

The African American experience: Notes on black identity development,  
membership in a historically black fraternity or sorority and involvement

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Introduction

There are over 40 black Greek-letter organizations (Kimbrough, 1996) with a combined membership of over 1.5 million (Ballard, 1997). The development of these organizations was due, in part, to the unfulfilled expectations of African Americans in higher education. Black students came to college expecting less prejudice and more social integration than they found. Their consequent anger and despair contributed to a desire for separation and withdrawal from whites. The lack of trust in whites led many to turn to other black students for a social life and mutual validation (Fleming, 1984). "On white campuses, general political turning away from the white establishment was accompanied by a proliferation of black student organizations that expressed a need for black political and cultural identity" (Fleming, 1984, p. 11).

Black Greek-letter organizations provide an academic and social connection for students with common cultural and life experiences and similar ambitions. Success in college is dependent not only on intellectual ability, but on the ability to achieve a sense of membership, or integration within a college's academic and social communities (Boyer, 1984). The organizations provide the types of interactions that allow students to become "interpersonally accomplished" (Allen, 1985, p. 145). In a study on structural, interpersonal and psychological correlates of success for black students on white campuses, Allen (1985) concluded that

Interpersonally accomplished black students are more involved with the general (and black student-specific) campus life. Their expertise in interpersonal relations leads to regular participation in black student organizations activities, better relations with faculty, and more favorable views of university support services (since personable, interpersonally competent people are usually better able to manipulate bureaucracies to their advantage). Drawing on their learned interpersonal skills, these black students manage to create and maintain favorable social relationships with blacks and whites, faculty and students, on the campus. (p. 145)

The organizations also strengthen the students' ties to the campus community, the African American community and the global community through local, national and international social and service projects that include in their focus economics, politics, education, and health.

#### Statement of the Problem

Student affairs practitioners on the campuses of colleges and universities across the country are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs "of students for whom their institutions were not designed" (McEwen, Roper, Bryant & Langa, 1990, p. 429). In order to provide quality service to these students, it is imperative that research be done on them. "Our campuses have always educated those students who best conform to existing campus norms. Although most of our services are standardized on the basis of a homogenous population and campus environment, that population has essentially disappeared. The homogenous eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old, middle class, largely white male college student population is being replaced by one that is increasingly heterogeneous and culturally diverse" (Jones, 1992, p. 5).

"Our increasingly heterogeneous student population challenges traditional theories and approaches to student development" (Jones, 1992, p. 59). Much of the developmental theory that exists is Eurocentric in nature, because it was founded and standardized on populations that do not reflect the college campus of today (Jones, 1992). This study will utilize theory that was developed with an underrepresented population in mind. The study will focus on the black identity model that was developed by Cross (1971) and expanded upon by Parham (1989) and Helms (1989). The model, which explores the impact of acculturation and assimilation on the college experience of African American students, will be applied to patterns of involvement by black fraternity and sorority members.

The models of Cross and others who do research specifically on black students have been neither accepted nor embraced readily by mainstream theorists [or student affairs practitioners]. Reluctance to understand the acculturation and assimilation variables and processes posited by Cross and others may result in conflict for those who try to apply mainstream theory to African American students. (Wright, 1987)

If we hope to get African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) connected to the campus and, in turn, reverse dwindling retention rates, we must get an understanding of the role identity formation plays in their overall development. We must also understand the impact that identity formation can have on a students' motivation to get involved and how it plays into the types of organizations students choose to join.

Many students choose to become involved in groups exclusively for African Americans, some choose to join organizations that are representative of the campus community and others choose both types of organizations.

Although minority student organizations offer a myriad of activities that intentionally promote students' development within a cultural framework, student affairs professionals are often too naive or insensitive to recognize this source. Students participating in an organization that speaks out against racial or social injustice, for example, are provided with an opportunity to confront moral and real-life dilemmas first-hand. By dealing with situations that closely resemble those a student may encounter once they leave campus, the student might learn responsibility, concern for the welfare of others, and new thinking strategies while altering beliefs and enhancing their own development of basic self identity. Minority campus organizations provide an ideal living laboratory for personal development. It is the responsibility of student affairs practitioners to explore these outlets for promoting student development (Wright, 1987).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are: (a) to examine and describe the relationship between black identity development and the decision to join a historically black fraternity or sorority and (b) to identify if involvement in a historically black fraternity or sorority influences involvement in the campus community.

#### Research Questions

Prior to this study a review of the research and literature relevant to historically black fraternities and sororities, black identity development theory and involvement theory was conducted. A case study (Branch, 1995) with

similar purposes was also conducted. Based on the literature review and the case study, the following general research questions guided this expanded study:

1. Is the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization informed by racial identity development?
2. Does a student's readiness factor into the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization?
3. Is a student in Cross' Immersion-Emersion and Internalization stages more likely to become involved in a black Greek-letter organization than a student in Cross' Preencounter and Encounter stages?
4. What is the relationship between a student's black identity development, membership in a black Greek-letter organization and involvement?
5. Does membership in a black Greek-letter organization serve as a springboard to other types of involvement?

