A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON BLACK GREEK-LETTER ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP: PERCEPTIONS OF POWER AND INFLUENCE THROUGH AFFILIATION

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THROUGH AFFILIATION

by

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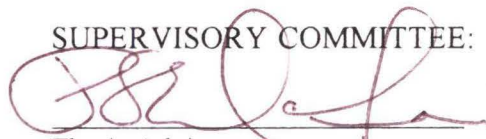
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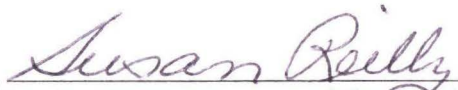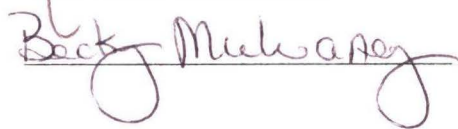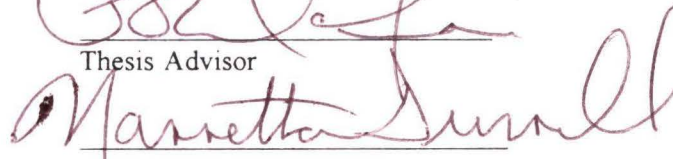ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP: POWER AND INFLUENCE THROUGH
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Patricia
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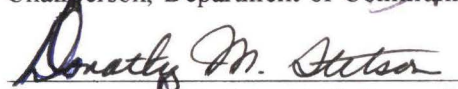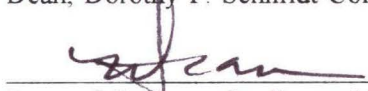
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To my husband (and brother in Greekdom), Kevin for his patience and unwaivering support thoughout my graduate school experience. Thanks for your daily encouragement and motivation, and for being such a wonderful blessing to my life.

ABSTRACT

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For nearly a century, historically black Greek-letter organizations have contributed to the educational, social, political and cultural experience of African-Americans. Consequently, these organizations composed of more than one million educated blacks have developed a unique subculture within the black community. This research investigates "black Greek" culture, its social impact, the influence of its members, and member and non-member perceptions of the black Greek experience. Ethnographic interviews and a questionnaire reveal that: (1) Members and non-members show significant familiarity with black Greek culture and believe that the culture is meaningful to African-American culture overall, and that (2) Members and non-members believe that membership in black Greek-letter organizations is a conduit for power and influence among African-Americans.

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Chapter 1

Black Fraternities and Sororities: An Introduction

Introduction

Ancestry, history and experience are at the center of commonality among

African-Americans (the terms "African-American" and "black" will be used

interchangeably except where specifically noted). With their own very distinct cultural

styles, African-Americans have created and developed many different forms of cultural

expression within their black experience.   Some of these expressions were born out of

originality, some handed down through ancestry and tradition, and others out of sheer

necessity. Having been denied the same civil rights afforded to their white

counterparts and because of segregationist policies, historically African-Americans

were not allowed to participate in educational, cultural, social, political, recreational,

or religious activity with whites. Blacks were forced to turn within to educate

themselves and establish meaningful lifestyles and activities that would fulfill their

desire for fellowship, learning, community and social belonginess (Malone, 1996,

Wesley, 1981). By the turn of the twentieth century, black colleges were slowly

developing -- heeding the call to educate and provide a sense of identity and purpose

for African-Americans.   While predominantly white colleges slowly began to

integrate, blacks were either prohibited by campus policy or overlooked to participate

in social, professional, athletic, cultural, religious or educational activities with white

students outside the classroom (McKenzie, 1990; Kimbrough, 1995; Wesley, 1981). The desire for acceptance, identity, and camaraderie prompted the development of literary, civil and social societies formed by black students. Between 1906 and 1922, eight black college based fraternities and sororities were formed at various colleges and universities, and are now recognized as the largest and most popular historically black international Greek-letter organizations in the United States (Gadson, 1989). Collectively, these fraternities and sororities are part of The National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC), the umbrella organization for more than one million members in the United States and abroad (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 1995).

From their inception, these organizations have played an overwhelmingly significant role in the education, politics, community service and social lives of African-Americans (Gadson, 1989; McKenzie, 1990; Schuh et'al., 1992). Their contributions have included scholarships and other financial aid programs for college students, community service and education projects, cultural awareness programs, and political involvement. The creation of black sororities and fraternities began a tradition that continues to attract black college students and alumni. Currently, more than 1.5 million African-Americans are members of one of the eight fraternities and sororities governed by the National Pan Hellenic Council (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 1995). These organizations consist of undergraduate members and active alumnus whose mottos and missions reflect service and the advancement of community service, political, social, educational and cultural awareness among African-Americans. Members of these fraternities and sororities are most commonly

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referred to as "Greeks," however, for the sake of distinguishing white fraternal or sororal members from those in this study, I will refer to members of black Greek-letter organizations as "black Greeks."

To those unfamiliar with the black Greek experience (also known among members as "black Greekdom"), on the surface these sororities and fraternities may appear to be mere social clubs that primarily engage in entertainment activities (particularly at the undergraduate level), make occasional charitable contributions, and occasionally participate in community-service activities. However, the social structure and culture of these groups may reveal far more. These organizations declare that they are a "family" of brothers and sisters who take oaths to forever uphold the mission of their founding forefathers and mothers, which is to support advancement opportunities for African-Americans (Schuh et al., 1992).

Although there are many African-American fraternal, civil and social organizations that have made exceptional contributions to the development of the black community (such as the Free Masons, The Urban League, The NAACP and The Links), some might observe that these groups do not demonstrate the same cultural distinctions and popularity as the NPHC fraternities and sororities. I have observed (as well as participated in) numerous conversations, where once it has been revealed that an African-American is a college graduate (particularly from a historically black college), the next question that follows is usually, "Are you (he/she) Greek?" Despite sharing other organization affiliations with a person recently met, to mention one's Greek affiliation most often immediately becomes an ice breaker, an avenue for

acceptance and bonding, and it serves as a means for knowing the "who's who" among blacks. Sorority and fraternity membership has provided access to a network of influence and power among African-Americans (Freeman and Witcher, 1988). Being Greek has appeared to share an important role in the lives of many college educated African-Americans (Freeman and Witcher, 1988; Gadson, 1989). Overall, black Greek membership and the black Greek experience have a mystique that has woven its way into African-American culture, but has been rarely discussed by scholars in terms of cultural relevance, influence and, social perceptions.

Issues to be Addressed

Samovar and Porter (1995) contend that dominant culture has influence over goal setting and the establishment of values and behavior. Black fraternity or sorority membership is a direct indication that the member is college educated (since membership is attained at either the college or post graduate levels). Since black Greeks represent educated African-Americans who make up most of the black middle class, could black Greeks be the dominant culture among middle-class African-Americans? By addressing this subject from a cultural and communication perspective, several questions can be answered: (1) What does membership in black Greek-letter organizations communicate among African-Americans both inside and outside of the Greek system? (2) Are the cultural traits of these groups recognized and accepted by non-members as valuable attributes of African-American culture overall?, and (3) Is the cultural experience of black Greek membership relative to the influence that exists among black Greeks in the black community and mainstream

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America overall? As previously noted, not only does membership in black fraternities and sororities seemingly offer a unique cultural experience shared by numerous educated blacks, but it also appears to be an inroad to influence and power.

Justification

Although many alumni chapters of fraternities and sororities are active, typically scholarly research on these organizations (black and white) have been conducted at the college-level, since college campuses are at the core of most Greek-letter organizations' existence. While there are numerous studies on the undergraduate Greek experience and a host of university support programs for fraternities and sororities, fewer studies have been conducted specifically on the black Greek experience. One researcher notes, "There is a paucity in professional literature of information on Greek life and the minority student" (McKee, 1987). Although existing research is valuable, little has been studied about the organizations' culture, social dynamics and perceptions of influence. NPHC sororities and fraternities promote lifetime involvement, and operate actively at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Schuh et al., 1992). Even less research is available on issues concerning alumni chapters of black Greek-letter organizations.

Black Greeks participate in various traditions, secret and public rituals, language and non-verbal communication modes, forms of entertainment, and other attributes that identify and separate their clan from others in the Greek and the non-Greek world. While a number of the college-based activities such as pledging, serenading, theme parties, etc., are similar to their white counterparts, there are other

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elements of the fraternity and sorority experience that are unique to the black organizations. Activities such as "lining," "stepping" and others (the specifics of these activities will be later discussed) appear to have developed into a culture that provides meaning and identification for its members. Exploring the cultural attributes of black Greek-letter organizations would provide knowledge and a historical background on this African-American subculture. Further, an exploration would examine the relevance of the hypothesis that black Greek membership is communicated among Greeks and non-Greeks as a (perceived or actual) conduit for social status and power among African-Americans.

Due to the lack of scholarly information on black Greek-letter organizations, I propose to conduct an exploration of black Greek membership in an attempt to: (1) explore the cultural characteristics of the organizations (ie, membership acculturation, rituals and traditions, lifestyles, etc.), (2) determine whether the cultural characteristics are believed by members and non-members to impact African-American culture overall, and (3) access what membership in black Greek-letter organizations communicates to members and non-members in the black community in terms of the potential for power and influence. Exploring the reasons why membership is sought, what takes place during the membership intake process, and what is expected from individuals once they achieve membership may be linked with member and non-member overall perceptions of black Greek power and influence.

Data for this inquiry will be gathered by using a combination of ethnographic interviews and survey research. Both ethnographic interviews and survey research

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have been determined as the most effective methods for this study because of the ability to gather in-depth information from respondents (Griffin, 1997; Holstein and Gumbrium, 1995). Ethnographic interviews may offer validity by allowing subjects (Greek and non-Greek) to speak freely about their thoughts and experiences. A questionnaire will be developed to get answers to specific questions that examine member and non-member cultural familiarity with black Greek-letter organizations, as well as their perceptions of black Greek influence. A combination of these research methods may be essential in discovering respondents' true feelings about black Greek power and influence.

To begin this inquiry, it is helpful to gain better understanding of black Greek-letter organizations by examining the historical context of these sororities and fraternities, likewise the relevance of their existence.

Chapter Two

The History and Purpose of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

The Creation of Fraternities and Sororities for Blacks

At the turn of the twentieth century, despite African-Americans being allowed

to enter and graduate from predominantly white colleges and universities, campus

policies, by-laws in student organizations' constitutions, and in many instances, state

laws prevented blacks from participating in joint activities with white students and

becoming alumni members of professional organizations (McKenzie, 1990; Wesley,

1981). From the desire to form a professional society where black college graduates,

entrepreneurs and other white collar professionals could participate in networking, and

social and civic opportunities, in 1904, Henry Minton, a prominent Philadelphia

physician, founded Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, the first ever Greek-letter organization for

African-Americans (Wesley, 1954). Although Sigma Pi Phi offered membership to

black college graduates and professionals (blue and white collar), black college

students had no such organization among their ranks.

Describing college life for black students at white, northern universities,

Wesley (1981) noted, "...because of their [black students] isolation as a group, they

were the first to feel the pressing need of close acquaintance and companionship."

Thus, in 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha, the first black Greek-letter fraternity, founded on the

campus of Cornell University, was organized by seven African-American male

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students (pp. 19-27). The group was initially formed to become a social and literary club for black men to share their common interests. Some members of the literary club had the idea of forming a fraternity that promoted brotherhood, similar to the white fraternities at Cornell. The students' ideas were coupled with the need for support, unity and the expressed desire to take part in worthwhile social, cultural and educational activities. In December, 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity deemed itself a national fraternity. As African American enrollment increased at black and white colleges and universities, other groups followed suit by organizing black Greek-letter organizations to promote community service, cultural awareness, scholarship and leadership.

Ironically, authorities at black colleges and universities were opposed to the establishment of fraternities and sororities. They believed that secret societies were damaging to the christian values upon which most black colleges were founded. Further, they believed Greek-letter societies to "...promote artificial caste and class distinctions among black undergraduates" (Malone, 1996, pp. 198-199).

Despite authorities' resistance, sororities and fraternities began to emerge and significantly impacted extra-curricular experiences for black college students. In 1908, the first black Greek-letter sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha was organized at Howard University. It was the first organization of its kind on a black college campus established by black women (Parker, 1990). Differences in taste, ideas, and image gave way to the development of other fraternities and sororities. In 1911, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, the second national fraternity for black men was established at Howard

University. The fraternity was developed to "enrich the social and intellectual aspects of college life" (Malone, 1996, p. 199). In 1913, twenty-two dissented young women of Alpha Kappa Alpha, who believed the sorority's focus should have been centered more on community and politics, and less on social activities received a charter to form Delta Sigma Theta, the second national sorority for black women (also established at Howard University). Howard University served as the founding home for two additional black Greek-letter organizations. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity was chartered in 1914 (Savage and Reddick, 1957). Six years later, the men of Phi Beta Sigma assisted in the creation of its sister organization, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, founded in 1920. Although racial exclusion did not exist on black college campuses, students still felt the need to provide a structured, organized, intellectual platform to discuss matters of political and social importance. While Howard University was home for five of the eight black Greek-letter organizations, Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity (1915, Indiana University), and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority (1922, Butler University) overcame the odds by organizing and founding their groups at predominantly white universities (McKenzie, 1990). Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity's beginnings closely resembled Alpha Phi Alpha's. It was established to be a support group for black men who felt ostracized, isolated and discriminated against by white university politics, and the lack of constructive activities for black students (Krump, 1983). Administration's disinterest in addressing the concerns of black students led to the full establishment of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity at Indiana University. Finally, in 1922, at Butler University, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority was initially formed as a

support group and professional sorority for black, female teachers (White, 1974). In 1929, the organization changed its articles of incorporation to make it a national sorority open to any young woman who espoused the motto, "Greater Service, Greater Progress." These Greek-letter organizations gave black students the opportunity to safely organize under national charters, provided a family oriented experience, promoted leadership, developed social and professional networks, and created social outlets.

Black Greek-letter organizations were compelled by their missions to promote social change, community activism and a true brother/sisterhood among members. Each group was responsible for creating substantial community empowerment programs, educational opportunities for young people, service activities and collectively united to influence civil justice. In 1920, Alpha Phi Alpha (Alphas) developed the acclaimed, "Go To High School, Go To College Week" program, the first national effort throughout 35 states to introduce and expose black high school students and others in the black community to the college environment. They encouraged youngsters to attend college by visiting schools, giving radio addresses and conducting individual interviews and counseling sessions with high school students about the possibility of pursuing a college education (Wesley, 1981). In the 1980's the Alphas initiated and were instrumental in the successful campaign for the declaration of a Martin Luther King, Jr. (who was also an Alpha) National Holiday. In 1920, Omega Psi Phi (Omegas), inspired by educator, Dr. Carter G. Woodson introduced the observance of Negro History and Literature Week to promote black cultural awareness

and dispel prevalent notions of the "inferiority of the Negro" (Gill, 1963). Negro History and Literature Week developed into what is now celebrated as Black History Month. The Omegas also took a political stand by passing resolutions condemning Ku Klux Klan activities and urging governors of every state to respond (Gill 1963). Kappa Alpha Psi (Kappas) established vocational programs for high school students in 1923. Through these programs they provided college scholarships and career assessment and counseling. During this period, the Kappas were also vocal in their opposition to concerns such as lynching and poor health care. In 1990, Ebony magazine reports the Kappas as having developed a National Revolving Loan Fund for college students in more that 123 institutions in the U.S. and that the group was the first fraternity to join Africare, a multi-million dollar fundraising initiative for African Aid. The establishment of Phi Beta Sigma's (Sigmas) Bigger and Better Negro Business program in 1924, encouraged black business ownership and provided financial and educational assistance to Negro entrepreneurs. In addition, the Sigmas sponsored activities to acknowledge the achievements of successful black businesses (McKenzie, 1990). While the sororities are also grounded in historic activities such as participation in the women's suffrage movement, educational programs for youth and adults, women's health issues and others (Adams, 1965; Giddings, 1988; Parker, 1990; White, 1974), notable recent achievements of the sororities include Zeta Phi Beta's seven point plan that involve initiatives for economy (which included programs to promote women business owners and the placement of women in non-traditional jobs), education, government, community, health and wellness, business management and

substance abuse. The organization notes:

>While we build on the past, it is critical that we plan a future for Zeta - one which we will be recognized for the quality of work performed and the demonstration of a sincere commitment to a turbulent, struggling world. This can only be done if we prepare for the 21st century - The New Millennium... through service, technology, education and leadership (Zeta Phi Beta, 1997, paragraph 2).

