God to do something can translate to being chosen for a specific task. Being chosen by God can make speakers feel special and have a unique responsibility that sets them apart from others.

Nearing the Last Days.

> If y’all can’t see that this is the end times, I don’t know what else God has to do to wake us up. God wake us—take the scales off of our eyes. Take the scales off of our ears so we can hear and see what you are trying to show us, father God. It’s a crazy, tragic world that we’re going through right now. (S13)

Speakers told their audience that we were in the last days, meaning the end of time. This is a biblical reference to when God will come from Heaven, when at once people will either go to Heaven or Hell. Speakers spoke with urgency about deciding to denounce BGLOs and encouraged others to follow suit. A code within this theme was “urgency,” which denotes that members do not have much time to leave the organizations since no one knows when our last day on earth will be. “He’s given me the wisdom and the knowledge to know what time it is and the urgency that I need to move with to save as many people as possible like we’re literally in the last days” (S3).

This theme demonstrates that speakers believed, based on current events and the Bible's depiction of the last days on earth, that we are in a time where we are all near death. The last days are imperative for speakers to emphasize because they do not think BGLO members will enter Heaven. Speakers talked about situations where God may return to earth to take the true believers to Heaven. Since speakers asserted a BGLO member cannot be a true believer, the people who choose to remain members will be left behind despite the speakers' warnings.

> And I think this just goes to further show what God means when he says that on the last day there are going to be people that are like, 'God, like, what do you mean you don't know me? I literally prophesized in your name, delivered people, healed, all of that.' And he's going to say, 'depart from me ye doers of iniquity.' You know what I mean? And this is not because like they didn't think that they were serving God. But there's a lot of things that were in their life, such as membership to, like, active, non-active, whatever you want to call it, not being a denounced member of a Greek org that—to die with that and like that for God—for the all-knowing God to say that he doesn't know you on the last day, like, that takes a lot. (S15)

Like the fire and brimstone strategy used in certain schools of thought, preachers use the last days and the uncertainty of death to motivate people to succumb to Christian practices or beliefs. The desire to save other people from an eternity of pain and suffering could be another prompting for the occurrences in this theme. These quotes exemplify speakers' ideas and justifications about us being in the end times.

- So, my prayer is that your conviction comes soon so that—because Jesus may be coming sooner. And we may think we have time in this life. We may think that this stuff is child's play, but it's not. It really isn't. (S11)

- I'm like you know what, I hear you because if you don't know about the rapture, do your research about it. Jesus is coming to get his church. He's coming very soon. (S12)

- At any given moment, the sky can crack open right now, and he come get his people. That's how close we are. Right now, y'all think everything that we're going through being homeless, Coronavirus and everything that's going on in the world; there's so many signs that I can't even speak on right now because there's so much that God has been showing me to know that we are in the last of the last days. (S3)

Speakers may have talked about the last days more than other believers because they could come from church or denomination teachings that we are in the last days; or they may have believed that we should always be concerned with how we live and how it will affect our souls once we die.

Living in the Binary.

> You have two options. Either you're going to be a part of the world, or you're going to come out of the world and come into the kingdom of God. It's that simple. You're going to accept and continue to be a part of these Greek-letter organizations and be a part of the world and be all prideful and egotistical and have the glory and chase the clout and be all cool and want people to be like you and doing all kinds of things for people to join your organization, or you're going to come out and save your soul from the second death that's to come and his wrath to come. (S3)

Speakers presented as if they only had a binary choice between Christianity/salvation and membership in the BGLO organizations. Some of them stated there is no way to be a member and a saved Christian simultaneously. Speakers believed BGLOs are blasphemous. This theme means that there is no way to compromise on being a member of a BGLO and a Christian. For some of the speakers, this was a personal conviction, while others applied this ideology to the entire body of Christian believers. Speaker 17 said:

> I believe that every person who considers themselves to be a Christian needs to denounce their Greek-letter organization because we cannot kid ourselves that we can basically bow our knee to a demon and enter into the gates of heaven.

The underlying theory of this theme is that there is no hope for the BGLOs or their members to become aligned with the speakers' interpretation of scripture. Speakers had a rigid understanding of the Bible and how God treats believers. This theme implies that there is no room for error in a Christian lifestyle. This theme also included many codes of binary choices like Heaven or Hell, God or Greek life, and Spirit or Flesh. Some denominations within the Christian faith stereotype other denominations as overzealous in their approach to teaching

Christianity. The approach consists of teaching members that they must strictly follow God's laws and rules or suffer grave consequences. The contrary is teaching that Jesus Christ came to earth as a sacrifice for the sins and mistakes that Christians will inevitably make and that God is loving and forgiving with grace and mercy. If a speaker had an unbalanced view of only the former type of teaching, that could give rise to the binary mindset that if you are a Christian, you are either in or out of BGLOs. Speakers showed how they conclude that things are either positive or negative in quotes like the ones below.

- "If something is not glorifying God, if something is not of God, it's the complete opposite. There is no gray area for God whatsoever." (S16)
- He had to show me that there's no way possible I was going to get to Heaven and be a part of that sorority. Like he showed me that, hey, I would have passed away in that moment in that time, I was going straight to Hell no if, ands or buts about it, none. There was nothing I could do. (S8)
- "You can't serve two masters. You have to pick one. You have to pick one." (S5)

The speakers talked about BGLOs in an absolute way. If no one has introduced them to a nuanced way of thinking within the Christian faith, they may have prematurely become fervent with their current understanding.

Integrating Others' Influence.

> I ran across this girl who was denouncing [another sorority]. And her testimony was so powerful. And after I watched hers, I was intrigued, so I just kept watching a whole bunch of videos. … And so once I typed that in and saw everybody's video and how young people were just being bold for Christ and how people were feeling the same way I was feeling with this heavy spirit on them, and it just felt good. It just felt good. (S9)

Speakers told stories about how other people positively or negatively impacted their decision to denounce. Speakers had interactions with other people along their journey to denounce, and those interactions ultimately played a pivotal role in their decisions to leave. Watching videos of other people denouncing was another influence for speakers. As with hearing

from God, the speakers would need to be impressionable to be influenced by other people. Some of the speakers were influenced by people who agreed with them, provided extra insight, and confirmed their thinking of denouncing. Other speakers were affected negatively when they spoke with people who disagreed or disapproved of their thought process, which incited them to go through with denouncing. The speakers talked about how they were implicitly influenced by mentioning stories of reaching out to those closest to them or other members of the organizations.

- I had a phone call with my sister. And I just mentioned, hey, pray for me. I feel like God is telling me there's something I need to let go. But I don't know what. And she said, hey, have you looked into the origins of your sorority? And that kind of took me off-guard. I'm a be honest; I was a little bit annoyed. (S17)

- And one of my very favorite line sisters, we were walking one time, and I asked her randomly just in conversation, 'How do you feel about some of the rituals that we had to do?' And she was just like, 'Man, I really just told God you know I'm playing right.' And I was just like, you know I'm playing? I like—and it was just like to me, again me a person that does not want to denounce. Like, I didn't even want to hear these responses because they literally were not making sense. (S15)

- And that's when I, you know, called my aunt, and she was like, 'you know, [name], you messed up when you joined the organization.' I was like, but I don't want to be in it anymore like I feel stuck. And she was like, 'you're not stuck.' She said, 'what you can do is you can go before God, and you can repent. You can denounce it, and you can plead the blood of Jesus over yourself and get rid of that stuff that they gave you.' (S7)

Although speakers may still have concluded that denouncing BGLOs was the best decision for them, having interactions with other members, pastors, or loved ones proved to be very influential.

Evangelizing.

> So, it's like, Lord, for the ones that don't know like, Lord, I pray for them. And he replied back to me in like a split second, and he was just like, '[name], what good is it for me to open your eyes, to reveal those things to you and you not warn them?' And it's like, y'all, I had got chills. It was just like whoa. And I was like, you're right. I have to warn them. (S8)

The denouncers saw themselves as evangelists. Evangelism is "the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ" or "crusading zeal" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). The passages in this theme include an act of evangelism or reference to how the speakers felt they were evangelists. After most of the speakers felt like they received a word from God to denounce their membership, they spoke as being responsible for educating others on the topic. This responsibility meant they saw themselves as Christian leaders and educators, and their public stance on BGLOs created a route for them to step boldly into that identity. The belief that God chose them to lead this charge may have influenced speakers to present an evangelical persona. Speakers also promoted having a desire to let God use them as a vessel.