### Scope

The scope of this study will be limited to the experiences and identity development of four African American students at a PWI who chose to affiliate with historically black fraternities and sororities. This research does not seek to compare black Greek-letter organizations with white Greek-letter organizations, compare black Greeks with non-Greeks or explore the relationships between gender and involvement.

## Definitions

The terms that follow will be used frequently in this study. The terms that are underlined are slang that was used by the respondents.

Black and African American: Used interchangeably to refer to an American born individual of African descent. Can also used to refer to a biracial individual who identifies him or herself as black:

Black Greek-letter Organization and Historically Black Fraternity or Sorority: Used interchangeably to refer to a Greek-letter organization that was founded by black men and women for the purpose of providing a social and service outlet (McKenzie, 1991).

Black Identity Development: A process defined by Cross (1991) as transformation from a non-Afrocentric identity into one that is Afrocentric.

Bruzz: Used by members of Mu Theta Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity to refer to other fraternity brothers.

Delta(s): Delta Sigma Theta Sorority or a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Frat: A fraternity or a fraternity brother.

Involvement: Astin (1984) defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297).

Kappa(s): Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity or a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.

Kick(in') It: To hang out or be with friends.

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC): The governing and coordinating body of historically black fraternities and sororities. The NPHC currently has nine member organizations that were founded between 1906 and 1936 - Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity (1906), Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (1908), Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity (1911), Omega Psi Phi Fraternity (1911), Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (1913), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity (1914), Zeta Phi Beta Sorority (1920), Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority (1922), and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity (1963).

Nigrescence: "The developmental process by which a person 'becomes black' where black is defined in terms of one's manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one's reference groups rather than in terms of skin color per se" (Helms, 1990, p. 17).

Que(s): A member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

Race: Refers to "differential concentrations of gene frequencies responsible for traits that are usually confined to physical manifestations, such as skin color or hair form. Race serves to create a common referent of peoplehood" (Smith, 1989, p. 277).

Racial Identity: "A sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1990, p. 3).

Sigma(s): Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity or a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity.

Soror(s): A sorority sister.

### Thesis Overview

This thesis consists of five chapters. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction that outlines the material covered in the chapter. Chapter One serves as an introduction to the study. The purpose of the study, research questions, statement of the problem and scope of the study are discussed. Definitions of frequently used terms are provided.

The second chapter is devoted to reviewing the research and literature relevant to black Greek-letter organizations, black identity development and involvement theory.

Chapter Three addresses the research methods. This chapter includes the rationale for using qualitative methods, data sources, techniques for data collection and analysis, and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness. Descriptions of the respondents, and the research site are also included in Chapter Three.

The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four and in Chapter Five the results of the study are interpreted and discussed, conclusions of the research are presented, and recommendations for further research are made.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the research and literature relevant to historically black fraternities and sororities, black identity development theory, and involvement theory. The review is divided into the following subsections: African Americans in American Higher Education, Historical Summary of Black Greek-Letter Organizations, Membership in Black Greek-Letter Organizations, Effects of Membership & Benefits of Black Greek-Letter Organizations, Black Identity Development Theory, and Involvement Theory.

#### African Americans in American Higher Education

"The entrance of black students into predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon. Only in the last three decades have black students entered PWIs in significant numbers" (Love, 1993, p. 29). The Civil Rights Movement and an increase in federal support for higher education influenced this trend. The Civil Rights Movement sought black student matriculation through educational entitlements, court orders and in some instances violence. The federal government created training programs like Head Start and Job Corp to provide basic educational skills to the educationally and economically disadvantaged. Financial aid for underrepresented students was increased through Pell Grants, National Defense

and Direct Student Loan Programs and College Work Study (Wright, 1987). This change in enrollment patterns brought with it a desire to establish clubs and organizations for students denied access to many campus-based organizations. "Within the last two decades, the emergence of minority student organizations has provided an opportunity for minority students to be involved in campus life" (Rooney, 1985, p. 450).

"Until the civil rights movement in the 1960s, most historically white national fraternities and sororities had constitutional stipulations or covenants prohibiting membership of nonwhites" (Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991, p. 140). Between 1906 and 1922 eight national black Greek-letter organizations were developed. "With the creation of their own organizations, these students sought to emulate their white counterparts in organizational structure, while at the same time incorporating aspects of racial identification and cultural heritage" (McKenzie, 1991, p. 30). Students joining these organizations were different from their white counterparts because they "were expected to transcend the usual emphasis on social activity and frivolity associated with college life and assume a leadership position in aiding in the uplift of the race" (McKenzie, 1991, p. 30).