Sigma Gamma Rho established the Wee Savers program, a national project to educate and involve African-American youth in financial empowerment. Other programs developed by the sorority included the building of homes for low-income families through former President Jimmy Carter's Habitat for Humanity project, a bone marrow education and recruitment project for minorities, and a public education and research foundation to financially support social, civic, cultural, economic and educational programs for at-risk citizens (Sigma Gamma Rho, 1997). Aside from operating career assistance programs such as The Cleveland Job Corps Center, Alpha Kappa Alpha's international initiatives encompass mathematics and science literacy, the building and ownership of a senior residence facility, an increase in the sorority representation in public policy and governmental affairs, black business empowerment and educational and social service programs for black families (Alpha Kappa Alpha, 1997). Delta Sigma Theta, the largest of the four NPHC sororities, created an endowed chair for African-American professors of historically black colleges, a national health and healing program to treat minority women with clinical depression, a social action

commission to monitor federal, state and local legislation affecting African-Americans, and the development of an arts and letters commission to identify and support black artists and writers (Delta Sigma Theta, 1997). Although social action and community service have long played an integral role in black Greek-letter organizations, their efforts have most often gone unnoticed and are generally not publicized in mainstream media. Another possibility for the lack of exposure may be due to mainstream America not placing as much importance on black Greek activity overall as black Americans (Schuh et al., 1992). Likewise, in the midst of service provided by these organizations, black Greek achievements are most often overshadowed by the negative publicity associated with Greek organizations in general (within black and white Greek-letter organizations). Particularly among black fraternities and sororities, the most recorded incidents of negative activity involves the cruel and sometimes fatal pledging practices known as hazing. Recent changes in intake procedures, as mandated by the NPHC, have contributed to a legal ban on hazing and an alternative to pledging that (1) provides a more refined image [of the organizations], and (2) a continued increase in membership and the redefining of [all] black Greek-letter organizations' purpose (McKenzie, 1990). In 1995, NPHC issued a resolution to combat the negative images of Black Greek-letter organizations as portrayed by the media, and to sway public opinion about the organizations (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 1995).

The Relevance of Black Fraternities and Sororities

Among those in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries vocal about

opportunity and acceptance for black Americans was W.E.B. Dubois. Although

Dubois insisted on equal access to higher education opportunities for blacks, he

envisioned African-Americans empowering themselves through education, social

political and cultural awareness, and primarily through enrolling at black colleges and

universities (Wolters, 1975). His concept of the "Talented Tenth" involved the

training and education of young black Americans as "leaders of thought and

missionaries of culture among their people" (Dubois, 1903, p. 33). These blacks

would be the educated, intelligent individuals who would conceptually lead the

African-American race to empowerment. The black college campus would become the

means to opening doors to educating these individuals academically, socially, and

organized student groups would propel the Talented Tenth through leadership

development and social activism. Further, DuBois believed that studies of "the unique

and marvelous life and experience of the black race in America" be incorporated into

black college curriculum and that black colleges could train students to apply their

higher learning "to the solutions of the Negro problem" (Wolters, 1975, p. 21). Several

researchers of black Greek-letter organizations believe that the NPHC fraternities and

sororities initialized and became the reality of Dubois' concept (Edmonds, 1978;

Gadson, 1989; McKenzie, 1990; Thompson, 1986; Wesley, 1981). It is interesting to

note that DuBois first joined Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity before becoming instrumental

in the development of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People (NAACP).

Membership in black fraternities and sororities has allowed individuals to

become a part of a network of educated professionals within the black community. Gadson (1989) refers to the organizations as "one of the most influential and powerful networks of black power in America," as well as "the most educated, highly trained, influential and politically connected sector of society" (pp. 34-35). Additionally, black Greek organizations encourage their members to commit to a lifetime of leadership and service. Using their combined human, financial, and technical resources, the NPHC organizations have access to information, the ability to disseminate information, and significantly impact the economic, educational, political and social development of the black community (p. 34). Black Greeks have donated millions of scholarship dollars to colleges around the country and used their political clout to elect public officials and create institutions such as the Congressional Black Caucus (p. 36). Within these professional networks lay a unique level of loyalty among members which contributes to the development of their power. That loyalty has been described as the "invisible chain" linking black Greeks together (p. 34).

Despite the numerous contributions made by black Greeks, these organizations have received scathing criticisms for selectivity practices, brutal membership initiation activity, elitism, and loss of focus on community service (Anderson, 1996; Daniels, 1992; Freeman and Witcher, 1988, Malone, 1996). Over the years, several conspiracy theories involving black Greek-letter organizations have surfaced with allegations that range from membership in these secret societies being led by demonic influence to members involved in a grand conspiracy to segregate African-Americans according to class (Smoot, 1998). Yet, with criticisms galore, it is evident that black Greek-letter

organizations continue to play a viable role in the overall political and cultural development, educational enrichment, and social advancement of African-Americans. In light of media and general public criticisms, it is worthwhile to conduct a scholarly inquiry on member and non-member attitudes regarding the role that black Greek letter organizations play in America, the organizations' cultural relevance, and perceptions of their power and influence.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

As previously noted, there is a paucity in information on the black Greek

experience at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Due to the lack of scholarly

research, the available literature regarding perceptions of black Greek power and

influence is scarce. Therefore, this review of literature will address various issues

including black students' perceptions of leadership within black Greek-letter

organizations, member/non-member perceptions of Greek membership (black and

white), rites of passage through pledging, racism with the Greek system, negative

media attention given to the Greek system overall, and others issues relative to the

Greek experience. Some of these topics may not directly answer the specific issues

that this inquiry will address. However, the issues to be addressed will be specifically

dealt with through ethnographic interviews and survey research in the actual research

process.

Black Greeks on College Campuses

While the strength of black fraternities and sororities is recognized at the

graduate level (because of the increase in financial and professional resources), most

of the existing research appears to focus on black Greek-letter organizations on college

campuses. Since membership is generally first sought at the college-level, this may be

a good starting point to examine member and non-member perceptions. To illustrate,

Schuh et al. (1992) conducted a qualitative research study at Wichita State University, studying the experiences of black Greeks on campus. By first learning more about NPHC members through observation in meetings, social situations and informal contacts, then conducting focus groups with NPHC members, the researchers noted several distinct patterns or themes within the black Greek experience. Their subjects spoke highly of bonding with members (particularly through pledging) in their chapters, a strong sense of family with members of other chapters within their sorority or fraternity, bonding through networking, and access to resources. Members discussed their involvement and commitment to service on campus and in the black community. They saw themselves as role models for their campus and community, and were eager to name distinguished alumni who influence their organization's image. In addition, they spoke of their graduate chapters as instrumental in the community and provided direction for their undergraduate activities. The subjects also viewed cooperation with other black Greeks outside their own organization as a way of uniting and collaborating on achieving common goals (pp. 274-282).

Because black Greek-letter organizations provide opportunities for African-American students that may not be available through membership in a white fraternity or sorority, these groups continue to attract black college students on predominantly black and white college campuses. In their study of college and its impact on motivation and aspirations, Gurin and Epps (1975) found that black fraternities and sororities (particularly on black college campuses) provide a context for expressing social concern; particularly evident in issues involving civil rights. Further, they

suggested that black students who are involved in fraternities and sororities believe that they must be committed to race responsibility and progress. Further, black Greeks also perform well in other campus organizations (often seeking leadership positions) and politics. Most often black Greek leadership on college campuses comes in the form of protest, political activism and social change (pp. 156-157).

Kimbrough (1995) surveyed sixty-one African-American students attending a predominantly white, mid-western, public university to determine perceptions of leadership among Greeks and non-Greeks. Twenty-seven students belonged to black fraternities and sororities, and the remaining thirty-four subjects belonged to organizations where leadership opportunities for black students was prevalent. Such organizations included the Black Student Union and the Gospel Choir. The two-part survey addressed self-assessments of their leadership activities' in their organizations, and their overall feelings about black Greek organizations and their members. Kimbrough's results concluded that members and non-members responded similarly to questions regarding leadership ability. Both groups considered themselves leaders on their campus' however, Greeks were found to hold more leadership offices than non-members. Non-members indicated they were active participants in two or more organizations on campus (but did not hold office), and more than half of the non-members believed that membership in a black Greek-letter organization could improve their leadership skills. Sixty-three percent of the members surveyed believed their leadership skills had improved since they joined their fraternity or sorority. Additionally, eight-two percent of non-members polled had considered membership.

Only six percent of the non-member respondents did not agree that fraternities and sororities provide leadership opportunities. However, twenty-nine percent where either unsure, or had no opinion. Nine percent of non-members believed that black Greek organizations were neither beneficial to the campus or to students. While the opinions of non-members significantly varied when asked about the image of black Greeks, members described black fraternities and sororities as community focused, leaders, scholarly and friendly. Ninety-three percent of members viewed themselves as serious leaders, while only fifty-three percent of non-members agreed. Kimbrough believed that non-member perceptions were swayed by negative publicity associated with Greek organizations, such as selectivity practices and hazing. His hypothesis that both non-members and members found value in black fraternities and sororities was only marginally confirmed. Both groups contended that predominantly black organizations are effective mechanisms for leadership development for black students (as compared to white organizations). However, by a small margin, non-members believed that black fraternities and sororities were valuable. Ironically, most non-members did perceive black Greek-letter organizations as a significant source for leadership opportunities. Although Kimbrough believed that non-member perceptions and attitudes may have resulted from negative publicity about Greek organizations, there was no additional research to confirm that assumption. Variances in responses probably resulted from the respondents being asked structured questions and not being able to expound on their feelings.

McKenzie (1990) suggested that black Greeks are at a crossroad in terms of

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adapting to environmental and cultural changes within the black Greek structure. She

provided a detailed account of the history and purpose of black Greek-letter

organizations, and suggested they recapture their heritage by continuing as legacies of

the "Talented Tenth." McKenzie argued that if black Greek-letter organizations are to

survive on the college campus, they must return to their missions. McKenzie declared

that many members perceive pledging in itself as the overall identity of the group and

the factor that distinguishes fraternities and sororities from other groups (p. 33). With

pledging activities being restructured to prevent hazing practices, these groups must

reclaim their historical purpose and function.

Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Greeks (in general) on Campus

A number of studies have been conducted to examine the perceptions of both

members and non-members of Greek-letter organizations. These studies appear to

address the issue as it relates more to white Greek organizations. Gurin and Epps

(1975) touched lightly on the subject. While studying the achievements and

experiences of Greeks (black and white), they concluded that instead of studying

perceptions of influence from members of Greek organizations, non-member

perceptions of the Greek experience may be more of an accurate indicator of sorority

and fraternity influence on campus. Depending on the size of the campus and the

proportion of students allowed to join Greek organizations, attitudes regarding whether

or not Greek organizations have meaning and value may greatly differ (p. 157). This

may be evident in the work of Malaney (1990).

Malaney found that because college campus Greek organizations (black and

white) have been criticized for their irresponsible behavior, there is much publicity about the way people feel about Greek life. Many non-members associated Greek behavior with hazing activities, alcohol abuse, excessive partying and sexual misconduct. While many colleges and universities have banned fraternities and sororities from their campuses because of such behavior, members continue to defend their existence by citing the positive aspects of their societies. Malaney reviewed the research of The University of Massachusetts at Amherst's Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Office Project PULSE survey on attitudes toward Greek life (PULSE is a telephone survey operation used to gain insight on various student related issues). Researchers assessed 310 randomly selected students of various age, class rank, and gender, and questioned their perceptions about membership in fraternities and sororities. Their data revealed that both Greeks and non-members found certain advantages in belonging to these groups. Both groups noted positive attributes such as leadership opportunities and the ability to socialize with others who share similar interests. The majority of all students surveyed recognize that Greeks perform community service. Negative responses involved the majority of non-members perceiving that Greek life offers more of an opportunity for entertainment (parties) and a decreased chance of making acquaintances with people of other cultural groups. Further, they believe that Greeks are more irresponsible than non-members with the use of alcohol. Although this study examined student perceptions and attitudes about Greek life, it is presumed that the Greek system researched is predominantly white, as many of the questions in the survey were relative to experiences that take place in

fraternity or sorority houses. Most black Greek-letter organizations do not have fraternity and sorority housing on college campuses (typically on large campuses, most white Greek organizations do). Therefore, the attitudes studied here may not reflect the perceptions of black students and how they feel about black Greek behavior and experiences.

Jakobsen (1986) provided reaction to the studies of Wilder et al. (1986), who sought to determine whether or not fraternities and sororities promoted attitudes that were contrary to the growth and development of college educated persons. According to Jakobsen, while Greeks scored lower on their social consciousness scale, the overall results revealed that there was little difference in the attitudes of Greeks as compared to non-Greeks toward family independence, liberalism, and cultural sophistication. Further, there was no significant difference in comparison to non-Greeks regarding peer independence and social consciousness. Even though the study also revealed that ex-Greeks (students who pledged and later disaffiliated themselves from the Greek system) scored higher in terms of their cultural sophistication, liberalism, and social consciousness, Jakobsen contended that it was the year of college enrollment (freshman, sophomore, etc.) was the major determinant of Greek and non-Greek attitude. According to Jakobson, Greeks are generally stereotyped as conformists who are preoccupied with social status, acceptance, appearance and materialism (p. 523). Further review of studies by Marlowe and Auvenshire (1982) suggested that Greeks are also typically from a higher socioeconomic background, have a higher social orientation, loftier professional objectives and tend to lean more toward conservativism

than non-Greeks (p. 524). The study offered that Greeks' orientation toward family may reflect traditional family values typically correlated to a conservative political orientation. Jakobson suggested that if the afore-mentioned is a true profile of the kind of person who joins a Greek-letter organization, then their attitudes toward liberalism, social consciousness, etc., would automatically be different, regardless of their Greek affiliation. Further review revealed that Greeks made little to no change in their peer independence, as well as their sensitivity toward social and ethnic issues from their freshmen through senior years. Though Jakobsen's study provides meaningful information regarding the Greek profile, it may be assumed that the Greek system studied is predominantly white. For example, the variables for the inquiry were Greeks, ex-Greeks, and independents. The term "ex-Greek" does not exist in the black Greek system. Black Greeks may choose to be financially inactive (not paying annual dues). However, because membership is lifetime, one generally does not opt to disaffiliate him/herself from the sorority or fraternity that he/she joined. Further, the profile includes students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, which may not apply to a number of black students who have used the Greek system as a means to achieve social status.