> I'm just a willing vessel. That's the thing. I'm willing. I'm willing. I'm willing. I'm available. I said God if you want to use me, then use me. Use me in the way that you see fit, and I will do it. (S6)

Assuming a Christian leadership role could have caused speakers to aim for flawlessness, as many Christians expect perfection from their leaders. This assumption could lead to a binary way of thinking regarding BGLOs. Speakers felt repentant about their participation in BGLOs and wanted to prevent others from making the same mistake. So, they offered themselves as a guide and mentor for other people who wanted to learn more about denouncing and the Word of God. They did not take the revelations, spiritual experiences, or new understanding of Biblical principles lightly as you will see in the upcoming examples.

- "I didn't want to make this video, but it got to the point where the Holy Spirit was telling me, [name], you better do this because there's someone out there that needs to hear this." (S5)
- "This is the word that we're supposed to be following, and this is the word we're supposed to be teaching." (S2)
- "I know what my mission is. I know what my purpose is. I am to be an imitator of Christ, and I am to spread truth." (S12)

Speakers taking on the mantle as proprietors of truth is the condition that likely gave rise to this theme.

Scriptural Evidence

One commonality within the entire dataset was scripture use. Although no scripture was referenced enough to become a theme in this study, every speaker used scripture at some point to support their decision to denounce. Thus, scriptural evidence is a theme. They often used scripture as evidence to discredit BGLOs as if BGLOs were on trial for touting the notion that their organizations were built on Christian principles. Video after video, speakers took pieces of rituals or practices and compared them to scripture from the Holy Bible to show how rituals and scripture contradict each other. This technique was so prevalent that I had to note it as a finding in this section. The most commonly used scriptures were Ephesians 6:12 and Matthew 6:24.

- "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (*King James Bible*, 1989, Ephesians 6:12)
- "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (*King James Bible,* 1989, Matthew 6:24)

Speakers mentioned scripture over 143 times throughout the dataset of 18 videos. Table 4.2 shows a list of identifiable scriptures from the dataset. The scriptures are listed in biblical order.

Table 4.2

Scriptural Evidence from the Dataset

Scriptures					
Ex 20:3	Prov 18:21	Matt 27:45-46	John 3:36	Eph 6:12	Jude 1:23
Ex 20:4-5	Prov 19:21	Matt 5:14-16	John 8:12	Phil 2:12	Rev 21:8
Ex 23:13	Prov 2:6-7	Matt 5:29-30	John 8:32	Col 2:20-23	Rev 22:18-19
Ex 32:1-23	Prov 30:6	Matt 5:34-37	John 8:36	Col 2:8-10	
Lev 19:28	Prov 3:5	Matt 6:1-4	Acts 17:23	Col 3:17	
Lev 26:1	Isa 41:10	Matt 6:23	Acts 13:47	1 Tim 4:1	
Lev 5:4-5	Isa 43:1	Matt 6:24	Acts 26:18	1 Tim 4:2	
Deut 18:10	Isa 57:7-13	Matt 6:33	Romans 12:2	2 Tim 2:15	
Deut 23:17	Isa 59:1	Matt 7:13-14	Romans 1:6	2 Tim 2:24-26	
Deut 32:43	Isa 8:19	Matt 7:14	Romans 6:16	2 Tim 4:3	
Deut 6:13	Jer 17:5	Matt 7:15	1 Cor 10:19-21	Heb 10:26	
Josh 1:9	Jer 2:8	Matt 7:18	1 Cor 10:21	Heb 1:3	
Josh 24:15	Jer 31:33	Matt 7:21-23	1 Cor 10:23	Heb 5:8	
Josh 24:24	Jer 35:15	Mark 12:30	1 Cor 15:33	James 1:22-25	
2 Kings 17:33-40	Hos 4:6	Mark 4:21-22	1 Cor 2:9	James 1:5	
2 Kings 17:35	Amos 3:7	Mark 8:23-25	1 Cor 8:1-6	James 2:17	
Ez 14:2-4	Matt 10:22	Mark 8:36	1 Cor 8:7	James 4:2	
Ez 20:7	Matt 10:33	Luke 10:27	2 Cor 10:5	James 4:4	
Ez 23:49	Matt 10:34-39	Luke 14:26-27	2 Cor 11:4	James 4:7-8	
Ez 3:16-18	Matt 11:15	Luke 6:43-45	2 Cor 4:2	1 Peter 1:3-4	
Ps 119:18	Matt 12:36	Luke 8:17	2 Cor 4:4	1 Peter 2:9	
Ps 139:23-24	Matt 15:8	Luke 8:21	2 Cor 6:14	2 Pet 2:21	
Ps 148:13	Matt 15:9	Luke 9:23	Gal 1:10	1 John 1:5	
Ps 23:4	Matt 17:21	Luke 9:24	Gal 5:16-17	1 John 2:15-17	
Ps 83:5	Matt 22:7	Luke 9:62	Gal 5:19-20	1 John 2:22	
Prov 14:12	Matt 23:37	John 14:6	Eph 2:8	1 John 2:4-5	
Prov 16:25	Matt 24:23-24	John 16:13	Eph 4:1	1 John 3:24	
Prov 18:20	Matt 25:40	John 3:16	Eph 5:8	1 John 4:4	

Journey to Denouncing

The complete perspective of the speakers' processes to denounce was an unexpected supplementary finding in this study. While coding in Phase 2, my team and I noticed a set of codes emerging that did not directly answer the research question. However, these experiences seemed worthy enough to note. We thought these were significant because we noticed a pattern developing throughout the data that we did not want to overlook, even if it did not answer the research question. After completing the coding process and reviewing the data, I grouped the codes that did not answer the research question together. When I isolated and analyzed this group of codes, I discovered that they all described what the speakers went through during their process to denouncing. The excerpts within these codes all described the speakers' actions or experiences throughout their stories. Therefore, I formulated a better understanding of the denouncing journey.

Many of the speakers provided a complete illustration of their experience of denouncing a BGLO, starting with discussing why they joined their organizations. When speakers began their videos with why they joined and ended with why they left, naturally they "filled in the blanks." After additional findings emerged, this study gained a comprehensive overview of the process. This perspective gave insight into how iterative the speakers' journeys were. Rarely did the speakers decide to denounce and immediately leave. There were multiple steps, influences, and impactful experiences speakers factored into their decisions. Speakers provided reasons for leaving that they sometimes did not encounter until after they officially denounced. This exhibits the non-linear nature of denouncing because it shows that there is not a step-by-step pattern each person followed.

Although there were similar experiences throughout the dataset, no two processes looked exactly alike in terms of how speakers experienced their organizations and determined denouncing was the best decision. Table 4.3 displays the codes that explain the experiences speakers encountered throughout their process, starting with before they joined and ending with after they denounced.

Table 4.3

Codes Included in the Journey to Denouncing

Before Joining	During Membership	On the Way Out	After Denouncing
Seeking Belonging	Tough Times	Supernatural Experience	Found Fulfillment in Christ
Seeking Approval	Attachment to Material Things	Sought Confirmation	Heartbreak Over their Participation
Seeking Purpose	Dismissed Denouncers	Revelation Interruption	Picking up my Cross
Seeking Fulfillment	Disobedient	Revelations	Professing Jesus Christ
Joined for the Wrong Reason	Gave Gifts to the Organization	Didn't Want to do This	Public Crossing Public Denouncing
	Poor Decision Making	Questioned Scripture	Responsibility to Educate
	Luke Warm	Questioned God	
		Prayed for Revelation	
		Intentional Pursuit	
		Fasting	
		Dreams	
		Felt uneasy	

Before speakers joined, they indicated wanting to gain the approval of their peers or to find belonging, purpose, and fulfillment. People like Speaker 4 noted that looking to the organizations for fulfillment and purpose was the wrong reason to join:

> I just wanted to be a part of something, you know. Just like a void, you know, a void that was inside of me, you know, that needed to be filled. And I thought that would fill it, you know, and that really didn't do it. You know, it actually made it worse for me.