### Historical Summary of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

"First of All, Service of All, We Shall Transcend All" is the motto of Alpha Phi Alpha, the first Greek-letter organization for African American men. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity was founded at Cornell University, a predominantly white institution, in Ithaca, New York on December 4, 1906, by seven African American men with a "desire to maintain close association and unified support

inasmuch as they were denied, for the most part, the mutual helpfulness which the majority of students attending their university regularly enjoyed" (NPHC, 1984, p. 18). The organization originally started as a social study club, but turned into a fraternity in order to provide the young men with a sense of brotherhood (Kimbrough, 1995).

The fraternity developed programs for the educational and economic advancement of blacks in the United States. One of the programs that was developed was "The Go-to-High-School, Go-to-College Movement which was regarded as one of the significant contributions of the fraternity in the education of Negroes in the United States" (Baird, 1991, p. III-164). Another program, "Education and Citizenship," was developed to familiarize blacks with their rights as citizens.

Alpha men were continually encouraged to be active in the political affairs of their communities. This encouragement fostered active participation in the Civil Rights Movement, the programs of the American Council on Human Rights, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Philanthropies include the Alpha Phi Alpha Foundation which "was created in recognition of the increasing educational, economic, and social needs of the Negro people in the United States" (Baird, 1991, p. III-164).

Shortly after Alpha Phi Alpha was founded, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority came into existence at Howard University, a historically black university in Washington, D.C. The organization was developed "to cultivate and encourage high scholastic and ethical standards, improve the social status of the race,

promote unity and friendship among college women, and keep alive within the alumnae an interest in college life and progressive movements emanating therefrom" (Baird, 1991, p. IV-74).

Alpha Kappa Alpha has upheld the purposes and ideals of its founders through the years. "In the twenties, the sorority waged a war on diphtheria and smallpox. During the forties she rallied against lynching. Today, the sorority is fighting the spread of HIV and AIDS and for Affirmative Action" (NPHC, 1995, p. 28). In an effort to concentrate on global issues, many of the chapters have adopted African villages where they support projects like the construction of wells, health clinics, and schools.

One of three black Greek-letter organizations founded at predominantly white institutions was born on January 5, 1911. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity was founded at Indiana University by 10 "God-fearing, clean living, serious minded young men who possessed the imagination, ambition, courage, and determination to defy custom in pursuit of a college education, and careers" (Crump, 1983, p. 5). The fraternity was formed out of a desire to form friendships among men who were denied access to entertainment and recreational facilities. Black men at Indiana University were only permitted to participate in track and field events.

The founders set out to form a unique organization that would be incorporated as a national fraternity. The organization filed an application with the state of Indiana on April 11, 1911 and on May 15, 1911, Kappa Alpha Psi "became the first undergraduate college fraternity to be incorporated by blacks as

a national body" (Crump, 1983, p. 5). The purposes of the fraternity "are to encourage honorable achievement in every field of human endeavor, to unite in a fraternal bond college men of culture, patriotism, and high sense of honor, and to promote the social, intellectual, and moral welfare of its members" (Baird, 1991, p. III-59).

Included in the early programs of Kappa Alpha Psi were the Guide Right Program which was geared toward providing youth the opportunity to discover and develop their potential and the National Leadership Conference which is held annually for the indoctrination of chapter officers on the undergraduate level. Programs set up to encourage and award achievement within the organization include an "Achievement Commission [which] promotes competition between undergraduate and graduate chapters and awards suitable trophies and scholarships rating, chapter finances, outstanding achievement, etc. It also administers the Elder W. Diggs Award for extra meritorious contributions to the fraternity or to society on less than a national basis" (Baird, 1991, p. III-60). The fraternity's paramount honor, the Guy Levis Award, is reserved exclusively for undergraduate members. The current programs of Kappa Alpha Psi include a National Revolving Student Loan Fund and a National Assault on Illiteracy Program.

On November 17, 1911, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity was founded on the campus of Howard University by three liberal arts students, Oscar J. Cooper, Edgar A. Love, and Frank Coleman and a faculty advisor, Ernest E. Just. This was the first men's Greek-letter social organization founded on the campus of a black

college (NPHC, 1995, p. 42). The organization derived its name from the initials of the Greek phrase meaning "Friendship Is Essential To The Soul." This phrase was chosen as the motto of Omega Psi Phi. The cardinal principles of the fraternity, manhood, scholarship, perseverance and uplift, and the design for the fraternity pin and emblem were decided at the first meeting of the organization.

Since the inception of the fraternity, the purpose has been to "bring about a union of college men of similar high ideals of scholarship and manhood in order to stimulate the attainment of ideas and ambitions of its members; occupy a progressive helpful and constructive place in the political life of the community and nation; and foster the humanity, freedom and dignity of the individual; and aid downtrodden humanity in its efforts to achieve higher economic and intellectual status" (NPHC, 1995, p. 42).

The men of Omega Psi Phi uphold their purposes through programs like the Charles R. Drew Graduate Scholarships, the National Talent Hunt Program and an annual contribution of \$50,000 to the United Negro College Fund. Other nationally mandated programs include a memorial service to remember members who have passed away, a national high school essay contest for college-bound high school seniors, an Assault on Illiteracy Program to reduce illiteracy among blacks, and Achievement Week.