Other researchers such as Baier and Whipple (1990) conducted research that sought to measure the values and attitudes of Greeks and non-Greeks at a large, moderately selective, public university. By using the Educational Testing Service College Student Questionnaires (developed in the mid-1960's, and the same test used by Wilder et al.), the researchers used surveys from 904 students. Their study

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concluded that non-members are inclined to be more independent and culturally sophisticated and view Greek life in a more negative and superfluous light. On the other hand, members and proponents of the Greek system believe that affiliation promotes security, belongingness, and intellectual self-esteem (pp. 40-41).

Kuh and Lyons (1990) share their observations about the role of Greek-letter organizations on college campuses. They set out to answer questions regarding whether or not Greek organizations contribute to or detract from the quality of campus life, the educational purposes of the institution, and the social development of members and non-members. Using 1,300 students, faculty and administrators as subjects, they studied the way the Greek system fits into the overall college experience. The only historically black college surveyed in their study was Xavier University, where subjects revealed a belief that the organizations are not as service oriented as they once were. Subjects (including the president of the university) agreed that the Greek organizations on their campus have become less community and academic achievement oriented, and engage more in social activities. Despite these opinions, the study noted that many female students (non-members) described having meaningful experiences with professional black women in the community that they met by participating in sorority-sponsored events. Other positive observations cited in the study include fraternities and sororities serving as outlets for personal development and community service. It was perceived that Greek life offered more opportunities for leadership and active participation in community activities. The Xavier study concluded that Greek organizations can be instrumental and influential to student life

and the mission of a school, depending on the environment where they exist. Because of the service and education oriented mission of most historically black colleges, Greek-letter organizations (particular given their historic value) are a compatible component of the philosophy and purpose of the host institution (Edmonds and Willie, 1978). Although the study indicated that many members and non-members (females in particular) at Xavier perceived the presence of Greek-letter organizations as valuable means for professional, cultural and social opportunities, the researchers also found that at colleges and universities where there was an absence of fraternities and sororities, students were less likely to participate in activities that promoted status distinctions, selectivity or privilege. Another observation made by Kuh and Lyons was that some institutions believed that Greek organizations are incompatible with the institutions' mission or educational purpose. Negative rituals and cultural attributes such as hazing, hell-week, etc. conflict with the institutions' positive, inclusionary rituals and celebrations.

Negative Images and Media Attention

Both black and white Greek-letter organizations have been associated with notorious physical, verbal and mental abuse of its pledges through the activity known as hazing. Hazing has practically been incorporated into the process of becoming a member of these organizations. A countless number of individuals have willingly or otherwise been subjected to cruel pledging practices that in some instances have caused the deaths of many prospective members. Ironically, considering a history of abuse of African-Americans, black fraternities are said to be more likely to engage in

hazing than white organizations (Wiley and Clarke, 1989). "Many of the pledges can't wait to put somebody else through the same hell that they went through" (p. 19). Thus, hazing has developed into a cruel tradition that is handed down from pledge group to pledge group (Shaw and Morgan, 1990). It is not certain how hazing developed into a traditional practice among black Greeks, but the fact remains that it is a part of the pledge process of which, on a national level, the organizations are not proud. As a part of the pledge process, prospectives submit themselves to "big brothers" and "big sisters" in an attempt to prove their loyalty and that they are worthy of membership. Typically, the job of the pledge is to perform any given task or submit to any request made by big brothers/sisters. However, the requests often have little to do with bonding, unity or the organization's mission. For example, they include menial tasks such as washing big brother/sister's cars, ironing clothes, polishing shoes, arranging dates, and in some instances doing homework. Michael Gordon, former executive director of the National Pan Hellenic Council notes, "Having to go though trash to prove ourselves worthy is foolish. We have already proved ourselves by surviving in this country" (Rodriguez, 1995, p. 33). Subservient tasks are one aspect of the hazing equation. Verbal abuse and the participation in humiliating activity are also components. Talking down to pledges is almost always an integral part of the pledging experience. Big brothers/sisters must remind pledges that they are in pursuit of what they already possess -- the right to call themselves Greek. It's the, "I have what you want and if you want it you better respect me, because only I can give it to you" attitude. Name calling and "humility building" language is used to

break down the pledge, stripping one of his/her identity so that he/she will conform to the image of the organization. The most common hazing practice, particularly among fraternities, is physical abuse. Among the many documented incidents of physical brutality caused by fraternity hazing, is a pledge in Maryland losing his sight after being hit over the head with a frying pan, a pledge in Missouri dying from head injuries following a beating by his big brothers (U. Magazine, 1995), a pledge in New York being beaten unconscious with a paddle, a cane and fists, and a prospective in Atlanta (who had a congenital heart defect) dying as a result of repeated blows to the chest (Daniels, 1992).

Despite the good these organizations have done, most positive activity is overshadowed by reports of hazing. Darryl Matthews, the Alpha Phi Alpha liaison to Capitol Hill (and President Bill Clinton's administration) asked in an interview with YSB magazine, "How am I going to be perceived as an influencer of policy when most folks only want to ask me about hazing"? (Keets, 1996)

Although the most serious incidents of hazing take place in fraternities, sororities follow in the same traditions. Shaw and Morgan's (1990) research on sorority hazing reveals that men and women view hazing activities as "tradition" (p. 61). Forty three percent of the sorority advisors polled in their survey indicated that hazing incidents had been reported to them. Two percent of the hazing activity involved physical abuse, twenty percent involved psychological activity and twenty-seven percent involved both. Specific hazing activities and tasks mentioned included pledges obtaining signatures, scavenger hunts, blindfolding, required singing, running

errands, interrogation, deprivation of sleep, yelling, hitting and branding.

While the national bodies of Greek-letter organizations have always denounced hazing, it is suggested that alumni members who participated in hazing rituals are more likely to support hazing activities. Baier and Williams (1983) conducted a study on fraternity alumni and active member attitudes toward hazing and found that the majority of alumni surveyed were more lenient toward activities that were considered hazing. Some of those activities include dropping food into mouth (usually while blindfolded) and eating unpalatable foods, calisthenics, pushing, shoving and tackling, being hit with a paddle, sleep deprivation, kidnaps, road trips and walks, and the forced drinking of alcohol. Justifications for these activities included responses that were centered around building pledge group unity, instilling humility in pledges, chapter tradition requiring it, maintaining campus respect for the chapter, and pledges expecting and enjoying the activities (pp. 301-302). The authors suggest that this leniency toward hazing contributes to the reasons why efforts to eliminate the abuse have been unsuccessful. It is not clear if the students and organizations studied in this research belonged to black or white (or both) Greek-letter organizations. However, the conclusions may hold true for both groups. Wiley and Clarke (1989) claim in their article on the death of pledge resulting from hazing:

...according to several college officials...hazing is so imbedded in the

tradition of Greek-letter organizations that group leadership often looks

the other way as abusive acts are committed. To become members in most

black fraternities, pledges often undergo a gamut of painful pledging sessions -

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in which they are screamed at, taunted, paddled, punched, etc. (p.19).

While fraternal councils everywhere have recently banned hazing as a part of pledge activities (Ackerman, 1990), they note that it is possible that alumni members who have lived the Greek experience longer than recent members may be desensitized to hazing practices, as they were active during a time when these practices were commonplace. The traditional practices appear to be stronger than the moral issue of right versus wrong. Some critics of the pledging process have compared the activities to gang behavior or the abused wife syndrome --enduring and accepting pain and suffering for the sake of belonginess and family (p.19).

While white fraternity hazing and membership has provided the story line for a number of Hollywood films, African-American director, Spike Lee's 1987 film, School Daze was the first to vividly tell the story of the varied experiences of a black college fraternity pledgee as Lee's character endured harsh hazing practices and acculturation into black "Greekdom." In School Daze, Lee portrays a pledge willing to "eat dog food, endure brutal paddlings and even crawl across campus in chains and a dog collar to prove his worthiness" (Freeman and Witcher, 1988, p. 146). To ensure accuracy in some of the details of the pledging process, Lee hired a friend from college (who is Greek) as the film's technical director. Lee claims to have used many of his friend's true life pledging experiences in the film (pp. 146-147). Further, the conflict in School Daze not only exhibited controversial pledging practices, but Lee also addressed his displeasure with the level of elitism he believes is displayed among black Greek organization members. Despite law suits and negative media attention,

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black Greek-letter organizations have openly practiced hazing as part of pledging --
their membership acculturation process.

Pledging and the Rite of Passage

Although pledging has been a controversial issue for many years, the process is
suggested to have value. Pledging among black Greeks resembles a military style
training, designed to promote unity among the pledge groups and members, increase
pledge's self esteem, provide time for the pledge group to learn the full history and
related organizational information, develop respect for the organization and its
members, and build character. The pledge program represents the prospective's rite of
passage into the organization. The rites of passage concept is rooted in African
(Egyptian) traditions of novices participating in an "elaborate , extremely intense, and
difficult process before they could be considered for initiation" (Warfield-Coppock,
1992, p. 473). Sociologists and historians have recorded various societies' sacred
histories and traditional customs being taught to an individual upon his initiation. In
black Greek culture, this information is taught during the pledge process, which on
average lasts approximately six weeks, and in some rare instances up to a year (pp.
473-474). Hardy Franklin, Jr., a Morehouse College student notes of his pledge
program:

> There are many things you learn about yourself. For example, the strength
> of your intestinal fortitude and your ability to deal with things out of the
> ordinary. Since my initiation I've realized I can better deal with a tough

situation in life when I compare it to the experience of pledging (Campbell, 1989).

Freeman and Witcher (1988) contend that "the idea {of pledging} is to break down the individual spirit of the pledge, forcing him or her to depend on others" (p. 153).

The National Pan Hellenic Council-Ban on Pledging

Overall, the national Greek organizations (black and white) have never supported hazing. However, as a result of the frequent reports of chapter hazing and a string of law suits developing from fatal pledging incidents, the leaders of the NPHC organizations shocked the black Greek world in 1990 by unanimously electing to abolish the tradition of pledging all together (Daniels, 1992; Keets, 1996). Pledging, which has been the most noted and identifiable of the cultural attributes of the black Greek experience and the primary process responsible for group acculturation, no longer exists. Tradition was now forced to take a back seat to moral behavior. As an alternate to pledging, the national leaders developed an intake process which allowed a prospective member open access to membership into his/her organization of choice. Specifics of the intake process varied with each organization. However, open access to those who met the minimum eligibility criteria (grade point average, etc.) could be initiated. Intake did not require pledging as a condition for initiation. Affiliate organizations who violated the NPHC rules were subject to severe penalties which enforce their positions (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 1995). This new intake process was not met with approval and cooperation from most fraternity and sorority members.

Monitors of the process have suspended or dissolved chapters who continued pledging practices. Additionally, individual members were legally liable if they violated intake policies. Consequently, a rift occurred in the attitudes toward those who pledged versus those who joined through the new intake process. It was felt by many who pledged that the intake members did not earn their right into the organization and were not true brothers or sisters (Keets, 1996).

Despite national attempts to enforce new intake procedures, many pledging activities are now done in secret (Keets, 1996, Black Issues in Higher Education, 1993). Although penalties are said to be severe, pledging incidents are still being reported and fatalities continue to occur. In 1992, a black pledge at the University of Virginia died in a car accident which was said to have been caused by sleep deprivation from pledging activities (1). In both 1996 and 1998, two more black fraternity pledges (of the same organization) died as a result of hazing (Keets, 1996; BET Talk, 1998). In 1997, another pledgee was regularly beaten with a horsewhip and his face placed next to a space heater because his brothers believed that he was not black enough. The fraternity members who carried out the brutality did not issue an apology, nor were they punished (Black Issues in Higher Education, 11). Not only do members continue to carry out the tradition of pledging practices in a desperate attempt to preserve tradition, prospectives continue to subject themselves to the practices, presumably for the purpose of acceptance. Although hazing within black Greek-letter organizations occurs by members who are black, these organizations most often embrace new prospects (black students) more than white fraternities and

sororities.

White Greek-Letter Organizations and Racist Practices

While the historical validity for black fraternities and sororities on college campuses has been clearly established, it can be said that the continuation of all black organizations is a form of racial separatism. As the twenty-first century approaches and American society promotes political correctness, it could be seen as a positive move to no longer establish race oriented organizations. However, despite political correctness, black students continue to face racial discrimination on their campuses. It has not been unusual for some white Greek-letter organizations to discriminate against blacks. For example, Goettsch and Hayes' (1990) research notes the lack of racial and gender sensitivity from many white fraternities. The researchers explored blatant and subtle behaviors and activities sponsored by white Greeks. Events hosted and sponsored by white fraternities and sororities such as plantation parties, slave auctions and "Martin Luther King trash parties", where guests were instructed to bring items such as Ku Klux Klan hoods, canceled welfare checks, oversized radios and "your father if you know who he is," sending clear messages about some white members' attitudes toward blacks. While many college administrators have responded to these concerns by developing racial harassment policies which condemn behavior stigmatizing or victimizing individuals based on race or ethnicity, others allow the activities so as not to prohibit the organizations' freedom of expression (pp. 65-69). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) urged The University of Mississippi in 1989 to integrate its historically white Greek

organizations. "The black community is outraged and disturbed at...ongoing racial incidents stemming from the fraternities and students who are enrolled there" (Black Issues in Higher Education, 1989). This action was taken following an incident in which two white fraternity pledges were left naked, with racial slurs scrawled on them, at a black college near the university. In an article featured in U. Magazine (1995), a publication that focuses on popular campus issues around the country, the question was posed (in an issue devoted to Greek affairs) whether or not one should pledge a fraternity or sorority. It listed black organizations under the title "Greek Alternatives," as though to imply that the black Greek system is an alternative to *real* (white) sororities and fraternities. However, the article indicated that the difference between black and white fraternities and sororities is the black organizations' "dedication to community service and typically lower dues," and noted that black sororities and fraternities contribute five times more community service hours than their white counterparts (p. 16).

While these studies and articles provided information on white fraternity and sorority behavior and practices, nothing was mentioned about their attitudes toward their black counterparts. Again, the paucity of available research in the area of perceptions or attitudes toward black Greek-letter organizations is evident.

The Black Elite

The value and relevance of black Greek-letter organizations may be proved through their historical context. They played pivotal roles in educating the black community through scholarships and awareness programs, provided financial resources

to support community initiatives that are typically overlooked by mainstream America, have been instrumental in policy making and public affairs, and in reaffirming culture, heritage and values in the black community. However, to further this inquiry on perceptions of power and influence, one must examine the social implications of black Greek membership.

"The black middle class is composed of individuals and families who are regarded by the black community as successful in terms of their education, occupational and income attainments. The most estimable, legitimizing source, the very fountainhead of the black middle class, has been education, or more specifically black colleges" (Thompson, 1986, p.127).

For blacks, the acquisition of a college degree serves as a status symbol and source of social influence. This notion of education as status is the brainchild of W.E. B. DuBois, whose "Talented Tenth" concept embodied the "well-bred and "well-born" of America's educated black elite (Thompson, 1986, 103; Gatewood, 219, 247). Charles S. Johnson, confirmed his beliefs about the "Talented Tenth," and wrote of educated blacks, "...All in all, they are the ones who...most frequently engage in elevating the stagnant masses of their own race" (qtd. in Thompson, 1986, p. 103). In her chronicle of urban politics and society, Hazzard-Gordon (1990) discussed black elite affairs by reflecting on early twentieth century, emancipated blacks who believed themselves to uplift the race by espousing upper-class behavior and activities. One of the prime requirements for this bourgeois group was the possession of a college degree. Also, occupation was a determining factor in black elitism. In A Black Elite

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(1986), Thompson discusses the lifestyle generally associated with the "upper stratum" of black society. Among the identifiers of elite existence among African-Americans, he notes:

> As a rule, certain stable members of the upper stratum attempt to develop some significant degree of national unity through a network of prestigious professional or business organizations, fraternities or sororities, and exclusive social connections. Such individuals are often regarded as the core of the black leadership class and sometimes get a great deal of national publicity when they are listed as being among 'The most influential 100 Blacks in the United States' (p. 134).