Then, during the process, many speakers discussed enduring tough times, when they lost material things or suffered the consequences of poor decisions they made. Some speakers mentioned that poor decisions included being disobedient and ignoring promptings from the Lord. Speaker 7 discussed losing their job, car, and laptop within the first week after joining their sorority, "I'm just like so you—that's what you're going to do to me, Lord? You're going to take everything? You gone take everything from me just because I joined this organization, like everything?"

Another occurrence that multiple people spoke about was how they dismissed people who denounced or spoke against BGLOs. Before making up their minds to denounce, speakers had adverse reactions to other former BGLO members' videos or other people who tried to get them to leave. Speaker 15 talked about how her cousin sent her a video of someone denouncing, "And I was just like, I'm not watching this. I just became a [member] like what, four—three weeks ago, like I'm not denouncing anytime soon, wherever. So, I dismissed it." One speaker mentioned fraternity members asking what they had to offer the group, and they only had their singing talent. Still, after realizing how they had offered they God-given gift to the fraternity and not God, they said they would use their voice differently. Some others talked about being "lukewarm," which some Christians refer to when people are not on fire for and totally committed to God.

> I was lukewarm. Yes, I went to church. I read my Bible. I spent time with God. I did all of those things, but after doing those things, guess what I did? I still did what I wanted to do. I still did what [name] wanted to do. I wasn't fully submitted over to Christ. (S8)

Some speakers felt uneasy for reasons they could not always verbalize until they had a revelation about BGLOs being something they should not be a part of. Some of the revelations were so powerful that they would interrupt speakers' courses of action for the day. Speakers described some of the revelations as dreams and others supernatural experiences. But some speakers did not automatically experience the revelations and had to pray for confirmation about their decision. Speakers intentionally sought God because they genuinely did not want to denounce their BGLO. Some grappled with their decision by questioning God, questioning scripture, and fasting.

Finally, after denouncing and realizing some of the things they had done were wrong, speakers were heartbroken over their participation. Speaker 2 said, "My heart breaks all over again that I would sing this," when she recounted a misaligned ritual. Speaker 6 had a similar experience:

> And that's when I broke down and cried because I was like out of all my years of living, I just started like being serious in my journey. I would never ever want to hurt God like that to know that I'm worshipping other things above him.

Speakers discussed searching for fulfillment in the organizations and they discussed finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ after leaving the organization. After speakers described their new devotion to Christianity as professing Jesus Christ and picking up their cross, they felt an exclusive responsibility to educate other people about their beliefs and experiences. As the Bible mentions in the story of Jesus' death, he had to carry his cross to Calvary before his crucifixion. Christians use the phrase "picking up my cross" to indicate they chose to endure whatever hardships come with living righteously. Speaker 2 explained, "I need Christ. I need him daily

because otherwise, this flesh wants to rise up always. That's why we have to crucify our flesh daily, pick up our cross daily because it's so easy to fall back."

Speakers also supported their reasons to publicly leave the organizations by reminding others of how they publicly announced they were new members. New members typically perform a step show and reveal themselves to the public through grandiose fanfare called a probate.

> And just because I publicly probated—actually knowing what the word probate means. It means to submit your will to something else. So, if I can publicly probate, I had to publicly denounce and to resubmit my will to God publicly for the world to see. (S13)

Similar to the themes I highlighted previously, these experiences did not occur in all speakers' journeys. Still, the compilation provides a depth of knowledge that BGLOs often overlook or dismiss. Although I display the experiences in phases, that does not mean that each person experienced each code in the phase I assigned it in Table 4.1. Hence, naming it the iterative journey to denouncing.

Summary

This study aimed to answer the research question: Why do people say they denounce their BGLOs? I performed thematic analysis on 18 videos with 17 speakers. This Chapter began with overviewing the speakers' demographic information. The demographic data included what type of organizations the speakers denounced, how long they had been members before denouncing, membership level, and spiritual level. The Chapter included thematic maps illustrating the analysis' progression from codes to themes. Next, it outlined the 12 themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. I separated them into two domains: internal and external. The internal themes were *Blasphemy, Practices*, *Rituals*, *Idolatry, Deception*, and *Warfare*. The external themes were *Believing in Absolute Truth*, *Nearing the Last Days, Receiving Godly*

Guidance, *Integrating Other's Influence*, *Living in the Binary*, and *Evangelizing*. Then, the Chapter provided insight on the scriptural evidence speakers provided throughout the dataset. Lastly, the Chapter narrated the journey speakers went through to denounce their organizations. In the next chapter I will review how the themes compare to the literature outlined in Chapter II and inferences I make from the demographics. I also discuss implications for leadership and change, before making recommendations for further study. Lastly, Chapter V gives readers insight into my personal reflections throughout this dissertation experience.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This study aimed to find the most significant reasons people say they denounce BGLOs. This research is meaningful because throughout the 19th century, BGLOs played a vital role in the racial uplift of Black people, but they currently struggle to remain relevant. There are various threats the organizations recognize, like hazing, financial sustainability, relevance in an era of social activism, and elitism. Still, the anti-BGLO movement is a growing problem that might not be on BGLOs' radar yet. This study provides themes on why denouncers think BGLOs are not aligned with Christian principles and decided to leave. Chapter V summarizes and interprets the findings outlined in Chapter IV, compares the results to the literature reviewed in Chapter II, outlines implications for leadership and change, makes recommendations for further study, and ends with personal reflections.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

A Snapshot of Speakers' Experiences and Their Influences

I analyzed 18 videos to determine the main reasons people denounce BGLOs. I used the content from their videos to ascertain a snapshot of demographic information. Although incomplete, the demographic information available illustrates how the majority of the speakers lacked experience in their organizations and faith. Therefore, implying it would serve them to acquire a more robust understanding of both. Their inexperience may have also influenced them to hone in on the initial rituals and the most apparent misalignments versus gaining a well-rounded knowledge from being a member over more time. The demographic data included how long they were in their organizations, what type of organization, what level of membership during which they underwent intake, how involved they were, and their spirituality level.

If BGLOs consider this research as a source of organizational change, the focus on initiation could inform their decision of where to start. Over half the speakers were initiated in an undergraduate chapter from the information I obtained. There could have potentially been more undergraduate representation in the data, but I could not ascertain some speakers' initiation levels. The most commonly cited ritual misaligned with Christianity was the initiation ceremony. This ritual was possibly the most memorable, especially for speakers who were members for less than 10 years, because it is one of the first and only rituals that every BGLO member must undergo. The common thread of highlighting this particular ritual emphasizes either the lack of exposure to other rituals throughout the membership lifespan or the others were not as severely misaligned.

Almost half of speakers lacked exposure in their organizations and faith. This information prompts me to wonder if their perspectives of the organizations and how they intersect with their faith would have changed if they had more exposure. For example, would they still consider them evil if the speakers were more aware of the multiple BGLO influences other than Masonic, such as the Black Church, benevolent societies, and civic organizations, all of which have helped shape BGLOs? If speakers were both in their organizations for less than 10 years and initiated through an undergraduate chapter, campus Greek life probably heavily influenced their decision. As speakers noted, membership in BGLOs is a lifetime commitment. If speakers decided about the entire organization based on three or four years out of potentially 60–70 years, they based their decision on a minute percentage of the maximum time they could have spent in the organization.

Similar to the maximum lifespan of a BGLO member with added experience over time, the Christian experience is the same. One speaker called themself a "baby Christian." Speaker 5

said, “And a problem that I had as a baby Christian was I wanted to be in the world.” This confession of being young in the faith corroborates my claim that speakers could benefit from more experience in their faith, which could have impacted their denouncement journey differently. This concept is in 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 and Hebrews 5:12–14 (*King James Bible*, 1989). The Bible uses an extended metaphor to liken people inexperienced in Christianity to babies who do not understand all God’s principles and how to apply them. As over half of the speakers were new in their faith, based on these scriptures, they may have been “babes in Christ” who are not yet ready to “discern both good and evil” (*King James Bible*, 1989, 1 Corinthians 3:1–2; Hebrews 5:12–14). The speakers’ potential lack of understanding their newfound faith and its diverse aspects could have provided an imbalanced view that would lead them to denounce.