"In 1913, twenty-two young women, barely out of their adolescent years, founded a sorority that today touches the lives of thousands of women" (Giddings, 1988, p. 22). Delta Sigma Theta Sorority was founded at Howard University for "college women who believed in serious and strong community

endeavor. The organization is concerned for the social welfare, academic excellence, and cultural enrichment of its members" (NPHC, 1995, p. 32).

The sorority's public service program centers around its Five-Point Program Thrust of Educational Development, Economic Development, International Awareness and Involvement, Physical and Mental Health, and Political Awareness and Involvement (NPHC, 1984). Current programs include the Distinguished Professor Endowed Chair, which is a trust fund to support a professor of distinction to teach at a Historically Black College or University for two years, and the Delta Habitat for Humanity Program. International service programs have included scholarships for women in Uganda and India, financial aid to Haiti, and construction of a maternity wing at a hospital in Kenya. Not only are Delta women active in public service programs, they are also active volunteers with organizations like the YWCA, NAACP, Urban League, Girl Scouts, Red Cross and the United Community Funds.

Three students who felt the need of embracing the principles of brotherhood, service, and scholarship founded Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity on January 9, 1914, at Howard University (Baird, 1991, p. III-169). Included in the objectives of the organization are encouragement of bigger and better business, social action and improvement of the educational stature of its members and others.

Three of the major programs sponsored by the fraternity are "Bigger and Better Business, inaugurated in 1925 for the purpose of encouraging the idea of thrift among minority groups and of stimulating the establishment and

expansion of small business enterprise; Social Action, organized in 1945 for the purpose of securing and protecting the civil liberties and human rights of minority groups and Education, a program instituted with the founding of the fraternity, designed to encourage scholarship among all students" (Baird, 1991, III-169).

Phi Beta Sigma has committed itself to educating black youth by sponsoring scholarships, tutorial services and educational and cultural programs. It has committed itself to supporting the following national and regional organizations: American Cancer Society, Congressional Black Caucus, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, NAACP, National Alliance of Black Organizations, National Coalition on Black Voter Participation, National Foundation of the March of Dimes, National Pan-Hellenic Council, National Urban League and United Negro College Fund. Today, Phi Beta Sigma continues to implement new programs and expand. Current programs include a Job Bank and a Political Action network.

"As the result of the encouragement given by a Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity leader who felt that the campus would profit by his chapter having a sister organization, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority was founded at Howard University on January 16, 1920" (Baird, 1991, p. IV-85). Zeta Phi Beta and Phi Beta Sigma became the first and only constitutionally bound sister and brother organizations. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority has a history complete with firsts. It "was the first Greek-letter organization to charter a chapter in Africa (1948), the first to

form an auxiliary group, the Amicae (Friends of Zeta), and the first to formulate youth auxiliary groups, the Archonettes and the Amicettes" (NPHC, 1984, p. 21).

The objectives of the organization are Finer Womanhood, sisterly love, scholarship and service. With these objectives in mind the sorority implemented a number of programs. The early programs of Zeta Phi Beta include voluntary war services in the U.S. and abroad, a national juvenile delinquency project, and scholarships for female students. Current programs include the Stork's Nest, which is a re-distribution center designed to provide welfare and disadvantaged working mothers with clothing and furniture for infants for a minimal cost, and banks to help disadvantaged individuals obtain items like milk, eyeglasses and shoes.

On November 12, 1922, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority was founded at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana by 7 school teachers. The organization "offered teachers an opportunity for fellowship and it encouraged professional growth through the exchange of ideas that naturally would become a part of the group process in planned meetings of various kinds" (White, 1974, p. 1). Through the years, Sigma Gamma Rho has sponsored several national and international programs. One of the national programs, National Youth Projects, is geared toward youth development through Guidance Clinics, Youth Programs, and Community Activities. Another national program provides leadership training for all chapters. The leadership program is held annually during area meetings and regional conferences and is evaluated each year by professional consultants. International programs include support of Project Africa, a program

done in conjunction with a Washington agency, Africare, that provides agricultural assistance to African women. Another facet of programming for Sigma Gamma Rho is awards which include talent, service, mental health achievement and outstanding chapter awards. Scholarships are awarded through the Sigma Gamma Rho National Education Fund which was established in 1984 to provide scholarship assistance to deserving young men and women and to support research and programs related to education and health.

The organization has also maintained membership in and/or supported several organizations that exemplify its ideals. Among them are the following: NAACP, National Council of Negro Women, National Pan-Hellenic Council, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, National Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, National Urban League, March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation, National Mental Health Association, United Negro College Fund, Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change, Black Women's Agenda, and American Association of University Women.