Thompson further discusses the social life and social class of African-Americans as centered around social group affiliation. He suggests that membership in organizations such as fraternities and sororities is a considerable financial and personal costs underscoring the key difference which sets members apart, as a group, from the masses and the underclass (p. 93). These organizations are also considered "extra community forces," a key influence in black society (Durant, 1986, p. 261). Respondents of his research were thought to engage in selective joining as a main avenue of upward mobility, which might lead to career advancement. Moreover, he asserts that black Greek-letter organizations "provide the most effective means whereby black college students and graduates can preserve a common identity and cooperate in the pursuit of common goals. They are essentially middle class" (p. 110). He declares that while blacks are often criticized for the exclusivity and elitism that

are common criticisms of black Greek membership, college students and alumni continue to join the organizations as "they seem to have almost irresistible appeal." He further contends, "Black students from affluent backgrounds often join Greek-letter organizations primarily because of family tradition or a felt need to reinforce their own middle-class status" (p. 110).

Just as middle/upper-class whites have invented avenues for social and professional networks (many found to historically and legally prevent blacks from participating), African-Americans used Greek-letter organizations as their means for networking. Pat King analyzes the networking capabilities of black fraternities and sororities, and notes, "Essentially, it is a process whereby members engage in mutual aid services. They assist one another in finding and succeeding in jobs and by extending such courtesies as helping to find homes for members who move into their communities" (qtd. in Thompson, 1986, p. 111).

Additional comments about elitism and black Greek membership come from Ozell Sutton, who was interviewed for Rolling Stone magazine. He notes:

On black campuses in the segregated days, it was the elite, the intellectuals who belonged {to fraternities}. You'd find your best students, activists, and scholars were in the Greek-letter organizations. On integrated campuses, they were a retreat, a bastion from the isolation, the hate and the discrimination of white society. But the mission of the black Greek-letter society was from the beginning to give leadership to a struggling people,

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to pull together the best-trained black minds to lead the black community (Freeman and Witcher, 1988).

Despite the backlash of the 1960's against black Greek selectivity, among the various members of black fraternities and sororities interviewed by Gadson (1995), one member claims, "Greek-letter organizations are elitists to the extent that they are only available to a small percentage of the youth enrolled at a college; elitist to the extent that it represents young men and women who are interested in academic achievement" (qtd. in Gadson, 1989, 136). Other critics of elitism in black fraternities and sororities argue that members are primarily interested in social activity that have nothing to do with liberation and are not effectively meeting the needs of the community (Rodriguez, 1995).

While critics of black Greek-letter organizations suggest that the organizations have become less focused on meeting the needs of the black community, it can be argued that the fraternities and sororities are meeting their own needs within the Greek community that they have established.

The Dynamics of Group Membership

The very structure of fraternities and sororities like any other group or club reverts to the basics of group membership and one of its principle elements is "belongingness." As the desire to join a group becomes important to an individual, Douglas (1995) proposed a wide range of factors that are involved in the decision making process to become a member of a group. Further, once the decision has been made to join a group, certain expectations of what the group can offer as well as what one can contribute are most likely present. In addition, Douglas discussed fifteen

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basic factors that bind members to a group. He included factors such as sharing experience in the group over time, developing relationships, satisfaction with membership, common interests and purpose and members attaching considerable meaning to the group. He noted that the effects of bonding include: (1) the reduction on anxiety, (2) the development of mutual trust among members, (3) an increased willingness to endure frustration to achieve the ends of the group, (4) the willingness of members to defend each other and their group, and (5) the increase of group pressure, which makes conformity nearly inevitable (pp. 12-16). Further, Douglas asserted that there exists, "The expectation of potential members that the group can provide some help at a cost the individual is prepared to pay" (p. 66) It can be assumed in the case of Greek membership that affiliation holds some particular expectation that is worthy of the price (financially, physically and mentally). The aforementioned principles may provide a window (worthy of further exploration) into prospective and active member attitudes about participating in pledging/hazing activities. Douglas continues to define groups by recognizing Freud's assumptions that group behavior stems from the patterns of family life (p. 33). Within the social structure of black Greek organizations, the sibling concept of "brothers" and "sisters" affirms this assumption. Within Douglas' review of behaviorist theory, it is suggested that, "Both normal and abnormal behavior patterns (within groups) are learned, are predictable and are considered to be natural" (p. 35). Thus, passing down of pledging rituals and other traditions becomes learned and eventually "natural" behavior.

Douglas addressed expectations by recognizing that the more attractive a

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group appears, the more likely individuals may desire to become a member. For example, he noted that factors such as prestige, environment, interaction, access to resources and member quality contribute to preference for membership. However, in the black community, Greeks might be looked upon as the "in-group" prototype described by Noel et al. (1995), as they discuss attractiveness based on "higher" status (pp. 127-136).

Samovar and Porter (1995) contend that within most communities there is a hierarchy of status and power (p. 133). These leaders are said to have access to resources and are perceived as important and valued. They offer:

Whatever the basis for determining the hierarchy, the fact of its existence in a society assures the evolution and continued presence of a power elite - - those at the top of the social hierarchy who accrue and possess what the society deems valuable or vital (p. 134).

From previously noted research, it can be assumed that black Greeks assume a great deal of the hierarchy of status and power among middle/upper class blacks in general. Boykin et al. (1997), discussed theories of communalism among African-Americans and listed among the cultural expressions of the race, the social interdependence of black people. They quote the African axiom, "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" (p. 410). This orientation places value on group belongingness and interaction. They further note, "Among African-Americans, a communal orientation is thought to be the basis for the following: a) the extended family, b) preferences in goal attainment strategies, and c) the superior performance of

African-American students in cooperative learning settings" (p. 410). Within this context, it is essential to understand the importance of group involvement and belongingness among black Greek-letter organizations. They provide extended families, the opportunity to obtain common goals and objectives and a chance (at the undergraduate level) for students to participate in activities that promote social and personal development. Overall, communalism serves as the basis for cultural expression and social development among black fraternities and sororities.

Although the negative aspects of the black Greek experience (i.e., hazing) have been in the forefront of news about black Greeks, college students and mature adults continue to take interest, join these groups and appear to achieve some level of satisfaction with their membership.

Black Greek Culture in the American Mainstream

White and black Americans are increasingly capitalizing on various aspects of black Greek culture. In recent years, major corporations have spent millions on the promotion and sponsorship of black Greek oriented entertainment. Some of these forms of black Greek cultural expression have taken center stage in music videos, film and television. Examples include Spike Lee's, School Daze, which showcased the black Greek experience, Disney's sponsorship and airing of STOMP, a televised "step show" competition (an entertainment activity created by black Greeks where members perform choreographed, rhythmic, precision dance movements), and MTV's mini-documentary of the pressure, practice and stress involved in one fraternity's preparation for a step show during a black college spring break weekend in Atlanta.

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The opening ceremony of the 1996 Olympics, held in Atlanta, Georgia (a city with a strong black middle-class population), featured "stepping" among the various forms of American cultural expression that was showcased to the world. In 1993, the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity step team from Howard University performed as part of President Bill Clinton's inaugural celebration. Though it is believed that negative media images and reports of hazing caused a temporary decrease in black Greek membership recruitment, it is also suggested that membership in recent years has increased because of television, movies and music videos that highlight black Greek culture (Rodriguez, 1995). According to vendors of black Greek paraphernalia that I polled during the 1998 *For Sisters Only* exhibition (an annual exhibition featuring products and services geared toward African-American women) in Atlanta, Georgia, sales of black Greek paraphernalia and novelties average nearly $100,000 annually per vendor. Many of the vendors believed that the business of manufacturing and selling black Greek novelties to be a multi-million dollar industry. From exclusive specialty shops to catalogue sales to street vendors, many merchants have made their fortunes by recognizing that black Greek spend their dollars on items that display their organization's letters.

Influential Black Greeks

Black Greeks continue to pilot powerful civil rights and political movements. For example, in 1990, Miami's tourism boycott came about when the local government snubbed African leader, Nelson Mandela. This boycott stifled convention business in South Florida for over a year. The boycott was developed under the direction of

leaders such as Miami attorney, H.T. Smith, and national civil rights leader, Jesse Jackson (both are black Greeks) at Delta Sigma Theta Sorority's national convention in Miami Beach. Winnie Mandela was the wife of Nelson Mandela and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. In July, 1983, Congresswoman Katie Hall from Indiana, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, introduced House bill 3706 to Congress. This was the bill to create a national holiday in observance of Martin Luther King's (a member of Alpha Phi Alpha) birthday. The bill was accompanied by a half million letters that were a result of Alpha Phi Alpha's M.L.K. Holiday campaign, and the bill went to the floor with the support of other black Greek congressmen (Freeman and Witcher, 1988). These are just a couple of example of actions resulting from powerful alliances within black Greek organizations.

Influential Greeks (living and deceased) such as scholar and activist, W.E.B. Dubois, civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, the first black to serve on the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall, Senator Adam Clayton Powell, track great Jesse Owens, famed physician, Dr. Charles Drew, Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP, famed musician, Duke Ellington, author, activist, and historian, Dick Gregory, Senator Barbara Jordan, former presidential candidate, Senator Jesse Jackson, Dorothy Height, president of the Children's Defense Fund, former U.N. Ambassador and mayor of Atlanta, Andrew Young, famed educator, Marva Collins, Secretary of the Treasury, Sharon Pratt Kelly, Energy Secretary, Hazel O'Leary, Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman, former Mayors David Dinkins, Ernest Morial, Sydney Barthelemy, and Tom Bradley, Mayor of Washington, D.C, Marion Barry, Black Enterprise

magazine publisher, Earl Graves, former executive director of the National Urban League and confidant of President Bill Clinton, Vernon Jordan, the first black person in space, Ron McNair, wife of Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Congressman Louis Stokes, activist and educator Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and head of the Johnson Publishing empire, John Johnson, Leon Sullivan, Planned Parenthood president, Faye Waddleton, Astronaut Mae Jemison, civil rights leader, Winnie Mandela, president of Kraft Foods, Ann Fudge, and thousands of others have made profound accomplishments that have vitally impacted the professional, social, educational and political climate of the U.S. and abroad. Their Greek affiliations are not as widely known among non-Greeks as among fellow Greeks. However, it is obvious that having "brothers and sisters" like these who occupy positions of power and social influence provides powerful alliances for the Greek organizations. Popular artists, sports figures, authors and entertainers such as Maya Angelou, Sarah Vaughn, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, Ntozake Shanghe, Toni Morrison, Lena Horne, Brenda Joysmith, Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, Zora Neale Hurston, Emmit Smith, Shaquille O'Neil and others' affiliations are well known among Greek circles. With influential members such as these, networking among alumni Greeks is a powerful tool. Thousands of black Greeks occupy positions of power in major corporations, academia, government and other industries. As their accomplishments (individually and collectively) are generally well known among Greeks, many non-Greeks are aware of the achievement of these people, but do not know that they are Greek. As a mechanism for increasing power and

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popularity among black fraternity and sororities, the organizations bestow numerous "honorary" memberships to influential African-Americans annually. According to a former national officer of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, "Sorors regularly review the accomplishments of notable black women at both local and national levels. Nominations for honorary memberships are presented, voted upon by national officers, and then extended to those women who not only best represent the image of the sorority, but also increase the value of our membership and national initiatives." Several of the afore-mentioned influential Greeks (who are not college graduates) have received honorary status by black fraternities and sororities because of their public influence.

Other influential blacks who did not join black fraternities or sororities do recognize the power that the organizations wield. Former state senator and civil-rights activist, Julian Bond is not a member of a black Greek-letter organization. However, he says of Jesse Jackson, "...Jesse Jackson is an Omega...I don't want to denigrate Jesse Jackson in an way, but I'll hazard a guess that if he were not an Omega, he wouldn't be the Jesse Jackson we know and love today" (Freeman and Witcher, 1988, 146). Bond further discussed that his disinterest in joining a fraternity was primarily due to hazing activities that he witnessed as a young boy growing up in a black college community. However, Bond also notes of black Greek membership, "It's a remarkable fellowship...a kindship among my colleagues that they've kept all their adult lives...If I were invited to join now, I'd leap at the chance" (p. 153).

It is suggested that black fraternities and sororities are most productive and

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powerful at the alumni level. "In the alumni chapters, political action and service to the community are expected. When the sisters of Delta or the brothers of Alpha step into the real world, they also step into one of the most influential networks of black power in this country" (p. 146).

Furthering the Exploration of Black Greek Influence and Power

In light of numerous changes in recent years made by NPHC and the individual fraternities and sororities (particularly regarding membership intake), it would be insightful to get current opinions and perceptions about the influence of black Greeks. Further, exposing elements of black Greek culture and better understanding perceptions of black Greek social influence may help those who are familiar with the system to better understand their attitudes about membership, their roles and responsibilities to the black community, and the specific elements of the black Greek experience that continue to attract individuals to seek membership. For those not familiar with this subculture of black Americans, it is informative to reveal the beliefs, practices and social order of a segment of African-American society that may be influential in the decision making, policy shaping and social experiences of the black community and the American community in general.

Though studies exist regarding the history, purpose and membership experiences of black Greeks, there are some missing pieces to the puzzle. First, there seems to be a lack of scholarly studies involving the activities and practices embraced by black Greeks. With the exception of "lining," "stepping" and "pledging" (Schuh et al., 1992), none of the research accounts for specific, traditional/cultural activities

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practiced by black Greeks. This is worthy of study because their customs appear to be practices that have value to members and may impact non-Greeks as well. Black Greeks' customs may be seen as artifacts -- traditions and rituals, language, entertainment and status -- that are important to the make up and identity of their culture. Black Greeks teach their new members their lingo, practices, behavior and symbols that not only identify and separate them from other Greeks and non-members, but in many cases, provide a sense of identity for its members. This study is particularly of interest in that the 1990 ban on pledging has caused some dissention within the organizations (between established and newer members).

Socially, membership appears to warrant assumed leadership and brings with it a sense of power and influence that begins at the undergraduate level and strengthens after graduating from college.

With nearly a century of history and accomplishment, black Greeks are at a crossroad. On one hand, at the national level, black Greek organizations continue to increase membership and provide well-needed social, cultural and educational services to the black community. On the other hand, many established members are dissatisfied and displeased with newer members who they believe have not "earned" their rite to membership, have little sense of communalism (because they did not participate in bonding activities that the pledging process requires), and have not been properly prepared for leadership. If this is true of new members, as the future of black Greek organizations is considered, one should question whether the lack of traditional acculturation into the organizations will affect black Greeks' mystique and influential status among African-Americans (members and non-members).