Fraternity and sorority representation in the dataset were about even, with eight of the speakers representing fraternities and nine representing sororities. This study’s even representation would imply that denouncing your BGLO does not tend to be skewed by gender. However, there were more videos from ex-sorority members than ex-fraternity members in the entire dataset that we did not explore before we reached saturation. I intentionally organized the data rounds to have equal representation, but the longer I researched this topic, the more an imbalance would have occurred. Although it is not reflected in this study’s demographics, the overall presence of more females than males expressing their faith corroborates the literature on the Black Church. While Black men tend to lead the church, the church’s congregation, ministries, and auxiliaries consist of much more women than men (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). Women outnumber men in the Black church and religious expression (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007).

Reliability of the Scriptural Evidence

The speakers provided scriptural evidence throughout the data to support their claims that BGLOs are blasphemous, and that Christians should not be members. While speakers provided the scriptures and their interpretations, they did not include the justification or criteria for validity. Therefore, their application of scripture is yet to be examined. There should be more explanation of how speakers arrived at their interpretations and applications to BGLOs, so their audiences can determine if their analyses are reliable or not. One theme that emerged surrounding this proof was *Believing in Absolute Truth*. This theme refers to the idea that the speakers' interpretation and application of scripture were absolute truths. Commentary on scripture deals with hermeneutics, "the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation" (Britannica, 2021b). Throughout history, Christians' primary purpose of hermeneutics has been to uncover the values and truths expressed in the Bible using exegetical methods (Britannica, 2021b). Two notable processes referring to scriptural interpretation in hermeneutics are exegesis and eisegesis. J. G. Williams (1973) described the difference between them:

> Exegesis is legitimate interpretation which 'reads out of' the text what the original author or authors meant to convey. Eisegesis, on the other hand, reads into the text what the interpreter wishes to find or thinks he finds there. It expresses the reader's own subjective ideas, not the meaning which is in the text. (p. 218)

According to the exegesis definition, "a given text may yield a number of very different interpretations according to the exegetical presuppositions and techniques applied to it" (Britannica, 2021b). Pepinsky (1982) asserted that speakers risk reading their biases into the interpretation if they are not explicit about its rationale. I would argue that some of the speakers' analyses could include uninformed opinions that do not consider the historical context, the author, the audience, or the scriptural context in which the author wrote it.

Receiving Godly Guidance: Thematic Evaluation for Organizational Change

Each theme translates to the reasons speakers denounced their organizations. As I evaluate the propensity of each theme to be used for organizational change, there is one— *Receiving Godly Guidance*—that appears useless in that pursuit. It is important to note that this theme is also the only reason unanimous among all the speakers. Every speaker stated they received a message or prompting from God leading them to denounce. While organizations may further investigate and reject claims that the organizations are blasphemous, which was the second most common theme, there is not much debate on whether a person hears from God. This type of experience is so personal that this reason for leaving a BGLO is almost indisputable. Speakers could eventually have another revelation that what they thought was the voice of God telling them to go could have been their conscience or a combination of that and others' influence. Yet, they would likely not conclude that based on BGLOs efforts to get them to stay. While hearing God's voice is a profound experience that BGLOs should be aware their members are experiencing as a result of BGLO activity, preventing members from experiencing spiritual encounters is an arduous task. Therefore, the most efficient change efforts could be to address the root cause that prompted these members to leave, which will fall under the themes in the external domain.

Comparison of Findings and Previous Literature

BGLO Origins

Chapter II uncovered that some anti-BGLO activists argue that the origin of Greek-letter organizations is inconsistent with Christianity because they inherited organizational structures and rituals from Freemasons. Contrarily, the literature reflects that the Freemasons, the Black Church, benevolent societies, Black civic organizations, and African core values all influenced

the BGLO founders when they created the organizations. As previously stated in Chapter II, Phi Beta Sigma member Alain Leroy Locke coined the racial milieu of BGLOs the "New Negro" ethos (Parks & Hughey, 2020). He coined this term because the impetus for BGLOs was intertwined with the Black Church, benevolent and secret societies, White fraternities, and collegiate literary societies (Parks & Hughey, 2020). The Black Church inspired BGLOs to include ideals of siblinghood, civic action, and community service (Parks & Hughey, 2020).

Hatchett (2002), a former member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, claimed that GLOs are satanic because Masonry is derived from silly myths, idolatry, and occultism. He asserted that BGLOs' lineage from Masonry doomed them because they did not solely involve Christian influences; therefore, the organizations are unredeemable. He noted that in contrast to BGLOs, people who strayed away from God could always repent and return to the righteous fold because they came from God and were made in his image. According to Hatchett (2002), this opportunity is never available to BGLOs since the founders did not exclusively pattern them after Christianity. He said they could never repent, restructure, or become right in God's eyes (Hatchett, 2002). This philosophy exemplifies the *Living in the Binary* theme of this study. When discussing this theme in Chapter IV, I mentioned that Christians who tend to live in the binary disregard nuance in their beliefs. In this case, Hatchett (2002) believed that God either can or cannot save people or functions of society. I disagree that BGLOs are irredeemable due to their origins, because that would limit God's ability from being able to turn something seemingly inherently evil into good. There is a Christian colloquialism based on the scripture Genesis 50:20 that says: "what the enemy meant for evil, God turned it for good" (*King James Bible*, 1989). To claim BGLOs are doomed from righteousness due to their origin would deny God's limitless power.

Gray (2004), an ex-member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, concluded that if Freemasons had no reverence for God, there could not be reverence for Christ in today's Masonic organization, and likewise, BGLOs. Hatchett (2002) and Gray (2004) presented parallel views that BGLOs and Freemasonry are connected in their founding; and that BGLOs cannot apply Christian principles to their organizations because of the link to Freemasonry. The speakers' perspectives of BGLOs corroborate Hatchett's (2002) argument. Hatchett (2002), Gray (2004), and many speakers disregarded other BGLO founding influences. This inattention to history could be because they are unaware of the Black Church, benevolent societies, and civic organizations' additional impact on BGLOs. Again, however, the rigid binary way of thinking could lead speakers to think that the negative parts of BGLOs' origins are the sum of the whole. The following quotes from Speakers 15 and 3 exemplify these thoughts.

- And this just further shows the true origins of Greek organizations, not Christ, Masonic rituals. And I'm sure most people know about Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, and many people don't even bother trying to debate whether Rosicrucianism or Freemasonry is Godly or not because, like I'm sure that we all can—all collectively agree that it's highly demonic. And those are where Greek orgs come from. (S15)

- "And the Illuminati works with these Freemasons. They're all these Luciferians who create these secret society organizations and these cults with these elites and these corrupt behind people who are running the world and deceiving you" (S3).

Explicit and Implicit Principles

Black Greek-letter organizations embody both implicit and explicit principles, and upon further examination, BGLO leaders may need to explain some of the implicit principles clearly to incoming members. There are explicit principles throughout the organizations that one would notice upon an exploration of BGLO history, mottos, mission statements, crests, and imagery. They are service, siblinghood, and scholarship. They all have these principles in common. One implicit principle the literature pointed out was a consistent spirit of racial uplift present when

college students established these organizations. Racial uplift was vital in manifesting the BGLOs in the 20th century because elite Blacks saw it as their duty to lead other Black people to political, economic, and educational freedom. Christianity or spirituality was another implicit principle. According to Martin and Johnson (2009), it is not hard to find a religious influence on fraternity and sorority values, symbols, and rituals—whether overt or covert. In 1979, Bobby McMinn found that religion was also a precept, in addition to the explicit principles of scholarship, fellowship, leadership, and service. Rebholz and Hoke (2009) added that although members may have made religion an original component of fraternities and sororities, they may have forgotten it as a precept. My explanation of the findings may confirm this point later in this section.

Explicit Principles in the Data

Speakers recognized service as a principle of the organizations but denounced the component because they claimed God was not honored by the organization's community service. Speaker 1 said:

> When you do community service and things for the people, who gets the glory for it? Not God. Because when you do it, you're wearing your jackets with your letters. So, when you come and clean up this and when you come and help those people, they can be like, 'yo, the fraternity is some good people.'