Several similarities exist among historically black fraternities and sororities. The organizations are similar in their rationale for developing. All of the organizations were developed out of a need for support organizations for African American students who entered Higher Education at the turn of the century. The organizations also have similar objectives. Included in the objectives of all are scholarship, service, and brotherhood or sisterhood. Lastly, the structure of the organizations is the same. Included in the structure is

governance, traditions, insignias and publications. The governance of the organizations is similar in that they all have a cabinet and an executive director and they all hold boules or conventions for the purpose of fellowshipping and handling business. The traditions and insignias include colors, a motto, a pledge pin, an active pin, a pledge, a badge and a sorority or fraternity hymn.

#### Membership in Black Greek-Letter Organizations at PWIs

Although some black Greek-letter organizations started with as few as three members, membership has grown to hundreds of chapters throughout Africa, Asia, Bermuda, Germany, the U.S., the Bahamas, the Caribbean Islands, the Republic of Haiti and the Virgin Islands. One possible factor in this increase is the unfortunate rise of racism and racial tension on American campuses (Wilkerson, 1989; Monroe, 1973). "Students of color are likely to be the victims of racist attitudes and behaviors on many predominantly white college campuses" (Rendon & Hope, 1996, p. 22).

At the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where there was a clash between black and white students in 1986, membership in the university's black Greek-letter groups rose to more than 100 [in 1988] from 12 [in 1985]. At the University of Michigan, where racial slurs aimed at blacks were broadcast on the campus radio station and anti-black fliers were distributed, there has been a surge in membership [in] nearly all the black organizations. (Wilkerson, 1989, p. B11)

Another possible factor in the increase in membership in black Greek-letter organizations is that "African American students at predominantly white institutions are left out of informal networks and mentoring relationships that help Caucasian students survive academically, socially and professionally. Black fraternities and sororities can offer black students much needed support and

social interaction with students who have common cultural experiences, interests, and goals" (Stewart, Haynes, Brown-Wright & Anderson, 1996, p. 4). "Predominantly black organizations may provide a familiar cultural milieu for black students and help them establish social networks and support systems not found in the classroom environment or residence halls" (DeSousa & King, 1992, p. 368).

Many black students attending predominantly white institutions, especially black males, exist in social isolation because of an alienating campus environment (Monroe, 1973; Fleming, 1984; Stewart, Haynes, Brown-Wright & Anderson, 1996; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Sylvester Monroe, an African American Harvard College graduate, offered the following account of the social isolation he experienced during his college days:

The problem is that the traditional Harvard just isn't my Harvard. The Harvard of my experience has been three years of a totally black experience-black roommates, black friends, black dining-hall tables, black dances, black student organizations, black building takeovers, black studies, and black ideology, all isolated within the confines of an otherwise white university. (Monroe, 1973, p. 45)

Fleming (1984) notes that in order to combat isolation, black students must find constructive means of encouraging helpful peer contact. Membership in historically black fraternities and sororities may serve as a means of developing "meaningful interpersonal relationships" (Kimbrough, 1995, p. 64). In a pilot study (Branch, 1995) conducted on the relationship between membership in black Greek-letter organizations, black identity development and student

involvement, the respondent shared the following rationale for joining a historically black sorority:

I didn't look at any traditionally white sororities, because that's not anything I wanted to get into. I knew that you [would] spend a lot of time with the people that you would be in a sorority with and I wanted to spend more time with black women. Considering there are about 300 black women on campus, to have a majority of my time spent with another chapter that was predominantly white would not be a support system. I would probably be the only black member of that chapter. It would have been like going to class or like going to the meeting of the other organizations that I'm involved in. I wanted the social and supportive outlet that I am sure I wouldn't have been able to get from a white chapter. (Branch, 1995, p. 20)

The respondent viewed the historically black sorority as a means of developing relationships with other black women on a campus where black women are few in number.

#### Effects of Membership and Benefits of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

The research suggests that membership in fraternities and sororities has positive effects on the academic experience. Astin and Abrahamson (as cited in Schuh, Triponey, Heim & Nishimura, 1992) state that fraternity and sorority members are less likely to drop out of college, are more likely to be satisfied with their institution and their social lives, and are more likely to be involved in activities on campus. In a longitudinal study on student involvement, Astin (1984) found that students who join Greek-letter organizations and participate in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out (p. 302). The findings of Whipple, Baier and Grady (1991) echo those of Astin and Abrahamson (as cited in Schuh, Triponey, Heim & Nishimura, 1992) and Astin (1984). In their comparative study of black and white Greeks at a predominantly white

university, black Greeks were found to be more grade-motivated than their white counterparts, study more hours per week, enroll in engineering more often and receive more merit-based financial aid. There were no significant differences in extracurricular involvement. The authors concluded that "black Greeks are likely to be the superior students academically" (p. 143).

Kimbrough (1995), in a study on the views of the role of black Greek-letter organizations in leadership development, found that over 74% of the members of black Greek-letter organizations surveyed were active in two or more campus or community organizations (including black Greek-letter organizations) and held office in at least one organization. Nonmembers were found to be similarly involved, but less likely to hold an office.