Although many questions can be considered with regard to black Greek membership, the primary focus of this inquiry is to closely explore the cultural and social implications of black Greek membership by examining member and non-member familiarity with the primary artifacts of the black Greek experience and whether or not they impact African-American culture overall. After this is established, member and non-member current perceptions of power and influence will be surveyed. Little research has been done that provides an in-depth approach to understanding perceptions and thoughts from both non-members and members about the black Greek experience. The results from this inquiry should prove useful by partially filling a void in the paucity of available research.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Methods of Data Collection

The purpose of this study is to first, identify the cultural characteristics of black Greek membership and determine whether black Greeks and non-Greeks perceive these traits to have value. Second, the purpose is to survey current perceptions among black Greeks and non-Greeks to ascertain whether or not it is a collective belief that Greek membership yields power through affiliation. While this inquiry is two-fold and may seem extensive, I believe it necessary to first explore black Greek culture before surveying perceptions of influence. By identifying the cultural characteristics of black Greek membership, it may provide a clear window into the practices and lifestyles of black Greeks that may help to explain their (and others) feelings about membership. Additionally, it may help to determine whether members and non-members perceive components of black Greek culture to be of value.

The approach to this inquiry is through an interpersonal context -- presenting data based on the observation of members, their interactions and behavior with each other, and their verbal and non-verbal messages/methods of communication. The central goal of this research is to gain understanding. Therefore, two qualitative research methods have been selected as the best approach to this inquiry. Having examined other perception-based studies on Greek-letter organizations (as well as other

research grounded in an interpersonal context), I chose a combination of ethnographic interview research and survey research as the most effective methods for this inquiry (Kimbrough, 1995; Baier and Whipple, 1990; Schuh et al., 1992). While survey research is a good data collection method for describing a population too large to observe, and has also been said to be a reliable method for revealing what people think, as well as their attitudes and orientations (Babbie, 1995; Frey et al., 1992), it only allows responses from structured questions. Ethnographic interviews may offer more insight by allowing subjects to speak freely about their thoughts and experiences. Further, ethnographic interviews have been used as an in-depth approach to communication, cultural and sociological studies (Griffin, 1997; Holstein and Gumbrium, 1995). Because fraternities and sororities are secret societies, it is impossible to directly observe many of their customs, as they are practiced in private and only grant access to members. By conducting interviews with individuals and with focus groups, members are allowed to discuss past and present experiences and to describe their thoughts and interactions. Non-members (individually and in groups) will also be able to freely discuss their exposure to the black Greek system and their perceptions of black Greek culture, power and influence.

In addition to ethnographic interviews, to further the exploration a self-administered questionnaire was developed to examine member and non-member cultural familiarity with black Greek-letter organizations, as well as their perceptions of black Greek influence. A self-administered questionnaire offered an additional measure of support to the research. Although face-to-face interviewing provides a

greater opportunity to explore true feeling and perceptions, self-administered questionnaires offer anonymity for the respondent and ensures that there will be no interviewer bias (Babbie, 1995). For this inquiry, the combination of both survey and ethnographic interviews research methods are essential in discovering the subjects' true feelings.

Ethnographic Interviews

To examine black Greek culture, power and influence, I identified some of the primary artifacts of the black Greek experience. Since there may be a number of dimensions associated with black Greek culture, I divided the artifacts into two basic categories: (1) membership attainment, and (2) member traditions/lifestyle. I consider these categories "basic" as they encompass initial perceptions of reasons why membership is sought, what takes place during the intake process, and the traditions, rituals, language, member expectations, etc., that are realized (or perceived) through membership attainment. Through interviews and questionnaires, responses relating to member experiences and perceptions, as well as non-member exposure to and perceptions of black Greek culture have been thematically grouped and discussed. Making thematic connections is an ideal way of presenting interview data (Seidman, 1991; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). After collecting the information, by identifying patterns in responses, correlations could be made that describe common perceptions and feelings about black Greek culture among Greeks and non-Greeks. After recorded or transcribed data has been reviewed, I used a labeling or coding system, highlighting similar responses according to subject matter. Where common themes did not exist

within the data, notable responses were still organized according to subject. It was understood, as Seidman (1991) suggests, that locking in categories too soon may lead to dead ends (p. 99). Further, some subjects that may seem promising in the beginning may lose impact throughout the process. Given this understanding, caution was exercised by carefully organizing and reviewing the data, thus giving an added measure of validity to the final results (Frey et al., 1992).

Two focus groups, one consisting of NPHC members and one group of non-members were formed to discuss their experiences and perceptions of the culture and their influence among African-Americans. To keep the groups intimate and controllable, participation was limited to four to ten respondents. Additional research involved an undetermined number of individual interviews to be conducted with members and non-members. The number of individual interviews at the time of planning was undetermined, because of various casual and formal opportunities to interview members and non-members at numerous black Greek oriented events. Since the goal is to look for thematic patterns, before the data was collected I prefered not to limit the number of individual interviews. Often, ethnographic interviewers opt not to set a limit on the number of interviews they conduct. They continue to interview until it is felt they have reached a dead end and are no longer receiving fresh or useful information from their subjects (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Therefore, I continued to conduct individual interviews until I believed the information received was sufficient for analysis. After the data was collected and reviewed, to establish clarity in the use of black Greek terminology, eight members, one representing each of the

National Pan-Hellenic Council Greek-letter organizations, from four geographic regions (north, south, east, west) were randomly selected and surveyed to ascertain their description and definition of terms used by respondents that are familiar or exclusive to the black Greek system.

Questionnaire

To further the inquiry into black Greek culture, power and influence, a self-administered questionnaire was developed. One hundred-fifty questionnaires was given (handed or mailed) to black Greeks and non-Greeks who are college alumni and undergraduates, including individuals who are actively participating in the membership intake process. The number 150 (75 Greeks and 75 non-Greeks) was selected in the hopes of receiving an adequate response rate of at least fifty percent (Babbie, 1995). Since data collection consisted of both ethnographic interviews and a questionnaire, I believed that 75 respondents to the questionnaire would provide sufficient data.

The questionnaire, designed to explore perceptions of power and influence (with some questions regarding culture) consisted of 42 Likert Scale responses that were used to measure the degree of the respondents' perceptions of black Greek membership and influence. The survey was divided into three sections: (1) social perceptions, questioning black Greek impact on the African-American social, political, and economic climate, (2) cultural identification, questioning Greek and non-Greek familiarity and acceptance of black Greek culture, and (3) personal beliefs, questioning general perceptions of black Greek social development and status. Response choices included whether or not the respondents would "Strongly Agree," "Agree," Somewhat

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Agree," "Disagree," or have "No Opinion" to the questions. The third section

consisted of 13 open ended questions that provided respondents with an opportunity

to include personal remarks about their feelings toward the subject matter overall.

Because the research is primarily concerned with an African-American subculture,

respondents were limited to individuals of African descent. By conducting

ethnographic interviews and using a questionnaire, narrative linkages and common

responses were used to draw overall conclusions about member and non-member

perceptions of black Greek power.

From the literature reviewed in this inquiry, the study on <u>Student Involvement</u>

<u>in Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations</u> by Schuh et al. (1992), was the only

research that conducted focus group interviews only with black students as part of

their methodology. Their research sought to gain insight on the experiences of NPHC

membership. Additionally, While Kimbrough's research (1995) was the only study that

specifically targeted black students that provided a self-administered survey designed

to examine their opinions of leadership within black Greek letter organizations, Baier

and Williams' (1983) research examined active and alumni member attitudes toward

hazing by using a three part questionnaire that measured the degree of agreement with

each statement, as well as open-ended questions. Similarly, the questionnaire for this

inquiry is in three parts, using Likert scaling to measure the degree of agreement with

each statement, and also using open-ended questions to explore member perceptions.

Since they are qualitative and exploratory, the Bair and Williams and Schuh et al.

methodologies can be used as models for this research, and the data for this inquiry

will be analyzed in like manner (references to data analysis will be given in the Research section).

Chapter 5

Research

Data Collection and Analysis

The first phase of data collection involved interviewing the two focus groups (one group of black Greeks and one of non-members). I thought it best not to leave participation to chance by attempting to involve strangers to take part in the focus groups. Because of my acquaintances with many members of black fraternities and sororities, I decided to invite people I knew would be willing to participate (Frey, et al., 1992). I selected the first ten names of black Greeks who appeared in my personal phone book and extended an invitation for them to take part in a focus group to casually discuss their experiences as members of black fraternities and sororities. Five of the ten accepted the invitation. One of the five brought two friends (who I did not know) who were also Greek, making the total number of the Greek focus group participants seven. All participants were alumni of both historically black and predominantly white colleges/universities with ages ranging from twenty five to thirty seven.

For the non-member focus group, I used the same selection process. The first ten non-Greeks in my phone book were invited to casually discuss their opinions and exposure to black fraternities and sororities. Eight of the invited ten participated. Two of the eight were college students at a historically black college. The other six

were graduates of both historically black and predominantly white colleges/universities, with ages ranging from nineteen to forty two. I facilitated both focus group discussions in a relaxed home setting. Both sessions were taped and transcribed for later review.

Second, individual interviews were conducted over a one year period (one academic year). This time frame allowed for casual and formal interviews with members and non-members at various alumni and undergraduate annual Greek events such as step shows, interest meetings, balls, picnics, etc., as well as Pan Hellenic Council meetings (Schuh et al., 1992) and education oriented activities that typically attract or involve the college educated black middle class (The College Fund/UNCF fundraisers, Black History Month activities, etc.). With each individual contact, discussions were either tape recorded or handwritten notes were taken. A total of 34 individual interviews were conducted; 15 with black Greeks (alumni and undergraduates) and 19 with non-members (alumni and undergraduates).

Third, recordings and notes were transcribed and analyzed in search for themes and information that "emerged as important and of interest from the text" (Siedman, 1995, p. 89). As each passage was read, excerpts where patterns developed were highlighted and then re-read together (like a mini-narrative) to ensure that the pattern was consistent. These comments were then grouped into themes that will be fully discussed and quoted in the next chapter. Comments that were not part of a pattern were disregarded (Schuh et al., 1992).

Fourth, 150 questionnaires were mailed or handed to 75 black Greeks and 75 non-

members who are both alumni and undergraduates. Forty surveys (38% response rate)

were returned and used as data for the research. Because Likert scaling was used to

measure the respondents' degree of perception, a one point value was assigned to each

response. No point was assigned to those who responded, "No Opinion."

Section I of the questionnaire surveyed perceptions of black Greek social status.

Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement.

Section II consisted of a series of questions regarding cultural validity and familiarity

with various aspects of the black Greek experience. In this section, respondents

indicated their degree of agreement with each statement and answered "yes" or "no" to

questions involving familiarity with various black Greek practices. Section III

contained open-ended questions that examined respondents' personal feelings about

black Greek membership overall. Since this part of the questionnaire is open-ended,

responses were analyzed in a manner similiar to the ethnographic interviews. Since

this section allowed respondents to be more candid by writing their own personal

opinions and not providing a structured response, their comments were grouped

thematically.

The results are presented on two tables (for the first two sections) and a thematic

summary of the open ended questions. The tables show the degree of respondents'

perceptions for each question. Additionally, results from the tables are discussed and

summarized in percentage form at the end of each section (Baier and Williams, 1983).

Overall percentages may not equal 100, since participants were given the "No

Opinion" option. Additionally, some participants skipped questions, giving no

response to some questions.

Finally, to ensure clarity with terminology, eight fraternity and sorority members who were not previously interviewed or surveyed were selected to define or describe words, phrases, and activities that are used within the black Greek system. This added measure not only clarifies language, but also reveals member familiarity with this element of black Greek culture.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

Before the findings are discussed, it is necessary to first list a definition of terms used within the black Greek system. Some of these terms appear in the questionnaire and others were used by respondents in their interviews. Additionally, the eight members who provided these definitions where asked to identify and define other terms with which they are familiar that are used within the black Greek system. This list is essential not only for those who are not familiar with the black Greek experience to gain better awareness of the culture by understanding some of the language used by the NPHC organizations, but it also provides clarity of terms used within the findings of the research. It is also appropriate for the cultural exploration addressed by this inquiry.

Listed alphabetically, the terms are:

Big brothers/sisters: The term a pledge uses to address those who already are members of the fraternity/sorority.

Call: The call and response that is used among members to identify one another.

Crossed, Crossing the burning sands: One's initiation into a fraternity or sorority after completing their pledge process.

Financial: Represents an individual's active status within his/her organization. One can not be considered "active" unless his/her membership dues are paid.

Ghost line, Ghost brother/sister: Persons who are part of an intake group who are participating in illegal pledging activities.

Intake: The new term used to describe the process by which one becomes a member of a fraternity or sorority. This process has replaced pledging. Each organization's intake process may differ and is structured as each fraternity or sorority deems appropriate.

Line brother/sister: Individuals who are a part of the same pledge group.

Me Phi Me (also called, *Non Phi Non*): A person who is not Greek.

On-line: Used to describe the process by which an individual or group of people take part in the pledging process.

Pledging: The traditional process by which one becomes a member of a fraternity or sorority. Pledging traditionally lasts anywhere from three to six weeks (sometimes more). During this process, the organization' s history, traditions, rituals, and secret information are taught and prospective members participate in various bonding activities. When the period ends, the ritual of initiation into the organization is performed.

Pledge line: A pledge group. Traditionally, all pledges walk together in a straight line from smallest to tallest in height. Each pledge is ascribed a line number (depending on where he/she falls within the line). Traditionally, pledge lines bond by doing everything together including learning the organization's information, eating, sharing a room, service projects, studying, etc. Each member of the pledge line is held accountable for the actions of its members. While graduate chapters also have pledge lines, the close bonding experience is usually conducted at the undergraduate level.

Rush/Smoker/Tea: An interest meeting held for those who seek to know more about a sorority (Rush/Tea) or a fraternity (Smoker).

Ship or Sands: Used differently according to geographic areas, a term used to describe individuals either who pledged the same organization at the same time, but through different chapters, or it describes individuals from different chapters who share the same line number.

Shirt wearer: Someone who appears to have only become a member just to have rights to bear the organizations' letters. They are generally non-participatory and

financially inactive.

Skating: Used to describe the process by which an individual becomes a member without having gone through what most Greeks would consider an acceptable pledge process.

Stepping (Step Show): A form of entertainment popularized and traditionally conducted by black Greeks. Rooted in the traditions of precision oriented dancing of West African tribes to display unity and achievement, sororities and fraternities put on a show by choreographing rhythmic, precision steps, while praising their organization and often poking fun at the others.

Sweethearts: A fraternity or sorority auxiliary support group. Found mostly among fraternities, sweetheart groups are typically young women who support fraternity activities organization's activities and assist pledges.

These definitions will be used to explain various terms used by respondents from the focus groups and the questionnaire. Defining the terms is relevant to understanding different aspects of black Greek culture.

Focus Groups

Black Greek culture

Members of both focus groups strongly agreed that there is a mystique involved with being a member of a black sorority or fraternity. Participants of both focus groups generally agreed on most issues and gave similar responses. The responses are grouped according to whether the issues were relevant to membership attainment or lifestyle (lifestyle once membership has been achieved).

Membership attainment

Both interview sessions began with questions regarding why membership is sought, then went into the dynamics of matriculation. In general, participants (Greek and non-Greek) cited three main reasons why membership is sought: (1) for status/popularity,

(2) for a sense of belonging, and (3) wanting to be a part of group with historical value and opportunities for service. These responses drew the most conversation.

In terms of status, members believe that many African-Americans perceive black Greeks as being popular, powerful, and "in charge,"particularly on the college campus. The basis of many responses was rooted in Noel et al. 's (1995) "in group" prototype, which describes attraction to groups based on perceptions of higher status. Quotes from members who commented on their initial impressions of black fraternities and sororities address this observation:

> As a new student, when I first walked on my college campus, the first thing that stood out were the painted trees, benches, monuments, even garbage cans with Greek letters on them. People I saw wearing letters seemed to have a certain air about them. Before classes even began, it was like, they were the people running things on the campus -- and you just knew it. They were the *in* group. It was like the letters made a statement.