Among other speakers, Speaker 1 believed the organizations get glory from community service instead of God. Speakers had varied responses and conflicts with the siblinghood aspect of their BGLOs. Some felt the loss of siblinghood when they denounced, felt like they did not need the organization for siblinghood or they did not feel a change at all. The following quotes from Speakers 17, 4, and 2 exhibit these sentiments:

- "I realized I was breaking bonds with my sorority sisters, not friendships but bonds. That oath, that covenant I went into with them. I was breaking that, and I grieved that. I'm going to be honest, I did" (S17).

- "Now, don't misunderstand this letter. To everyone I have met due to [the fraternity], I don't want to cut ties. I have a genuine love for each and every one of you" (S4).
- "I can do community service and get sisterliness through my sisters in Christ, which God has given me" (S2).

The explicit principle of scholarship was not very prevalent in the data, other than one speaker citing that they wanted to join to keep her grade point average (GPA) up.

Implicit Principles in the Data

Speakers did not address the implicit principle of racial uplift mentioned in Chapter II. The speakers had an awareness of the Christian tenets BGLOs touted. Speaker 1 said, "The only thing that people ever told me when I was joining my [organization], 'it's based on Christian principles.' That's all they ever told me, 'Christian principles.'" Notably, speakers rejected the organizations' foundations on Christian principles because they struggled to discount the disconnect between Christianity, BGLO practices, and rituals. "Actually, the crazy thing is many times living purely like Jesus in these fraternities and sororities will cause you many times to be the complete outcast. And if that's the case, how is this based off of Christian principles?" said Speaker 13. Speakers also saw scripture in rituals as antithetical to having Christian foundations.

> It's got a scripture in there, but then it's gotten mixed up with other pagan stuff. And, no, it's like if you—would you eat a cake and it had a fly in it or a maggot? Would you eat it? That's what we're doing when we're taking God's stuff and then mixing it up with wicked stuff. (S2)

While speakers were aware of and embraced some explicit and implicit BGLO principles, most speakers rejected the others because of the grave misalignment they experienced within the organizations.

As it pertains to BGLOs aligning themselves with its implicit espoused principles, the organizations will have to decide whether they want their professed identity to align with their projected identity. The conflict between these two identities shows the BGLOs' competing

commitments. If they want to have Christian principles as a foundation, I do not think they can continue to include imagery and rituals that contradict Christianity. BGLOs need to examine certain hymns, poems, ritual sayings, and Greek mascot representatives that may put the organization in place of God to determine if they truly align with the Christian principles they claim to have. Those aspects are obvious issues BGLOs will need to address because the contradiction with Christian principles is evident. However, suppose BGLOs are not open to changing or ridding themselves of those contradictions. In that case, they should re-establish and clarify their identity and how it falls within or outside religious classifications. BGLOs never claimed to be Christian organizations. They only claimed to possess those kinds of principles, and if that is still the case, BGLOs can clarify that they also include polytheistic ideals. To conclude, the organizations have to decide who they want to be, address the misalignments, or communicate how their implicit principles do not conflict with their practices and rituals.

Reasons for Denouncing in the Literature vs. Data

The literature I reviewed for why people denounce BGLOs only consisted of three self-published books. I could not find any peer-reviewed articles or empirical data on the topic. Current research on why people denounce BGLOs revolves around religion. Yet, there is still overlap.

Chapter II outlines how people who are former Jehovah's Witnesses, KKK, cult members, and NRM members decided to leave their organizations or religions due to religious or moral conflict. They realized either the organizations conflicted with their faith or the religion conflicted with their morals. Similarly, the literature on why people denounce BGLOs includes a religious conflict with the organizations related to the BGLOs' origins, rituals, and alleged idolatry. The parallel in the literature and results from this study is religious and moral conflict in

the literature and *Blasphemy* in the results. Speakers denounced BGLOs because they believed the BGLOs conflicted with their Christian beliefs. Most of the issues with moral and ethical conflict start with the group members' disillusionment. Members had an epiphany that the group or its leaders were not what they claimed. Members found SYDA leaders to be unethical because they displayed malicious behavior. Ex-KKK realized KKK leaders were wrong because the Bible does not support racial superiority. Finally, former BGLO members concluded that BGLOs are not built on Christian principles because they perform blasphemous rituals and practices. Moral and religious conflict and disillusionment are reasons people denounce organizations that parallel but occur simultaneously, as other reasons throughout the iterative journey to denouncing. The way men who were KKK members came into a newfound faith in Christianity and understood there were misalignments in KKK and Christianity is the same way BGLO members experienced their revelations after establishing themselves as Christians.

The second intersection between the literature on general organizations and BGLOs deals with violence. People decided to leave the football system, the Jehovah's Witness church, cults, SYDA, and the Church of Scientology because of abuse and physical violence. In the BGLOs, people denounced due to hazing, which includes a conglomerate of psychological and physical abuse elements. I was not prepared for this finding's weakness in the data because there was a stark contrast between the literature and the results. The information from this study lacked such a presence of abuse and violence, which was shocking. This was shocking because as I reviewed the literature, I saw similarities between the literature and my understanding of BGLO culture and my experiences within a BGLO. When I read about the degradation, mental and psychological shock, and physical abuse, I immediately expected BGLO denouncers to affirm that hazing was a significant reasons for denouncing. While hazing manifested under the theme

of *Practices*, it did not weigh enough to become a separate theme. This contrast could be because the BGLO denouncers are more focused on the spiritual nature of the organizations. The main sentiments ex-BGLO members had around hazing were that the organizations were deceptive because they presented messaging that hazing does not occur when the reality is, it does.

The intersection of wanting better for others and *Evangelizing* is another overlap in the literature and results. Some people left their organizations because they did not want other people to have the same experiences or make mistakes. Speakers stated that preventing others from making mistakes factored into their decisions to denounce BGLOs publicly. In public organizations, they seek better for others by leaving, speaking out against the organizations when others are afraid to, writing books, creating or joining support groups; these have all occurred within the anti-BGLO movement. My preliminary research uncovered the support groups and conferences for BGLO denouncers. General organization denouncers talked about getting to a point where they grew tired of seeing others suffer the negative consequences of memberships in the Church of Scientology, SYDA, or the NFL and collegiate football system.

These experiences drove them to denounce in order to affect change. Multiple speakers from this study discussed understanding their role in preventing current members from staying in BGLOs and keeping prospective members from joining. Sometimes, protecting others was more of an influence than enduring personal harm. Scientology, SYDA, and Jehovah's Witness members became enraged and ignited to act after hearing how their loved ones and family were mistreated. While the speakers from this study did not express experiencing the same severity level, because most of the harm they described is spiritual instead of physical, they also felt responsible for educating and evangelizing to others.

The last two examples of mirrored reasons in the literature and study results for denouncing are *Idolatry* and *Rituals*. One reason from the literature on why people denounce general organizations that did not emerge in the results of this study is the loss of autonomy. While I know this sometimes occurs through hazing, I understand it may not be as pertinent as other reasons for denouncing a BGLO. Therefore, I did not expect this to rise to the level of becoming a theme. Although all five reasons to denounce a BGLO from the literature review appeared in the data, Greek preachers/prophets and secrecy did not emerge as a complete theme. As previously mentioned, the authors did not include the most common reason the speakers stated for denouncing—*Receiving Godly Guidance*—in the literature on denouncing BGLOs.

I did not have expectations for what would be the most prevalent theme. Therefore, it was not surprising that *Receiving Godly Guidance* was a unanimous occurrence. I find it interesting, however, that Gray (2004), Hatchett (2002), and Allah (1992) neglected to include hearing from God as a reason to denounce BGLOs. This is the most significant gap between the literature and results. The absence of this theme in their publications could speak to the notion that denouncing BGLOs is not a personal decision as much as it is a mandatory decision for any person who claims to be a Christian; because to include Godly guidance as a reason would absolve anyone who has not experienced that from denouncing. Instead, the ex-BGLO authors from the literature review wanted all Christians to denounce, whether they have heard from God or not. The duality of denouncing being a personal decision versus a mandatory decision for Christians further emphasizes how people who denounce BGLOs are not monolithic.