Over half of nonmembers believed that membership in a black Greek-letter organization could improve their leadership skills, and roughly 82% had at least considered membership. Approximately 63% of members believed their leadership skills had improved since they joined their fraternity or sorority. The overwhelming majority, black Greeks and non-Greeks alike, claimed that black-dominated organizations provided leadership opportunities at a higher level than white-dominated ones. (Kimbrough, 1995, p. 68)

The author concluded that black Greek-letter organizations are an important source for leadership development opportunities.

Members and nonmembers of historically black fraternities and sororities benefit from the presence of these organizations. In a study conducted by Schuh, Triponey, Heim & Nishimura (1992), members of the National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations stated that some of the benefits of membership are learning more about black history, bonding, and experiencing the feeling of

satisfaction associated with being involved in ongoing service projects. "On most predominantly white college campuses, black Greeks provide the major social structure for most blacks on campus, both members and nonmembers alike" (Whipple, Baier & Grady, 1991, p. 141). McKee (1987) points out that "predominantly black Greek organizations have played and continue to play, significant roles as sources of racial pride and as an important group for black students (members and independents alike) on predominantly white campuses. For many black college students these organizations represent a link both to their heritage and to their futures" (p. 29).

### Black Identity Development Theory

The formulation of Nigrescence models for application in the analysis of the psychology of black identity is a fairly recent phenomenon dating back to 1968 or 1969. Initially, the authors of Nigrescence models were trying to explicate black identity change that was taking place within the context of a social movement- [the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s]. As [their] insights matured, [black identity theorists] became aware that the models were applicable to black social movements of other eras. Today, Nigrescence is a central theme in black history, sometimes reflected in the individual conversions of numerous blacks during social movements. More recently, Helms has helped comprehend that in the absence of a social movement the racial images embedded in each stage of Nigrescence define distinctive archetypes or "worldviews". In other words, the study of Nigrescence may provide insight into the typologies of people who are not experiencing identity change as well as reticulate evanescent images linked to identity conversion. (Cross, 1989, p. 274)

Cross (1991) defines black identity development as a process of moving from negative or external determination to positive or internal determination through a five-stage process. These five stages are Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. In the

Preencounter stage, the individual views the world from a white frame of reference. Consequently, he or she thinks, acts and behaves in ways that devalue and/or deny his or her blackness. The individual in this stage hasn't had any reason to question his or her frame of reference. He or she is likely to belong to clubs and organizations that don't have race-related goals.

In the second stage, Encounter, the individual experiences a personal or social event that is inconsistent with his or her frame of reference. The Encounter is usually either a negative experience with whites or a positive experience with blacks. In the first phase of the Encounter stage, the individual recognizes that their old frame of reference is inappropriate and begins to explore aspects of a new identity. In the second phase, the individual decides to develop a black identity. It is likely that the individual in this stage will be confused. "Encounter as a transition stage would have individuals who are exploring their interests and values and thus, who would be just as likely to be in a predominantly black or predominantly white campus organization" (Mitchell & Dell, 1992, p. 40).

"Given an emphasis on valuing blackness, an Immersion-Emersion student would be expected to be more involved in culturally or racially oriented activities, whereas the opposite would be true of a Pre-Encounter student" (Mitchell & Dell, 1992, p. 40). The Immersion-Emersion stage represents a turning point from the old to a new frame of reference. In the Immersion phase the individual deals with anger towards whites or positive feeling towards blacks by immersing him/herself into total blackness, clinging to various elements of

black culture and simultaneously withdrawing from interactions with other ethnic groups. The individual seeks affiliation with black organizations, wears traditionally black hairstyles and clothing and may even adopt black linguistic patterns. "Entry into Emersion requires the opportunity to withdraw into black community to engage in catharsis within a supportive environment. During Emersion, one often finds individuals engaging in 'rap' sessions, political action groups, exploration of black and African culture, discussions of racial issues with black elders whose experiences were formerly ignored, 'hanging out' with other black in a spirit of kinship, and so forth" (Helms, 1990, p. 28).

Stage four, Internalization, is characterized by the individual achieving a sense of inner security and self confidence with blackness. There is a higher level of confidence with self and others. The individual begins to develop a more humanistic viewpoint. Parham (1989) refers to the individual in this stage as biculturally successful. "Group membership might be based less on experimentation and more on a secure, stable interest in various groups" (Mitchell & Dell, 1992, p. 40). Cross (1991) characterizes the final stage, Internalization-Commitment, as an introspective phase in which there is a fusion of Afrocentric awareness with a desire to move from belief to action and empower others. This stage is very similar to the Internalization stage except that there is a sustained interest and a commitment.

Movement through these stages is thought to be cyclical and is viewed as an attempt to balance African American and Euro-American values. Parham (1989) identified three possible ways that a person might deal with his or her

racial identity: Stagnation, Stagewise Linear Progression, and Recycling.

Stagnation is an inability to develop different race-related attitudes. One attitude is maintained throughout most of the individual's lifetime because of a failure to move out of a stage or failure to move beyond an original set of attitudes.