> ...Growing up with my mom at Cookman [Bethune Cookman College] and coming up in a Greek atmosphere, even though I didn't know what they were really all about, the first thing I looked for in the brochure when I went to college was Greek organizations and the choir. I didn't know what it (Greek-letter organizations) was really all about, but I was drawn to them because they were elite. They were like the people I grew up around with my mom and wanted to get to know. They had a sense of power and the things they did mesmerized you. You come on campus and the leaders were the Greeks. It didn't matter what Greek letter organization it was, you saw the Greeks.

Other responses from members were similar. A number of the participants from both focus groups associated members of fraternities and sororities on college campuses with popularity and power. Most agreed that particularly on black college campuses, a large number of student leaders are members of black Greek-letter organizations. Additionally, the believe their schools (particularly black colleges and universities) supported the visable presence of black fraternities and sororities by

allowing the organizations to resurrect monuments, paint sidewalks, benches, trees, etc. with their groups' letters and colors. The group of non-Greeks claimed to have perceived early in their college experience a powerful mystique among members. Several non-members who were not exposed to a strong black Greek system in college made comparisons to what they believed black fraternity and sorority influence should be. Several comments from non-members who addressed their perceptions of black Greek influence include:

> I think people believe that the Greeks are powerful. I know when I started school, they were the first thing to catch my eye. My friends and I didn't know anything about fraternities and stuff, but we could tell that you just couldn't mess with them. They carried themselves like they were the s---. Like, being a freshman, I was intimidated by all that. At first, it was kind of like they were a gang! They were running everything, but they were like an intelligent gang. ...You wanted to get something done, or makethings happen, go to a Greek.

> Well, I noticed early on that Greeks are the one's everybody in school looks up to. They are the presidents of all the other clubs, and they give the best parties. They set the tone for what goes on. And even after college, alumni chapters run everything social here. They've got the balls and other classy social functions... Just about every black politician here, at least the ones I know are Greek. Most of them campaign using their organization's colors.

> Greeks at my school aren't about much. They are pretty weak. They're mostly shirtwearers. But, at the same time, if you know something about fraternities and sororities like I do, then you know that it's not supposed to be that way. The Greeks are supposed to be leaders and the one's with the power to handle things. None of the other organizations (non-Greek) really do much either. Its almost like they're waiting for the Greeks to take charge and get things going and then they'll follow.

Additionally, both groups noted that members generally exercise a certain behavior that alludes importance to others. This is particularly apparent when members are wearing organization paraphernalia. One member noted:

The letters have meaning. It shows you've been through something. When you wear those letters, you're conscious of your actions. You act like you earned them. The letters are a statement of leadership and achievement. You belong to something deep. That's what the letters communicate.

Belongingness

Members cited a sense of belonging as another primary reason why membership is sought. Among Douglas' (1995) 15 factors why individuals bond to a group, he includes reduction of anxiety, development of trust among one another, and willingness to defend one another. These principles resounded among members as they commented on membership experiences. Within the culture lies an environment of mutual trust among constituents that members believe was cultivated through the pledging process. Many members felt strongly that pledge lines encouraged prospective members to bond by developing trust with each other and their big brothers or sisters. In doing so, prospectives are rewarded with family membership. Comments from members that confirm Douglas' principles include:

It's my opinion, but a lot of black students, particularly the ones who are away at college, look for something to belong to. They want to feel liked, secure, and have that village feeling of being around people who care. People see that bonding happening when pledges are on line. When you pledge, everybody can see unity developing among line brothers and sisters.

...I decided I wanted to pledge because I was really stressed about whether or not I'd really make it in college. I mean, I knew I had what it took academically, but I missed my family and friends from home, and really needed to feel like I was a part of a family on campus. My line sisters kept me going by encouraging me. ...We were forced to become dependant on one another. I mean, I didn't choose my line sisters, they were chosen for me. So, here I am with all these girls I don't know, going through this intense process. We had to quickly learn to trust one another and learn to love each other, and our big sisters. Once you cross the burning sands, boom -- you instantly belong to a new family.

Your frat brother always has your back. Somebody just can't mess with you without knowing their messing with the whole fraternity. The brothers look out for one another, and on line, you're taught to be your brothers' keeper. His problems are yours, so you make sure that you look out for him that's what brotherhood is about. I think more than anything, that's why people join. They want to be part of a culture where they feel secure and valued, and that's what black sororities and fraternities offer.

While status and belongingness were the most recurring reasons that members believe attracts individuals to black fraternities and sororities, they also mentioned the historical value and opportunities for service that black Greek organizations offer.

Historical value and service

Almost every member interviewed recognized their affiliation with a black fraternity or sorority as a continuation of the black Greek-letter organizations' historical beginnings. Each member claimed to find value in being a part of an organization founded as a platform for black students to organize, share common interests, and develop activities and programs designed specifically to aid the black community. For members, membership (and the prospect of membership) provides a strong outlet for "giving back," as well as a sense of duty to the black community. However, the only non-members who commented in the affirmative about the historical value and service opportunities that membership offers were those who were fairly knowledgeable about black fraternities and sororities. Other non-members suggested that many prospective members lack knowledge of the historical and service aspects of black fraternities and sororities until they've been exposed through a membership intake process. One non-member argued:

...With a lot of people, especially where Greeks aren't really active like
they are supposed to be, the impression of black Greek organizations is that its all

about having fun. Its about stepping, and partying, and being in something where you wear colors and symbols, and have secret rituals, and secret pledging activities, and getting instant popularity, and stuff like that. They see the cultural part of the experience that makes being a Greek fun, but most of the time, the service and history of the organizations is unknown. People want to be a part of that culture because of the popularity and status. ...In other service organizations, you know up front that the work is required. Sometimes, its almost a hidden fact with Greek organizations. A lot of people don't know what being Greek is really all about until after they've joined. ...Yes, a lot of people learn about the organizations at a rush or a smoker, but still, not in depth. Especially now, because of intake they can join a fraternity or sorority and they don't have to know anything about the organization they become a part of.

This comment was affirmed by several comments from non-Greeks who attested to not knowing that service was a vital component of black Greek membership. Although these individuals were aware that the black Greek organizations do conduct some service oriented activities, their primary perception of black fraternities and sororities centered around party oriented, social activities and hazing practices conducted by the organizations at the campus level. At least three individuals who became members through the new intake process admitted to not knowing about their organization's historical impact or service contributions until after they became members. While these three members claim to enjoy what they consider benefits of membership, only one of the three is currently a financially active member of their organization.

Pledging's impact on black Greek culture

Since pledging was banned in 1993 by the National Pan Hellenic Council and replaced with a new intake procedure, members, in particular, believe that this new process has a profound impact on membership and black Greek culture overall. As

both groups described their perceptions of pledging, repeatedly, pledging was identified as the creative force behind the allure of black Greek culture. Both groups suggested that pledging provided a small, but effective window for the public to view the development and transformation of pledges into influential members. To summarize the respondents' views on pledging, this activity served as the acculturation process by which a non-member learned the in-depth history, ideologies, values, behaviors, and traditions of their respective organization, while required to form family oriented bonds with fellow pledges and current members of the organization. Several members offered:

Pledges are taught to think, act, and respond on the same accord. I and my sister are one! If a big sister asks number two something and she says she doesn't know the answer, then the rest of the line doesn't know it either. Whatever number one on the line ate, that's what the rest of us ate. We were taught to work together as one force. Even though individuality is respected, we had to use our individual talents to aid the whole line. There's no such thing as standing out on your own. We stand together or we don't stand at all. In private, our line would work out our personal differences; sometimes even fight if we needed to, but in the end, when we were in front of our big sisters or the public, we were one.

When people used to see us walking together in line, on the same foot, swinging the same arm, every single move synchronized -- it was awesome! It felt good to know that people were watching me and rooting for me to make it. It was like observing a troop who is going through basic training walking across the base. They look good and sound good singing their songs, but when they get behind closed doors, you know they are going through something intense. ...And after it was all over, people would tell me how they could see my development. ...It was like everything I was learning and going through on line was turning me into a new person. Not like a different person, but a better me.

Everything that I learned on line prepared me to be a strong Greek and even a stronger member of black society. I learned to be a quick and smart thinker. I really learned how to control my temper and hold my tongue and work with people. ...You go through it and once you're in, you reap the

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benefits of everything that Greek life has to offer. For a lot of people who maybe didn't have much before they pledged, being Greek practically propels you into a new life. ...There's definitely a transformation taking place when you pledge.

Several non-Greeks noted:

I know you don't have to pledge anymore, but people still want to go through it to feel like they earned their letters. It used to be that nobody respected a skater. Now skating's the way. You don't have to do anything or go through anything. Its (membership) not respected like it used to be. Think about it... you could join any organization to do service projects. When somebody pledged, it made them stand out and people knew that they were being trained to handle things. Now, the letters just mean you are part of a group that is respected. It doesn't mean that you actually know how to handle things or that you are a part of some unique culture. I know people who went through intake and they are the exact same. They said they wanted to join to become better, but they didn't go through anything to change. Now, a lot of them have Greek letters on their chest, and don't know the first thing about what it means to be Greek.

They (pledge lines) looked so good. You could tell the ones on line who were not adjusting well or the ones who were just really going through hell. Sometimes, you'd just see a line whose s--- was so together, and everybody knew once they crossed the burning sands that they would really be a force to reckon with.

I had a friend who was quite a clown before he pledged, then afterwards, it was like he become Mr. Serious. I mean, he's still cool and everything, but he really went through some things on line that made him shape up and turn into like, this mold of his fraternity. His fraternity has a reputation for being like serious, really dignified men. Ministers and people like that. So, he became that way, too. He went from Joe Blow to being an *Alpha man*. Most of them go through that. When they pledge, they transform into the image of their fraternity or sorority, which means a new way of acting and socializing. ...Just about every man I know personally who is an Alpha is married to an AKA. That's what Alpha's do -- they marry AKA's. Its not a written rule, but its a traditional part of Alpha culture.

I don't believe pledging is worth what most people endure to become Greek. Its foolish to submit to physical and verbal abuse by someone you call 'big sister.' A person should be able to join a sorority for what they are worth, not to be molded into someone else. I've seen too many people change into this 'Greek' thing after they pledge. I don't even think its real power that they achieve after they cross. Its like they assume power or think they are powerful

once they become Greek. ...A lot of times with black people, popularity is synomous with power.

A small number of non-Greeks agreed with this same point. They argued that membership produced popularity that, at the college level, could be easily confused with power. Further, they believe that pledging provided an opportunity for individuals who may have otherwise had little chance at popularity. Pledging provided an opportunity to be seen and accepted by others. However, the majority of this same group of non-Greeks do believe that once membership is achieved, the alumni network is undeniably a viable means to achieve "real" influence and power. As one non-member noted, "The college thing just gets them in and allows them to be popular. Once they graduate, its about getting down to business, 'cause that's where the real power begins."

Many participants of both groups offered that the pledging process, especially for individuals who may have had lower levels of self-esteem and confidence, provoked a "do or die" mentality. Having endured the process, a personal feeling of empowerment is cultivated and new members are stimulated by their "survival of the fittest" experience. The majority of both groups also believed that individuals who seek membership as alumni are those who have long desired membership, but not at the expense of hazing activities that are associated with college level pledging, or those who recognize the influence and lifestyle of graduate Greeks. Most agreed that once the rite of passage is achieved, numerous social and professional opportunities await.

<u>Member lifestyle</u>

Once membership has been attained, members of black fraternities and sororities gain entry into what many have described as a powerful network of middle and upper class, educated, professional African-Americans. Most members indicated that they are currently or have previously been indulgent in the lifestyle that they believe the black Greek experience fosters. Non-members also expressed their perceptions of black Greek lifestyles. Recurring responses from both groups regarding black Greek lifestyles have been categorized according to the following themes: (1) traditions and stereotypes, and (2) privilege.

<u>Traditions and stereotypes</u>

Members of both groups discussed the cultural traditions of black Greeks and how these traditions have developed into lifestyles. Both groups also discussed organization stereotypes that have become components of traditional lifestyles within black Greek culture.

Members who participated in a legal pledge period, as well as those who where involved in ghost lines expressed strong feelings toward the continuation of sorority and fraternity rituals and customs. Many cited a strong desire to resume the legacy of their organizations' traditions. Some of these traditions include the singing of songs and serenading, reciting chants, secret and public ceremonies (during occasions such as at a member's wedding, funeral, etc.), call and response, and use of black Greek language.

Several members who believed that black Greek traditions were of value noted:

It would be a disservice to our sororal ancestors to not keep up what they began. Some of the bad things like hazing should be done away with, but those special things that sisters share in at the birth of a baby, a wedding, and so on should be honored. It shows support for one another and continues the bond among sisters. ...Our activities have meaning. They reinforce our sisterhood and care for one another.

I met a new brother who was my ship and went to give him the handshake, and he didn't even know it. He told me he was new and hadn't been taught the handshake yet. I don't look at him as my brother. We wear the same letters, but if he doesn't know what I know, then how can we be brothers? I know that sounds cold, but our traditions are important and it's not cool at all for your organization to be about brotherhood and here's a brother who can't identify with the traditions of the group.

I love it when I give my call in a crowded room and a soror responds. It makes me feel good knowing that I have a sister in the room who can identify with me. Of course, when I meet a soror now, I usually ask when she became a member. Not to say she isn't worthy, but I know that if it's somebody who came in after 1995 or so, nine out of ten times, they aren't going to value the organization like someone who pledged. And if they are really into the sorority, its because they had to find their own way, not because they went through something to earn the letters. But, I still try to be sympathetic and make sure that if I do meet a soror who doesn't know the traditions, I teach her.

I used to be so into being Greek. I think I wore paraphernalia for about two months straight after I crossed. But, I recognized that as being important -- wearing the letters and colors, acknowledging my sorors with the call, getting together with the sisters and serenading around our tree every Friday, just everything. All that was meaningful to me because it made me feel like a part of something big, and it showed other people that I was into my commitment. ...As blacks...tradition plays an awesome part in our culture. Think about the role that song has played in our heritage. Singing and dancing bonded us in times of turmoil and helped us to celebrate. Serenading sorority songs and stepping is just an extension of African-American and African traditions. ...Even with language, like some words in street slang are rooted out of experiences in urban communities. Greeks have coined terms exclusive to their experiences, too. And, call and response is definitely an African tradition. Greeks do the same thing. ...Being a black Greek is definitely like living in a culture within a culture.

Non-Greeks who commented on their perceptions of black Greek traditions were

not as affirmative as members about their importance. However, most seemed to

believe that their participation in various aspects of Greek culture is valuable to members and has a place in African-American culture overall. Only a small number of non-members offered comments that suggest black Greek traditions are not a visible component of African-American culture, nor do they have value. Comments from non-members include:

> Since I've been around Greeks now more than when I was first exposed to sororities and fraternities, I can say that I see how their culture really ties into black culture overall. A lot of what they do like stepping is from an African tradition... It's good that they do that kind of thing, because its really one of black Americans' ways of taking African traditions and revising them to be more western and more modern.

> I'm not really sure if that (traditions) is important or not, but it seems to be very meaningful to them (members). It's not really important to me whether they continue with their traditions, but I think it would take away a little bit of our (black) culture overall if they stopped. Their lifestyle has become a part of black American culture, but I'm not sure I'd really call it an important part. Their service is more important than anything else, but their traditions and lifestyle is definitely a recognizable aspect of black American life .