Implications for Leadership and Change

One of the impetuses for this research was BGLOs' misalignments with their espoused Christian principles, which caused members to denounce and call them anti-Christian. Today,

people have more access to self-publish their detailed thoughts on blogs and social media platforms. Thus, we are witnessing an anti-BGLO movement of people giving testimonies about why they denounced BGLOs and why others should. With Christianity being the common cause, I decided to delve into their claims. As I conclude my research, I outline implications for personal, BGLO, and organizational leadership and change. While this study intended to ascertain information to support BGLO improvement, I will also explain how other organizations can benefit from it.

Implications for Personal Leadership

While there are implications for BGLO leadership, as a scholar-practitioner in the BGLO community, there are some things I can do to improve the state of BGLOs. I can make my work accessible and consult with BGLOs on it. According to Hughey and Parks (2011), BGLOs rarely use scholarly literature or empirical evidence to guide their organizational decisions. Still, they insisted that they must begin to use studies such as this to remain relevant (Hughey & Parks, 2011). Therefore, an implication for change would be to make this study available to the general public by publishing it in book form, as Hughey and Parks (2011) recommended. In addition to making my work more accessible to those outside the narrow field of BGLO research in academia, I could also present my findings to the organizations and consult with them on organizational change if they proclaim that as a goal.

Implications for BGLO Leadership and Change

As mentioned previously, this research intended to shed light on an understudied field with the purpose of improvement. Next, I will highlight things that BGLO leadership can consider as they manage the organizations, then I establish how this investigation can inform change.

Implications for BGLO Leadership

There may be ways the organization currently analyzes internal data to inform its decision-making processes, but external data could also serve as a buttress for BGLO leadership. Part of the significance of this study was to strengthen the BGLO sustainability so they can continue impacting the Black community positively. If BGLOs do not incorporate empirical studies into their strategic plans for the future, their legacies could suffer as a result. This study exhibits imagery, structural, and alignment issues between BGLOs' espoused principles and the members' experiences that BGLOs need to address. This misalignment, manifesting in a movement of young members making a general exodus, could potentially continue to snowball and affect recruitment and retention, as I mentioned in Chapter I. Hence, BGLO leadership should begin to heed scholarly work on their organizations.

BGLO leaders must also have a clear understanding of the power dynamics within their organizations. The power within BGLOs and the BGLO culture lies within the leaders, financial members, inactive members, host institutions, and anti-BGLO activists. "Organizations are inherently political entities and managers who ignore or fail to understand how power and influence work in organizations find it difficult to be effective and ethical on the job" (Hill, 1994, p. 2). There are different types of power and power systems within and outside of organizations. There's legitimate power, expert power, coercive power, reward power, charisma power, and information power (Goncalves & College, 2013). Most of the highest-ranking BGLO leaders are elected and hold legitimate power, referring to the "authority of a formal position" (Goncalves & College, 2013, p. 136). Inactive members are sorority and fraternity members who have not paid membership dues to participate in official organization business; they are often still a part of the

community. These members tend to have coercive power, which can be a negative form of power that does not encourage desired behaviors (Goncalves & College, 2013).

BGLO leaders could engage campus partners and anti-BGLO activists to understand their attributed identity (Soenon & Moingeon, 2002). Attributed identity refers to the attributes ascribed to the organization by various audiences (Soenon & Moingeon, 2002). Understanding the organization's attributed identity can help close gaps between how the organization perceives itself and how students and denouncers perceive it. Engaging with campus stakeholders could determine whether students' attitudes shift away from enthusiasm towards the Greek community. BGLO leaders can assess the initiation numbers to find declines in the number and quality of collegiate members joining. Campus professionals can provide an unbiased perspective and extra layer of support for any potential changes BGLOs decide to make.

Organization charts emphasize vertical command and control chains (Pearse, 2000). This means leaders essentially command orders of those vertically aligned underneath them. Mooijiman et al. (2019) defined power as an "inherently relational construct" that includes one part—the leader—controlling the other part—the followers (p. 2). While BGLOs have implemented these traditional command and control models throughout time, the power of organizational alignment often lies in both the leaders' and followers' hands. There are many ways to attempt organizational alignment; however, an organization's method to achieve it is not always a shared decision or a consensus. Often, the executives or leaders of the organizations decide how the organizations will try to obtain alignment, without including critical stakeholders in the decision-making process (Collins, 2000). Essential stakeholders of BGLOs include lower-level leaders, members, and inactive members whom the leaders expect to implement changes they had no part in creating. Based on solid research evidence, people support what they

help create, and therefore they must be brought into the process of change in the initial stages of the organization as well (Kusy & Holloway, 2014). Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) described the tenets of followership that BGLOs should apply to their concept of leadership to ensure future efforts for change are successful.

> Leadership can only occur if there is followership—without followers and following behaviors there is no leadership. This means behaviors are a crucial component of the leadership process. Following behaviors represent a willingness to defer to another in some way. (p. 83)

BGLO leaders should always consider the marginalized groups in their decision-making processes. Members without leadership roles, or subordinates, inexplicably hold power in organizations but are often marginalized. As previously mentioned, people are less resistant to support efforts when leaders include them from an earlier stage in the process (Kusy & Holloway, 2014). Lebow and Simon (1997) discuss how employees in their intended roles as followers feel disenfranchised, and there seems to be no reward or payoff because nobody trusts anybody else. Marginalized people are not frequently present in the centered person's immediate circle of influence (Vasas, 2005). Like elected and appointed leaders, those who hold power and privilege become oblivious to marginalized others (Vasas, 2005). The authors of *Lasting Change: The Shared Values Process that Makes Companies Great* (Lebow & Simon, 1997) mentioned leaders who once used a paternalistic, command and control style of leading must now shift to gaining a consensus to be successful. BGLO leaders should consider making this shift to address organizational threats in the 21st century, including anti-Christian claims.

The person who would be a good leader today faces the challenge of becoming a facilitator who can gather a new follower style: followers who understand their responsibility and participation in a new partnership with their leaders (Lebow & Simon, 1997). BGLO culture includes members and inactive members who still have influential power. Leaders inundated

with their power tend not to include others' preferences. Marginalized groups in organizations consist of people who leaders do not consider. In this case, this group is typically not included in cultural and large-scale organizational change. Leaders tend to overlook them, although they hold significant power to resist or implement change. BGLO leaders must make a conscious effort to consider and incorporate everyone with the power to influence the organization when making decisions.

Implications for BGLO Change

While certain practices are an ingrained characteristic of BGLO culture, BGLOs already condemn most of the worst practices in their codes of conduct. Therefore, the largest substantial misalignments the organizations could address lie within their rituals and imagery. If BGLOs were open to changing to create an experience for members more aligned with Christianity, I propose starting there. The process I suggest would be using Beisser's (1970) paradoxical theory of change, Beckhard and R. T. Harris' (1987) change formula, and Kusy and Holloway's (2014) field guide to real-time culture change. Beisser's (1970) paradoxical theory of change explains that change does not occur simply from desire. This is also a sentiment Beckhard and R. T. Harris' (1987) change formula supports: creating the environment necessary to change. As demonstrated in Chapter I, the formula shows the level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, multiplied by the desirability of the proposed change or vision, multiplied by the practicality of the change through action steps, must be greater than the resistance to the change (Beckhard & R. T. Harris, 1987). Kusy and Holloway's (2014) field guide to real-time culture change encourages involvement from varied stakeholders to plan and implement the change in real-time to combat resistance. BGLOs should use these theories and scholarly works to inform their efforts.

As there is no centralized position of control for all nine organizations, I infer there would need to be a strategic management process in which NPHC leaders collaborate in decision-making to assess and achieve alignment with Christian principles. The NPHC does not have positions with formal power to implement change. Yet, as previously stated in Chapter I, when there is a threat to all organizations large enough, they can convene to address the issue. The collaboration in the decision-making process has been beneficial within different sectors of the same organization (Gartlan & Shanks, 2007). As discussed by Kotter (1985), "power is the ability to influence others to get things done, while authority is the formal right that comes to a person who occupies a particular position, since power does not necessarily accompany a position" (p. 6). Researchers defined power as having "asymmetric control over valuable resources" (Mooijman et al., 2019, p. 2). Hopefully, proven alignment methods within one organization could be assessed as a proper fit to contribute to the success of multiple council organizations seeking alignment.