Stagewise Linear Progression is movement from one stage to another in a stage by stage fashion. The combination of life events, personal factors and environmental factors causes movement. The author suggests that linear movement means some type of growth is taking place. Parham (1989) defines recycling as "the reinitiation of the racial identity struggle and resolution process after having gone through the identity development process at an earlier stage in one's life" (p. 213). It is possible for a person to achieve identity resolution by going through the stages once. New experiences or encounters may cause an individual to recycle through the stages.

Taylor & Howard-Hamilton (1995) found that "African American males who participate in Greek-letter organizations tend to embrace a stronger, more positive sense of self-esteem and racial identity than their non-Greek counterparts" (p. 334). These findings stemmed from the hypotheses that:

Individuals reporting higher levels of Preencounter attitudes would be less involved in general campus activity and that those reporting higher levels of Internalization attitudes would be more involved in total campus activities. It was also hypothesized that individuals who were affiliated with Greek-letter organizations would be more involved with campus activities and have higher levels of Immersion-Emersion and Internalization attitudes. (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995, p. 331)

These findings suggest that involvement in black Greek-letter organizations has a positive influence on the formation of a positive black identity and on the level of involvement in the campus community.

### Involvement Theory

"Relatively little is known about the relationship between involvement and educational benefits of students of color, particularly African American undergraduates" (MacKay & Kuh, 1994, p. 217). Although "limited research exists on the relationship between racial/ethnic identity and student involvement" (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995, p. 330), a plethora of research on involvement exists from which we can draw inferences. This study will focus on the involvement theory developed by Astin.

Astin (1984) defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 294). The academic experience refers to activities like studying, spending time on campus, participating in clubs and organizations, and interacting with faculty and peers. Astin (1984) based this student involvement theory on the following assumptions.

Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 298)

Several studies have been conducted on different aspects of student involvement. Cooper, Healy & Simpson (1994), in a study that utilized the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory, found that "members of student organizations scored higher than nonmembers on Educational Involvement, Career Planning, Lifestyle Planning, Cultural Participation, and Academic Autonomy" (p. 99) and "those students who held leadership positions in student organizations scored higher than nonleaders on Developing Purpose, Educational Involvement, Career Planning, Lifestyle Planning, and Life Management" (p. 100-101). The authors concluded that "involvement in student organizations and leadership roles has positive effects on the academic experience and provide the opportunity to sustain and further develop development skills" (p. 101).

DeSousa and King (1992), in a comparative study on the levels of involvement of black and white students at a PWI, found that black students reported significantly higher levels of involvement than their white counterparts in library activities, campus clubs and organizations, interactions with faculty advisors and activities that took place in the union (p. 366-367). Many of the black students in this study were involved in black clubs and organizations. "These students may [have] used [these] campus clubs and organizations as a means to develop social relationships with other black students, faculty and staff-relationships that are more difficult to develop in other university settings (e.g., residence halls, classrooms) where few other blacks are found" (DeSousa & King, 1992, p. 368).

D' Augelli & Hershberger (1993), in a study on African American undergraduates at a PWI, found no difference between black and white students' involvement in campus organizations. "However, their social worlds were notably distinct, at least as far as the racial composition of their social networks is concerned" (D' Augelli & Hershberger, 1993, p. 72-73). This difference in social worlds leads many African American students to become involved in black organizations. In a study on minority student involvement in minority student organizations conducted by Rooney (1985), the results indicated that students became involved in these organizations for the opportunity to interrelate with those of a similar background and culture and for the chance to socialize and make friends.

### Conclusion

The literature revealed that in order to provide a quality academic and social experience for African American Students at PWIs, educators and student affairs practitioners must begin to examine the importance of racial identity and developing a sense of membership. Members of black Greek-letter organizations develop a strong sense of racial identity, despite the environment, and are able to comfortably extend their involvement beyond minority based clubs and organizations. With the constant interaction of race and environment black Greek-letter organizations seem to be a developmental catalyst and a social and emotional stabilizer.

The literature also revealed that many researchers have concerned themselves with involvement in minority based organizations, including black

Greek-letter organizations, and the benefits and effects of membership in Greek-letter organizations, but few researchers have grounded their research on involvement and membership in Greek-letter organizations in black identity theory. This study sought to examine and describe the relationships between black identity development, membership in a black Greek-letter organization, and involvement. The research methods for this study are presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the use of qualitative methods, including data sources and techniques for data collection and analysis. This chapter will also examine the steps taken to establish trustworthiness.

#### Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research methods will be used to conduct this study. Qualitative research is defined by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) in terms of five characteristics. One characteristic is that the researcher acts as the key data collection instrument while using the natural setting as the direct source of data. In this study, the data were collected by me, the researcher, in settings that were comfortable and convenient for the respondents.

Another characteristic is that qualitative research seeks to describe. I sought to gain an understanding and description of the experiences of members of black Greek-letter organizations at a PWI. These experiences were examined in relation to black identity development and involvement.

A third characteristic is that qualitative researchers concern themselves with process as well as outcomes or products. This study was concerned with how the identities of members of black Greek-letter organizations were developed and how their identity and membership in a historically black fraternity related to their co-curricular involvement.