> I think black sororities and fraternities have more or less carved their way into black American culture. If they cease with all the traditional things that they do, I think it will force them to be about service, which is what they are supposed to be about. It all may be a blessing in disguise, with them not pledging anymore. The focus should be on community, not keeping up traditions. That's part of change...

In addition to both groups' feelings about black Greek traditions, many included organization stereotypes as being a part of the traditional makeup of the black Greek experience. Within the black Greek lifestyle, members and non-members perceived that certain stereotypes that have developed over the years play a large role in the overall image of black sororities and fraternities. Additionally, many participants of both groups believe that membership influences lifestyle choices. When asked what

role image plays in the black Greek experience , there was a consensus by participants

of both groups in their descriptions of the organizations' individual stereotyped image.

Those who commented believe that the organizations' images impact factors such as

which organization one selects to join, dating and marital choices, public behavior, and

sometimes career choices.

Well, if you're not a pretty and prissy, then you can't be an AKA. That's what
they are known for. I know a couple of girls who were turned down from
AKA, because the girls in the sorority said they didn't look good enough and
weren't divas. But then, I know a lot of girls who really aren't that way, who put
on an act just to get accepted into the sorority. I've seen a lot of girls
change who they were, just to adapt to their sorority's image.

I was interested in Kappa and went to their smoker, but they kept telling me
that I looked more like an Alpha. Kappa's are like the players and pretty boys,
and I'm real conservative, I guess like Alpha's are supposed to be -- like the
Martin Luther King type. I never did pledge anything, but when people find out I
went to a black college and I'm a minister, most of them assume I'm an
Alpha.

Yes, I knew about the sororities' image before I pledged. I didn't really let that
influence my decision to pledge, but I did feel like I fit in with Zeta better than I
would with the others. I will say that I attended teas for all the sororities
when I was in college, and the AKA's, Delta's and S.G. Rho's did scrutinize me. It
was like they were not concerned with my personal achievements; more
like they were looking me over to see if I could live up to their image. All my
friends were surprised when I went Zeta, 'cause they said that I don't look
like one. I still hear that all the time, 'You don't look like an Zeta.' With
thousands of unique women all across the country, I still can't figure out what a
Zeta is supposed to look like.

The stereotype thing really shouldn't matter, but I'd by lying if I said that
people don't take that into consideration. People look at physical appearance or
behavior, and they encourage you to pledge where they think you
stereotypically fit.

Before I pledged, I admit that I was attracted to the Greek lifestyle. And, I'm
embarrassed to say it now, because I know its silly, but right after I pledged, I was
so into my fraternity's culture. I would purposely only date Delta's
because the Delta/Omega match was what you were supposed to do. I would

date other Greeks, too, but I always thought that when it was time to settle down, my choice for marriage would be to a Delta. My wife is Greek, but she's not a Delta. Believe it or not, there was a time when that was really inconceivable to me -- that I'd marry somebody who wasn't a Delta.

Even though I really wanted to, I didn't pledge when I was in college because I was afraid, but I'm still thinking about becoming AKA. ...No, I don't know about anything they've done...I didn't know they do service projects. ...I want to be one, because I think they are so grand -- and that's me!

AKA's are light skinned women with long hair, or if they don't fit that m.o., they're really prissy like. Delta's are typically very aggressive, outspoken and tend to be wild. Sigma Gamma Rho's and Zeta's are real down to earth, but the Rho's don't necessarily have an obvious stereotype. I think they are supposed to be more like into their books. From what I know, most of them are teachers and educators. They're very low key -- not into the popularity thing like the other sororities. The Zeta's, depending on where you go, they tend to be different. I think their image has changed over the years. I think it used to be that women who couldn't physically live up to the stereotype of AKA and Delta used to pledge Zeta, but since their gaining more notoriety because of their service projects, Zeta attracts a lot of women because of that and their sisterhood with the Sigmas. The Omegas are rough and really wild. You know, they're reputation is for being just unorthodox. Kappas are the smooth playboys, Sigmas are down to earth, kinda' good hearted, country boy types, and the Alphas are the more stately and business types.

Nearly 80% of both members and non-members who were asked to describe the image of each of the organizations responded with similar descriptions for at least five of the eight organizations. Those unable to describe at least five of the eight organizations' stereotyped image consisted of a mix of non-members and newer members who participated in intake versus pledging. This coincides with concerns by members who participated in the pledging process about newer members being unknowledgable about many aspects of black Greek culture. Each person who did comment on this issue believes that black Greek stereotypes have been handed down through traditional practices of the organization and were probably not intended to

become stereotypes. Additionally, they believe that membership in black Greek organizations was intended to promote an image of leadership among African-Americans. Several members referred to W.E.B. DuBois' Talented Tenth concept and noted that they were taught during their pledge periods about upholding the Talented Tenth image.

As more questions regarding membership lifestyle were asked, in addition to the traditions and stereotypes of black Greeks, both groups offered comments concerning issues of privilege that they believe exist among members.

Privilege

During both focus groups, I held up a sorority t-shirt that read, "Membership has its privileges." Each group was asked to comment on whether or not they believe there is truth in that statement. Answers from those who responded were similar from both groups.

> Oh, when you become Greek, you are in. The invitations you get, the people you network with. Its a close knit group. I'm a sweetheart and sometimes I benefit from my association with the brothers even though I'm not Greek.

> I didn't realize until after I joined my sorority the vast resources that were at my fingertips. I became exposed to so much once I became Greek, that it was like I was privileged. I don't think I would have been exposed to some of the same opportunities had I not been Greek. Every job I've ever had was through a contact made with somebody who was Greek. Would I have gotten the jobs if I weren't Greek?... I don't know, maybe so. But, I think most of the people that I networked with to get those jobs, I met at Greek functions, or in talking with them somewhere and found out they were Greek. It's always just like a major icebreaker and an inroad when you get on the subject of being Greek if the person you're talking to is Greek, too.

> I'm not on the inside, so I can't say for sure, but I have friends who are Greek who always talk about like how their frat brother or soror hooked them up with something. Whether it's a job, a place to live or stay when they go out of

town, meeting somebody important... they have access to things that people who aren't in fraternities or sororities don't.

Fraternities and sororities for us (blacks) is what I would compare to white people's good old boy network. It's about who you know, and if they're a real soror or brother, they look out for their brothers and sisters and try to make things happen for them. ...Its happened to me where I was somewhere just wearing my letters and another Greek noticed and has helped me out, or fixed me up with something...

Only a few members did not agree that privilege, as others described it, was a part of their experience. However, they did agree that membership serves a resource for networking, but compared it to membership in any professional or education oriented organization where networking takes place.

Interview Conclusions

The majority of both groups indicated that black fraternities and sororities have a visible lifestyle among African-Americans and that the lifestyle is rooted in many of the stereotypes and traditional practices of the organizations.

Having conducted focus groups and personal interviews with members and non-members, discussions with these groups demonstrate that: (1) the majority of members and non-members are able to identify many of the primary aspects of black Greek culture and share similar perceptions of membership attainment and lifestyle associated with the culture, and that (2) both groups believe that black Greek culture has some value and meaning within African-American culture overall. The ethnographic interviews conducted with members and non-members, particularly the one-on-one interviews, provided participants with an opportunity to be candid about their perceptions.

While these interview responses were grouped thematically, and some of the more poignant comments were quoted above, responses from additional research through open-structured, ended questions on the questionnaire were also grouped according to recurring themes. Additionally, the Likert Scale responses from specific questions demonstrate majority opinion on each question and summarize this inquiry.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was categorized into three areas and responses were summarized at the end of each section. Demographic information was requested before the research questions began. The information obtained include: ethnicity, level of education, undergraduate or graduate Greek affiliation, and age range. This was done so that more information could be used in the summaries of each section to better identify perceptions from specific groups of respondents.

The following tables reflect the first two segments of the questionnaire and their Likert Scale responses. The results are separated based on member and non-member opinion. By displaying the results in this manner, it is clear to see majority opinion for each question. The first table indicates results from the Social Perceptions section, and the second table indicates results from the Cultural Perceptions section. Results from the third section of the questionnaire, which allowed for open-ended responses, are grouped thematically.

Social perceptions

The social perceptions section of the questionnaire addressed issues specifically concerning the respondents' beliefs regarding power and influence among black Greeks.

TABLE 1
Perceptions of the social climate of black Greek membership

Survey Item	Members n=18					Non-Members n=22				
	SA	A	SWA	D	NO	SA	A	SWA	D	NO
1. Believe that membership is beneficial & aids in an individual's social development.	11	6	1	0	0	3	8	10	1	0
2. Believe that members of BGO's are considered influential by society.	8	6	2	0	0	2	8	4	7	0
3. Believe that BG's significantly impact the social & political climate of African Americans.	6	9	3	0	0	1	10	4	7	0
4. Believe that BG's may have more influence in social & political affairs of African-Americans than non-members.	5	7	4	2	0	1	8	6	6	0
5. Believe that some of the most influential African-Americans are members of BGO's.	10	8	0	0	0	6	7	6	3	0
6. Believe that there are obvious differences in social attitudes toward membership in BGO's versus membership in other black service/social organizations.	6	7	2	3	0	5	5	5	6	1

	Y	SMT	HE	N						
7. *Consistently experienced some privilege solely because of membership.	8	9	1	0						
8. †Believe that BG's are often extended privilege solely because of membership.						2	1	14	2	2

	Y	YNS	N							
9. *Noticed obvious differences in others' behavior toward them after becoming a member.	10	7	1							
10. †Believe that BG's are perceived as elitists within the black community.						4	4	4	8	1

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	SA	A	SWA	D	NO
11. *Believe that membership has made a significant difference in their social development & status. Would not have had the same social/professional experiences without membership.	8	7	3	0	0

	Y	YNS	N
12. †Has witnessed an individual achieve influence & a higher level of social status after becoming a member.	8	8	4

SA - Strongly Agree, A- Agree, SWA- Somewhat Agree, D- Disagree, NO- No Opinion
Y - Yes, YNS- Yes, but not significant, N- Never, SMT -Sometimes, HE- Hardly Ever
BGO- Black Greek Organizations
BG's- Black Greeks
*. Questions for Greeks only
†- Questions for non-Greeks only

The results from the social perceptions segment of the questionnaire indicate that by fairly large margins most Greeks strongly agree or agree that membership in black Greek-letter organizations is influential. The majority of Greeks believed themselves considered influential by society and that they significantly impact the social and political climate of African-Americans. One hundred percent of members strongly agreed and agreed that black Greeks are influential African-Americans. While responses where often divided among non-Greeks, by a very small margin, most strongly agreed or agreed that membership is considered influential, but in larger numbers believe that black Greeks impact the social and political climate of blacks. Non-Greeks somewhat agreed or disagreed more on the three questions that were "non-Greek only". They do not perceive black Greeks as elitists, and believe that members sometimes are extended privilege. Overall, the division between non-Greeks who agree, somewhat agree and disagree was very close. This division may be the result of several factors. First, one member noted during an interview session, they

dynamics of membership are usually not exposed until one becomes a member. Many (particularly college students) outside of the black Greek system have associated popularity with membership, but do not have a real sense of its "value" or "benefits," nor are they aware of fraternity/sorority membership among influential African Americans. Therefore, to ask a non-Greek whether they believe black Greeks are influential or have political clout may not yield a knowledgeable answer, given they may not know that many prominent African-Americans hold membership. Particularly at the undergraduate level, in general non-members don't know about the Greek affiliation of prestigious African-Americans unless it is promoted by Greeks on their campus. Ironically, the majority of respondents to the questionnaire are college undergraduates.

Cultural identification

The section of the survey that explored cultural identification questions knowledge of black Greek language, traditions, and other artifacts. Responses to these questions are indicated in table 2.

TABLE 2
Black Greek cultural familiarity

Survey Item	Members n=18		Non-Members n=22	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
13. Can identify the colors of at least four of the eight fraternities and sororities?	16	2	20	2
14. Can identify at least four organizations by its hand signal/gesture?	16	2	14	8
15. Has seen an individual wearing particular colors and immediately assumed that he/she is a member of a fraternity or sorority?	12	6	14	8

Table 2. continued

		Members					Non-Members			
		Yes	No				Yes	No		

16. Have you ever seen an individual wearing the paraphernalia of his/her organization and immediately developed a perception of what he/she may be like? — Members: Yes 13, No 5 — Non-Members: Yes 19, No 2

17. Able to identify at least four of the eight fraternities/sororities by its call or yell? — Members: Yes 14, No 4 — Non-Members: Yes 11, No 11

18. Is familiar with at least four of these terms that are formerly or currently used by BG's?
    a) Crossing the burning sands, b) Ship or sands
    c) Shirt wearer, d) Me Phi Me, e) On Line — Members: Yes 18, No 0 — Non-Members: Yes 12, No 10

19. Has seen or participated in a pledge line. — Members: Yes 18, No 0 — Non-Members: Yes 14, No 8

20. Has seen or participated in a black Greek ritual such as group serenading. — Members: Yes 12, No 6 — Non-Members: Yes 9, No 14

21. Has seen or participated in a Greek step show. — Members: Yes 18, No 0 — Non-Members: Yes 13, No 9

		Members				Non-Members		
		Y	NS	N		Y	NS	N
22.	Do you believe that the stereotypical image of a fraternity/sorority significantly impacts the increase in memberships?	11	5	2		14	6	2

		SA	A	SWA	D	NO	SA	A	SWA	D	NO
23.	Most black Greek-letter organizations have a clearly identifiable stereotype of its members.	7	6	3	2	0	9	4	6	1	1
24.	Believes that people with like personalities join the same fraternities or sororities?	5	4	6	2	1	2	7	11	2	1
25.	Believes that individuals join a fraternity or sorority then assume the stereotype of the organization.	9	5	3	1	0	1	8	7	1	5
26.	Believes that black Greek traditions such as stepping should be conducted only by Greek organizations.	6	0	8	2	2	5	1	4	6	5
27.	Believes that pledging and pledge-like activities should be conducted only by Greek organizations.	6	4	5	1	2	2	6	1	3	10
28.	Believes that the rituals and traditions of Greeks have significant value and meaning to its members.	9	7	2	0	0	6	6	0	1	0

*29. Believes that the wearing of paraphernalia
and colors is an important tradition of
black Greeks.   12   6   0   0   0

The responses here are not as closely divided as those regarding social perception. It is clear that most individuals, Greek or non-Greek, have (or believe that they have) enough exposure to the black Greek experience to identify members through verbal and non-verbal communication and by the practice of certain black Greek traditions. In recent years, practices such as stepping and pledging have been mimicked by other non-fraternal organizations. It was said that churches have formed step ministries and high school groups have formed step teams to teach discipline to young people. Marching bands, athletic teams and other groups that are club oriented have practiced Greek-style pledging to build unity among its members. Traditionally, black Greeks have been against non-fraternal organizations practicing its traditions. However, it appears that these attitudes may be softening, particularly among younger Greeks. The majority of members agreed that Greek-like activities should only be conducted only by Greek-letter organizations, with all members from the age 31 and up group responding in the affirmative. Younger members expressed more lenient opinions by indicating they somewhat agreed, disagreed, or had no opinion that Greek-like activities should only be conducted by members. All of the Greeks who indicated a lack of familiarity with black Greek cultural identifiers where those among the 18 to 21 group. Non-Greek responses were closely divided among those who somewhat agreed or had no opinion. When asked if black Greek culture was meaningful to its

members, nearly 50% of non-Greeks did not answer. As indicated during the interviews, while non-Greeks expressed some value to black Greek culture overall, many were indifferent regarding the importance of black Greek cultural identifiers. The majority of black Greeks (88%) strongly agreed or agreed that black Greek culture has value to its members.