Implications for Organizational Leadership and Change

While BGLOs can benefit from this study, public organizations and companies struggling with alignment can also. The following implications apply to general organizations, including BGLOs. In the organization development sector, principles translate to values. I will use the two interchangeably. There is a responsibility on top-level leaders to ensure the values are clear for the organization to pursue alignment. Organizations must clarify their values and use them as a foundation for strategic plans before onboarding members. Otherwise, they may lose an engaged workforce's commitment, creativity, and knowledge (S. Williams, 2002). Senge et al. (1994) also reported that for individuals to identify opportunities, contribute effectively, and act responsibly, organizations must communicate the guiding principles and ensure the workforce is

aware of them. Unfortunately, in many of today's organizations, as some Speakers stated of BGLOs, core principles have been relegated to an implicit or undefined form, or may have been deliberately repressed in certain instances (S. Williams, 2002). Organizations manage the members' fit from a hiring/selection process perspective. According to Collins (2000), you cannot program people to exhibit values they did not initially possess. "You find, attract and retain people who are already predisposed to sharing your values" (Collins, 2000, "Identifying Core Values" section).

Organizations unconsciously choose their foundational morals by their decisions, actions, strategies, and long-term goals they implement (Fritz, 1999). Thus, it seems crucial for organizations to identify and define shared values explicitly, so the organization structures, processes, and formal and informal rules (culture) are combined to achieve common goals. Since organization culture is based on assumptions regarding its members' beliefs and principles about how the organization works, and these values and beliefs affect the entire system of organization strategies, processes, and behaviors; an organization will only be as effective as its ability to live its values (Fitzpatrick, 2007).

In addition to communicating and clarifying principles, training members and employees is an added layer of assurance for organizational alignment. Internal communication and training perform alignment by fostering employees' internalization of brand values, which bolsters their commitment to enact brand-supporting behaviors (Thomson et al., 1999). Workers who exhibit the company's values provide a worthwhile experience for stakeholders, which helps the organization sustain a competitive edge (Chong, 2007). It is not good enough that employees understand the company's brand values and have the right skills if the goal is to be brand ambassadors; they also have to believe in and internalize the brand values by enacting

appropriate behaviors (Vallaster & Chernatony, 2005). When employees understand and align themselves with the core values, they better appreciate their roles and higher commitment to delivering the brand promise, resulting in higher brand performance (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003).

Some organizations conduct value audits or value assessments of their current environments (Trickett, 1997). The alignment audit measures how people implement a company's mission and principles (Crotts et al., 2005). A value audit could be helpful to any organization that has a mission, practices, policies, and procedures, whether the organization is non-profit. Assessing the members' values, and auditing which of the organization's values members are executing, would help create alignment once the researchers analyze results and design strategies to close any gaps. Researchers could pattern an audit after a multifaceted model by Soenon and Moingeon (2002) that offered a holistic way of showing how internal communication and training can contribute to identity alignment. This model can serve as a paradigm for organizations that have aspects of their identity that are out of alignment with how people experience them.

The model overviews five facets of identity (Soenon & Moingeon, 2002). These five facets of identity are professed identity, projected identity, experienced identity, manifested identity, and attributed identity. Professed identity refers to what a group or organization asserts about itself. Projected identity relates to the elements an organization uses to present itself to specific audiences in more or less controlled ways. Experienced identity refers to what organization members experience concerning their organization, more or less consciously. Manifested identity refers to an organization's historical identity or elements that have characterized the organization over time. Lastly, attributed identity refers to attributes ascribed to

the organization by its various audiences (Soenon & Moingeon, 2002). Understanding stakeholders' experience of all facets of the organization's identity could uncover strengths and areas for growth.

Recommendations for Further Study

My recommendations for further study include recreating my study, increasing the population, and thoroughly investigating single aspects of my dissertation. The developing nature of this research area informs the recommendations for further research. These recommendations will help build the research and literature foundation of BGLO threats in the 21st century, denouncing, and organizational alignment. Further research could change the data source to include videos with multiple speakers and other forms of media like blogs, Facebook and Twitter posts, and articles. As Edmonson and McManus (2007) championed qualitative methods for nascent research, I advise following their guidance for my recommendations for future studies. There is still a wealth of knowledge to be explored on this topic and rich, detailed evidence should be gathered by interviews, focus groups, case studies, and longitudinal studies (Edmonson & McManus, 2007).

Once more researchers conduct studies of this nature, mixed methods would be beneficial to include surveys of both ex-members and current BGLO members. Surveying a larger population would add depth to the former members' claims that BGLOs are anti-Christian or BGLO claims that they are built on Christian principles. Including multiple forms of media, as previously suggested, could eventually lend itself to performing content analysis instead of thematic analysis. I propose expanding the population to diversify the output and determine if and how it impacts the results.

As I undertook this research, I knew that I would only ascertain one side of the story by focusing solely on former BGLO members. As one of the only empirical studies before this in *Black Greek-Letter Organizations 2.0: New Directions in the Study of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (Hughey & Parks, 2011) did, future research should thoroughly explore current BGLO members' experiences. Researchers could perform interviews to discuss how BGLO members feel about the themes from this research. As mentioned in Chapter II and the data, there are many Christian clergy members and leaders in BGLOs. Utilizing them as the population for a study that specifically addresses the scriptural evidence and the themes of *Believing in Absolute Truth*, *Living in the Binary*, *Blasphemy* and *Warfare* could balance the literature on the topic. Researchers should also qualitatively study BGLO members' experiences with *Receiving Godly Guidance*, *Evangelizing*, and *Integrating Others' Influence* to see how or why they have not influenced them to leave BGLOs.

In addition, I propose a list of new investigations for further study. Since most of the speakers in this study were inexperienced in their organizations and faiths, further research should explore the journeys of BGLO members who have established experiences in their organizations and personal Christian beliefs. This study can delve into whether Christian members have ever dealt with hearing from God about leaving, and wrestling with the BGLO and Christian identity. Researchers could also narrate people's journeys who denounce and later recant or rejoin their organizations. Due to a large amount of scriptural evidence that emerged from the data, one could do a hermeneutic study on the scriptures used to validate the speakers' decision to denounce to see if their interpretations and applications are credible. Lastly, researchers should follow up on McMinn's (1979) study with a content analysis on the esoteric written initiation rituals of national social college fraternities. One could use this current study as

a supplement to McMinn's (1979) to analyze the ritual manuals of BGLOs to understand their implicit and explicit principles.

No one has fully documented this anti-BGLO movement from an empirical perspective. Therefore, another study I recommend is to ascertain the precise impact denouncers make on the organizations. Researchers should determine if increasing public criticism against BGLOs has translated to recruitment and retention issues. Has this issue increased attrition, or is the increased media attention not equivalent to the organizations' experience? This study could also include the various ways BGLOs track members denouncing. Some may just accept a letter, and others may conduct exit surveys. The documentation the organizations have could also create a comparative study between what the ex-members present to the public on social media and what they report to the BGLOs. Someone could seek access to the BGLO records to study what percentage of members are leaving based on the themes from this investigation. Lastly, investigators could also poll prospective BGLO members to determine if and to what level denouncers influence their decision to join or not.

The last thing I suggest for further research is a comparative study of this anti-BGLO movement and the Christian nationalist movement. According to Burnett (2022), Christian nationalism is a movement of "ultra-conservative" evangelicals that believe America is a Christian nation and the government should maintain that religious superiority. Christian nationalists potentially exhibit rigid religious views revealed in the *Believing in Absolute Truth* and *Living in the Binary* themes. The QAnon movement is another that personifies extremism that could be compared and contrasted to the aspects of this study. QAnon is a conspiracy theory that promotes Donald Trump waging war against satanic pedophiles within the "deep state," Democratic Party, and Hollywood (Holoyda, 2022). The most recognizable similarity between

these three movements is the idea that their version of the truth is the only acceptable and accurate version. A deeper examination could uncover more.