Responses from the questions that addressed stereotypes appears to indicate that 77% of members and 40% of non-members strongly agree or agree that once an individual becomes a member, he/she takes on the organization's stereotype. Further, the majority of both members and non-members also strongly believe that organization stereotype impacts membership. This supports remarks taken from the personal interviews regarding identifiable stereotypes. Additionally, it supports many beliefs that fraternities and sororities are selective about prospective members, only accepting those who fit the organization's image. The majority of respondents (72% Greeks and 90% non-Greeks) also noted to have stereotypical perceptions of members (without necessarily knowing the individual) simply by seeing their letters.

Open-ended questions

The remaining questions were open-ended and the answers were grouped according to similarity in response. Most of these questions were targeted toward Greek members to better understand their specific feelings about their membership experience. Rather than provide full answers, the results are grouped according to the theme of the response. Unlike the grouping of the ethnographic interview responses,

where only remarks that reoccurred in pattern form were given, all responses to the open-ended questions have been categorized.

30. Do you feel that black Greek-letter organizations play(ed) an important role in black American culture?

Greeks: Yes - 18
Response themes: Historical significance, Socialization, Bonding, Positive imagery for blacks, Networking benefits, Leadership building.

Non-Greeks: Yes - 10
Response themes: Historical significance, represents educated blacks in America.

Non-Greeks: Somewhat - 5
Responses: Plays a part, but not a *significant* part of black culture.

Non-Greeks: No- 3
Responses: Don't believe they have value.

31. Do you feel that black Greek-letter organizations are true to their mission of service, education and the advancement of the black community?

Greeks: Yes- 17
Response themes: Service oriented organization goals, Identification of specific service projects.

Non-Greeks: Yes- 8
Response theme: Evidence of service (particularly at the graduate level).

Non-Greeks: Somewhat - 7
Response theme: More focused on tradition and not service.

Questions 32 to 30 - Greeks only

32. How important is maintaining the image, traditions and rituals of your organization? Why are they/aren't they important?

Very Important/Important: 14
Response themes: Provides a rite of passage, Creates bonding experiences, Traditions have historical value.

Not important: 2
Responses: No explanation.

33. Do you think image, traditions and rituals have overshadowed the missions of most black Greek-letter organizations?

Yes - 9
Response themes: Undergraduate popularity, Rivalry between organizations on college campuses.

No - 1
Response: No explanation

No Opinion: 4

34. Are you currently a financial member of your organization? If no, why not?

Yes - 7

No - 11

Response themes: Financial constraints, Lack of time to be active, Control by older members.

35. If you are not financial, do you still participate in fraternity/sorority related activities?

Yes - 11
Response themes: Attend social functions, Volunteer when available.

36. Would you submit to the same kinds of pledge or membership requirements to other social or services organizations in the way that you have for your fraternity/sorority?

Yes - 3
Response theme: If it is what membership requires.

No - 15
Response themes: Negative pledging experiences, Is more mature.

37. Was your pledge or intake process a negative experience?
Yes - 5
Response theme: Unnecessary hazing occurred

Somewhat: 10
Responses: Negative activity occurred, but the overall result was positive.

No - 3

38. Do you believe that the banning of pledging has caused a rift in the attitudes among Greeks before the ban toward those after the ban?

Yes: 8
Response themes: No opportunity for bonding, Not learning about the organization until after initiation.

Somewhat: 4
Response theme: Lack of unity (brother/sisterhood) among newer Greeks.

No: 6
Response themes: Continued increase in membership, Pledging is too hazardous, All members should accept change.

39. How do you feel about individuals of other races joining historically black fraternities and sororities?

Greeks: Don' t like it - 8
Response theme: Diminishes historical value, May cause racial tension.

Greeks: No Opinion - 8

40. (Greeks and non-Greeks) Can you identify any recent contributions made by black Greek-letter organizations?

Greeks: Yes - 17
Response themes: Scholarship support, Youth and social service oriented programs.

Greeks: No - 1

Non-Greeks: No - 22

41. Do you believe there is a mystique about membership in black fraternities/sororities? Whether you answer is yes or no, in general do you think there are distinctions between membership in these organizations versus membership in

other social or service organizations?

Greeks: 18 - Yes there is a mystique
Response themes: Brother/sisterhood and bonding experience, Influential and powerful members, Social and professional networking opportunities.

Non-Greeks: Yes -16
Response themes: Brother/sisterhood and bonding experience.

42. Would you encourage a youngster to become a member of a black Greek-letter organization. Why or Why Not?

Greeks: Yes - 18
Response themes: Valuable opportunities and benefits, Socialization and leadership, Life-long friendships.

Non-Greeks: Yes - 12
Response themes: Benefits of membership and life-long friendships.

Non-Greeks: No - 5
Response themes: Should be able to develop esteem without influence of Greeks, Would let person decide on own.

Non-Greeks: No Opinion - 5

The majority of Greeks and non-Greeks surveyed believed that there is value in black Greek membership and that black Greek organizations play(ed) a significant role in African-American society/culture. Members believe the organizations have historical significance, provide opportunities for social development, bonding experiences, and life-long friendships. Additionally, members were able to identify some of the educational, social and political involvements, community and social service projects of their groups. They believe it is important to maintain the image and traditions of their organizations because of it's historical value, bonding, and the rites of passage. Most members believe that the image and traditions have overshadowed the mission of

the organizations at the undergraduate level. Because of rivalry between groups, the "in group" prototype, and loss of focus on the organizations' mission, members believe that undergraduates do not fully engage in the mission of service and leadership. By a small margin, non-Greeks believe that the organizations are service focused. However, many non-Greeks also believe that black fraternities and sororities are more focused on tradition than service.

Non-financial members continue to participate in social and service activities. This may be due to the networking and social opportunities that come with membership. Most indicated strongly that they would not participate in any pledge-like activity to join another organization. Several cited having a negative pledge experience, others believe they are simply more mature and wiser to participate in pledge related activities. Although the clear majority of all Greeks polled indicated that negative activities (mostly hazing) occurred during their pledge period, most noted the end result as being worth it. During the focus group, the Greeks talked about feeling worthy and gratified upon crossing the burning sands and putting ill-feelings toward abusive big brothers/sisters behind them once they became Greek. Respondents who joined their organization through pledging admit to experiencing tension towards those who have joined the organizations through the intake process. Most in the survey and focus group emphasized a lack of unity among newer members. They believe newer members have a general understanding of the brother/sisterhood concept, but don't get a chance to actualize it since there is no opportunity to bond before becoming a member and that learning the organization's history, mission, structure and secret

information in many cases is now optional.

The results were evenly split between members with no opinion and those who did not like persons of other racial groups joining their organizations. Within the focus groups, when asked about this issue, most members indicated that they did not have a problem with members of other minority races seeking membership, but did not approve of white membership in historically black fraternities and sororities. As one member noted, when the time comes to "choose sides," its likely that white members would feel awkward and not get involved, or simply choose "the other side." Also because historically blacks have been kept out of white social and professional circles, they believed it important to have a networking environment exclusively for African-Americans.

Almost all of the Greeks were able to identify recent contributions from their organizations. However, none of the non-Greeks could identify any recent contributions by black Greek-letter organizations. This may be for several reasons. First, the majority of non-Greeks surveyed are undergraduates who's primary source of exposure to black fraternities and sororities is at the college level, and they are not aware of graduate level contributions. Second, non-Greeks may have knowledge of various community oriented activities, but may not be aware that black Greek organizations coordinate or sponsor them.

Most of the respondents (Greek and non-Greek) agree that there is a mystique about black Greek membership. The majority identify the brother/sisterhood experience as the prime distinction between Greek organizations and other black

social/service groups. The traditional bonding experiences noted throughout the questionnaires (as well as in the focus groups) was said to ensure togetherness and the mysterious relationship among members.

The majority of both Greeks and non-Greeks indicated that they would encourage a young person to become a member. Networking, socialization, leadership and friendship opportunities were all identified as reasons for this encouragement. Those who would not encourage a young person to join listed freedom of individual choice as the most recurring reason.

The results of the questionnaire appear to support many of the same results received through the ethnographic interviews.

Conclusions

Three main conclusions may be drawn from the data collected for this inquiry about black Greek membership. The research shows that: (1) membership is perceived by Greeks and non-Greeks as a source of influence, privilege, and power for African-Americans, (2) membership is believed to offer professional and social benefits for blacks, and (3) there are cultural attributes within black fraternities and sororities that may be considered meaningful to African-American culture overall. While these results were strongly confirmed by members, they were only marginally confirmed by non-members, particularly those who completed the questionnaire.

The strongest indicators of these results are revealed in ethnographic interviews and the social perceptions segment of the questionnaire. Members and non-members perceive black Greeks as those who influence the social and political climate of

African-Americans and that members, in general, are considered influential. Most respondents also recognized alumni chapters as having "real" power versus undergraduate chapters whose popularity is often synonymous with power. Additionally, most respondents strongly agreed that membership aids in one's social development. Given this perception, black sororities and fraternities have a unique advantage to develop its members' potential for leadership and influence. However, as respondents have noted, undergraduate chapters often lose sight of their organizations' mission. Particularly since traditional pledging no longer exists, leadership development must be implemented in new ways.

Secondary conclusions suggest that (1) traditional practices through the rites of passage (pledging activities) have been instrumental in communicating distinctions between black Greek organizations and other black social or service groups, and that (2) experienced Greeks are concerned that this distinction or mystique is being threatened by the new intake process, particularly at the undergraduate level.

Most respondents indicated that they were exposed to fraternities and sororities at the undergraduate level. One of the interviewed participants said the he considered pledging a fraternity at a large, predominantly white university in Florida. His interest was peaked by the popularity of fraternity men with young women on campus, their stepping ability in step shows, parties and their overall popularity. He further noted that the brothers seemed to be close to one another and extended favors among each other. He had no knowledge of community projects, fundraisers, or any other service oriented activities conducted by the fraternities, nor did he ever notice any unification

between that fraternity and any other black Greek group on campus. However, he noted several rivalry incidents (including a shooting) between two fraternities. Another non-Greek participant who has been exposed to black Greek organizations since she was a child is considering joining a sorority. However, she is unimpressed with the Greeks on her historically black college campus. Because of her exposure to Greeks in her hometown, she has a strong understanding of the bonding, service and empowerment concepts. Llikewise, she has high expectations for the benefits of the black Greek experience and notes that she is thinking about waiting to join a graduate chapter so that her experience can be more meaningful. While it is clearly understood that pledging as it has been traditionally practiced often brings with it hazing and other negative activities, it seems that the intake process as it is currently practiced may need refining if maintaining their mystique and traditions are as important as respondents have noted. Without bonding, a sense of "earning" membership, and in-depth knowledge about the organization before initiation, respondents believed that the experience and distinction seems marginalized. One member indicated that he was aware of many pledges participating in undergraduate ghost lines, subjecting themselves to hazing, believing that the abuse will somehow make them more worthy of membership. One alumni member also noted that his fraternity would continue to practice underground pledging in order for its new members to earn the rite of passage. Further, he said that pledging related activities are not discussed with prospective members, but it is made clear to prospectives "in a round about way" to expect to earn their letters. As evidenced with these statements,

the brother/sister bonding aspect of black Greek membership appears to also communicate worthiness. It is clearly understood that hazing activities are inexcusable and should never be a part of the bonding experience. However, respondents feel that the organizations should question whether a complete void of bonding activities is appropriate. It is fair to note that just as pledging (as it has been practiced for more than half a century) became a traditional component of black Greek matriculation, this tradition is not necessary for the organizations to carry out their missions of service. However, it does appear that there should be an initiative to provide a better system of orientation for prospective members prior to initiation and mission oriented guidance for undergraduate chapters as well as leadership building activities to prepare the newer members for the influence and potential power that comes with membership.

In addition to the afore-mentioned observations, it should also be noted that non-members in particular appear to significantly use the stereotyped image of each organization as an important basis for selecting which fraternity or sorority to join, and believe that members practice selectivity on this basis. Considering African-Americans have been negatively stereotyped for centuries, it is interesting to find these customs a part of "racially progressive" organizations. It is not certain whether or not eliminating these stereotypes is a concern of the organizations on a national level, but prospectives seeking membership on this basis, in my opinion, is problematic.

As a culture, black Greeks are visible in the non-Greek (black) community. Though the culture is considered a secret society many of their traditions, rituals, verbal and non-verbal codes of communication, image and stereotypes are apparent

and accepted by both members and non-members. The preservation of the culture may be rooted in the brotherly/sisterly bond that is shared among its members and the pleasure members experience by openly displaying "family" oriented activities such as public serenading, call and response, secret handshakes, and other artifacts described throughout this research. It may be assumed from the results of this research that cultural identity has also been an attractive feature of black Greek membership.

Limitations

While these conclusions represent the findings of the research, there are several limitations. First, all of the respondents (at the time of the survey) live or attend school in the same tri-county area. Conducted in another area, another state, or another region, responses may differ. This does not discount the respondents' answers, because many of the participants were natives of other areas and may have given their perspectives based on a wider range of exposure. Second, the sample hardly represents a collective opinion about black Greek membership. There are more than one million black Greeks across the U.S. and abroad. Less than 100 participants took part in this inquiry. Third, while ethnographic interviews allowed respondents to be candid, the questionnaire may not have given respondents an opportunity to fully express their beliefs, as they answered questions with structured responses. Additionally, respondents may not have taken the appropriate time to honestly answer the questions or provide well thought out answers. As one member noted during an interview session, undergraduates in particular take on the role of leader without understanding why they are considered leaders. "Particularly among undergraduate

Greeks, often times answers to commonly asked questions about the black Greek experience are mechanical. They are answers that have been taught and not always truly representative of the individual's own beliefs." Finally, the majority of respondents to the questionnaire were undergraduate Greeks and non-Greeks. As discussed, the undergraduate perspective may not offer a "real" perspective or experienced viewpoint of the black Greek experience since the undergraduate membership experience may greatly differ from the true purpose of membership.

Although the traditional practices of black Greek culture are undergoing change, it must not hinder the development of these organizations and the power to collectively influence social change and create programs that have been proven to have a significant impact on the black community and the nation at large. Structured leadership development at the undergraduate level may be the key to these organizations continued success and their perception of power and influence among blacks.

Future uses

The findings of this study may be helpful in several areas. The research may be used to: (1) be used as a reference for cultural and social research on African-American culture, (2) aid in the development of an effective orientation program for prospects, (3) serve as a useful tool for the enhancement of intake procedures, and (4) aid in the development of leadership activities for undergraduate Greeks.

Additional research on this topic would provide even more information about black Greek culture if it were replicated on a larger level. Further, exploring the black

Greek experience through other dimensions such as gender, geographic region, Greeks at historically black schools verses predominantly white schools, and those who join specifically at the alumni level would also serve as valuable research in the area of black Greek cultural studies. As black Greek letter organizations increase in membership, the organizations are now initiating many white members. Other research might examine reasons why whites are joining historically black fraternities and sororities, and an exploration on ways that whites and other racial groups believe that blacks achieve power and influence.

Note: After the start of this research, another historically black fraternity joined the National Pan Hellenic Council. Iota Phi Theta, Fraternity Inc., became the ninth member of NPHC on November 12, 1996. For twenty years, Iota Phi Theta has sought membership in NPHC. In 1993, NPHC amended its constitution to make provisions for new members. Iota Phi Theta is the first new organization allowed to join the NPHC since its inception. The fraternity's motto is, "Building a tradition, not resting upon one."

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