Personal Reflections

This section will outline what I learned from this research and how it changed me as a person and scholar-practitioner. Undertaking this study required me to be a reflexive researcher in that I constantly remained aware of my natural responses, thoughts, and feelings about the data. As a member of a BGLO, I understood the difficulty of inundating myself with opinions against the organization I have put so much time, money, and effort into. I journaled through voice memos throughout this research and shared my journey with my methodologist. This study's purpose was to learn the most significant reasons people denounce BGLOs because I saw the growing anti-BGLOs movement as a threat to recruitment and retention. I wanted to perform this study because I want this research to serve as a resource for BGLOs to course-correct if and when they choose to address these misalignment allegations.

What I Learned from this Research

One of the main things I learned from this research is the only unanimous reason speakers gave for denouncing is something BGLOs probably will not and cannot address. That is, speakers leaving because they feel like they received guidance from God to do so. Hearing the voice of God or following instructions from God is a very personal experience, and once someone decides based on that experience, they are not likely to change their minds. In addition, this anti-BGLO movement is not the only threat to the BGLO system, so if they were to resolve any issues to quell this movement, I do not think addressing the theme of *Receiving Godly Guidance* would be effective.

I chose to explore this subject because some accounts from my preliminary research were valid and gave me a fresh perspective. I can relate to spiritual experiences where I received instructions from God that seemed to make no sense or were contrary to my plans. Although I disagreed with some things the speakers said, there were more things I understood with no explanation. There were other things the speakers said that I neither agreed nor disagreed with but was open to more education on it. So, while I'm a Christian member of a BGLO, I realized I have a lot in common with denouncers.

Another thing I learned from this research is that denouncers are not a monolith. BGLO members often dismiss denouncers and stereotype them as radical religious people. While some may seem extreme in their speech, delivery, and thoughts, others are more even keeled. They also disagree on points like denouncing as a personal decision versus denouncing being the standard for all Christians. While I previously thought only radicalism drove their reasons for leaving, they incorporated other factors like morality, fear, and blind obedience.

As I incorporated data from all BGLOs except two, I found the experiences among the ones I studied were very similar. The commonality between the organizations shows that it would behoove them to collaborate to eliminate threats like this anti-BGLO movement and other crises that attack their relevance. The younger, less experienced speakers noting the Masonic origins exhibit a need for BGLOs to increase awareness of its foundational ties to the Black Church, benevolent societies, and Black civic groups that upheld the Black community in the 19th century. Increasing this kind of awareness among members could aid in the understanding of the multifaceted nature of BGLO beginnings. While the speakers' experiences within their BGLOs were homogeneous, their path to denouncing varied. They experienced some of the same things, yet they did not follow the same pattern.

How this Research Changed Me as a Person

From a Greek life perspective, members marginalize denouncers and non-members who denounce BGLOs. Vasas (2005) described marginalization happening in the following way:

> Marginalization can only occur only in relation to a margin. Margins include the physical (concrete) and psychological (perceived) constructs around which marginalized people reside. They are the boundary-determining aspects of persons, social networks, communities, and environments. Frequently, margins are defined or described in contrast to a central point (Center) defines the margins, and everyone who does not fit that description falls outside of the margin or becomes 'marginalized.' (p. 196)

One could argue that denouncers marginalize themselves by leaving, but how they arrive in the marginalized sector is a moot point. This research changed me as a person in that I was able to leave the centralized place that I resided in as a BGLO member to get a front-row seat to the speakers' experiences as a marginalized community. The study changed my perspective on them because I realized how much we have in common, which should be the goal of diversifying thought, policy, and processes, as we become more inclusive with our decision-making. Being able to relate to the speakers allows me to be open to their input and feedback to improve BGLOs, which I previously would not have.

How this Research Changed Me as a Scholar-Practitioner

Often "practitioner" refers to someone professionally employed in an area. While I am not a Christian leadership practitioner, my ministry works of writing, producing, or teaching—whether individually or collectively through my church—characterizes me as a practitioner. So, as a scholar-practitioner in Christian ministry and a student affairs advisor to BGLOs, this research has taught me to suppress my spiritual journey to understand someone else's better. I had to remain objective throughout this process, although the topic and data excerpts were highly personal. This new skill was challenging to employ, mainly because it was my first time undertaking such a thorough analysis. I often referred to it as performing mental

gymnastics. Now that I have almost completed this journey, I feel as if I have competed in the mental gymnastics Olympics. This research changed me as a scholar-practitioner because it took adroit restraint to suppress and deter my personal feelings while staying focused on the emerging data to present the analysis accurately.

I can also be considered a practitioner of Greek life as a sorority member. Performing this research upgraded my status to a scholar-practitioner in that I have studied BGLOs from an organization development perspective. This study has changed me as a scholar-practitioner in that aspect because it has provided me with language and a new footing to communicate and affect change within BGLOs. As I hoped, getting to the root of the misalignment issues BGLOs may be experiencing will lay the groundwork for consultations on how to improve them, perhaps leading to more possibilities with other types of organizations and companies.

Conclusion

This study aimed to obtain the root cause of the anti-BGLO movement that states BGLOs are anti-Christian. To understand this phenomenon, I sought to answer the research question: What are the most significant reasons people say they denounce BGLOs? This research is vital because BGLOs are critical to the racial uplift of Black people, and there is a dearth of research on BGLOs in areas outside of hazing and academic impact.

Edmonson and McManus (2007) suggested performing a qualitative methodology in academic areas where there is not much literature or research. I chose thematic analysis as my methodology because there was a surplus of accessible data researchers had not studied that lent itself to the flexibility of the methodology. I performed thematic analysis by selecting 18 videos that met the following criteria:

- There is only one speaker.
- The speaker must state the name of the BGLO that they denounced, or it must be

in the title or description of the video.

- They must provide reasons for denouncing the BGLO.
- The video is no longer than 1 hour and 30 minutes.

A coding team and I analyzed and coded the transcripts to see what themes emerged to answer the research question. Once I studied the complete dataset, 12 themes and two other significant findings appeared. The first additional finding was that all speakers used scripture to validate their stories, so it was important to note the scriptural evidence gamut. The second notable result from the study was the iterative journey speakers illustrated on denouncing.

The 12 themes were separated into two domains, external, referring to the organizations' behaviors, and internal, referring to the speakers' personal beliefs. The external themes consist of *Blasphemy*, *Idolatry*, *Practices*, *Rituals*, *Deception*, and *Warfare*. The internal themes consist of *Believing in Absolute Truth*, *Integrating Others' Influence*, *Living in the Binary*, *Receiving Godly Guidance*, *Nearing the Last Days*, and *Evangelizing*. These themes verified Hatchett (2002) and Gray's (2004) literature on why people should denounce BGLOs. However, the only theme that was unanimous throughout the data, *Receiving Godly Guidance*, was not included in the literature. While this was the most common theme amongst speakers, it will be the least likely to be addressed by BGLOs for organizational alignment because it is such a personal spiritual experience. Hughey and Parks (2011) stated that BGLOs would have to begin using empirical evidence and scholarly work to aid efforts to remain relevant in the 21st century. Since people have access to self-publish their theories, beliefs, and thoughts now more than ever, BGLOs must proactively curtail the anti-BGLO movement by attending to the misalignment issues displayed in this study. I aim to encourage forward-thinking based on this ground-breaking research.

BGLOs are under attack for not being what they claim to be. If we minimize and dismiss this attack on our organizational character while prioritizing other issues, which are equally as important, this phenomenon could outgrow the others. Those issues, like hazing, financial sustainability, elitism, and relevance in the 21st century, grapple with structure and culture, but this anti-BGLO movement is a character issue. People are attacking BGLOs' character and targeting the same group of people with whom we say we are most aligned. If Christians, who exemplify the qualities our organizations need to thrive, continue to leave and stop joining altogether, what does that mean for the quality of our output? What does that mean for the legacy of our organizations? What does that mean for our legacy that includes the rich history of the Black Church and so many influential BGLO Christian leaders like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie? Would that triumphant legacy building be for naught? I hope now that our perceived weaknesses have been exposed, instead of condescending those who unveiled our cherished secrets, we use this as a teachable moment to learn, thrive, and reinvigorate BGLOs to elevate the Black community in a way we have yet to see.

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