A fourth characteristic is that research is analyzed inductively. In analyzing the data, I did not seek to prove or disprove hypotheses. General research questions were developed following the literature review for the purpose of framing and grounding the study. These questions were used as a guide, but did not limit the study to a set of expected outcomes.

A final characteristic is that making meaning is an essential concern. Qualitative methods allowed me to capture the essence of the multiple, ever-changing realities experienced by the respondents. What was reality to one respondent at one point in time may or may not have been reality for that respondent or the other respondents at that same point or at a different point in time. As contexts changed there was the possibility that reality would change with it.

#### Setting of the Study

This study was conducted at Iowa State University (ISU) in Ames Iowa. ISU is a predominantly white, land-grant institution with an enrollment of approximately 25,000. African American students are approximately two percent of the total population and members of historically black fraternities and sororities make up less than three percent of a Greek system of about 3,000 students. This research site was selected out of convenience.

#### Data Sources

Documents and people were used as data sources for this study. Purposeful sampling was used to identify these data sources. Documents that would provide useful information about black Greek-letter organizations and

people whose experiences included being black and being members of historically black fraternities and sororities were chosen. Permission to use human subjects for this research was granted from the Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Committee (Appendix A).

### Documents

Documents were used in this study to provide a historical summary of each of the black Greek-letter organizations and to provide an understanding of the purposes of these organizations. The documents used in this study were the history books of black Greek-letter organizations, excerpts from the history books of black Greek-letter organizations and a book written by a member of a black Greek-letter organization about that particular organization.

The history books of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, The Story of Kappa Alpha Psi, and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Behind These Doors - A Legacy: The History of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority were provided by the members of these organizations. Excerpts of the history books of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, The History of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated, 1911-1939, and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, The Sigma Light, were provided by members. A book written by a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta & the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement, was also used. Members of the eight black Greek-letter organizations were asked to review the historical summaries to make sure the information was current and accurate.

### Respondents

The respondents were selected from the ISU member chapters of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the governing and coordinating body of black Greek-letter organizations. My current position as the NPHC Advisor provided me access to the names and contact information of students who were members of historically black fraternities and sororities. Each potential respondent received a letter that described this study and invited them to participate (Appendix B). The respondents for this research were selected based on the following criteria:

1. age. Much of the literature that exists on identity development and student involvement deals with traditional college students. "A close examination of the Nigrescence research reveals that each author has relied for the most part on college student populations as research subjects" (Parham, 1989, p. 188). In order to relate this study to the existing literature, it was advantageous to study students in the 18-24 year old age range.
2. year in college. A junior or graduating senior has a greater chance than a freshman of having been involved in a full spectrum of activities.
3. racial identity. Racial identity came into play by virtue of the theoretical framework being used for this study. If this research wasn't framed by the research of black identity theorists, race and identity formation as it relates to race would not have been important.

4. campus involvement. Campus involvement was important in examining the nature of the co-curricular activities the students were involved in and their rationale for becoming involved.

5. membership in a black Greek-letter organization. This criterion was included because of my interest in students who chose to affiliate with these organizations, their identity formation, and their level of overall campus involvement.

6. having held an executive office either in their chapter or in the NPHC. I believed that being involved in a black Greek-letter organization, particularly in a leadership position, might have served as a springboard to other types of involvement.

7. willingness to devote the time necessary for data collection. The study was conducted towards the end of the spring semester and data analysis continued into the summer months, so it was important that the students had time to devote to the study. It was also important that they be accessible after the semester ended.

The identities of the respondents was kept confidential in the coding and reporting of the data. The data were coded such that the identities of the respondents were evident only to me, and each respondent is identified by a pseudonym in the report. Each respondent was asked to sign an informed consent form before participating in this study (Appendix C). The informed consent stated that participation in this study was voluntary and that a

respondent could choose to discontinue participation at any time. A respondent was lost early in the study due to attrition. Her data are not reported.

### Data Collection

The primary data collection techniques for this study were interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were used to broaden the depth of the data by providing the respondents with the opportunity to share their personal experiences.

#### Interviews

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),

The purposes for doing an interview include, among others, obtaining here-and-now constructions of persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities; reconstructions of such entities as experienced in the past; projections of such entities as they are expected to be experienced in the future; verification, emendation, and extension of information obtained from other sources, human and nonhuman; and verification, emendation, and extension of constructions developed by the inquirer. (p. 268)

The respondents participated in three individual interviews, each lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes. The length of the interviews varied according to respondents' tendencies to talk a lot on certain issues and very little on others. The interviews were taped for the purpose of ensuring accuracy. The purpose of the interviews was to allow the respondents to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

The respondents participated in one focus group that lasted forty-five minutes. Focus group refers to "an increasingly popular qualitative research method designed to gather feedback regarding the perceptions and attitudes of a

small representative group about a specific topic" (Crook, Cufaud, Mason, & Smithhisler, 1997, p. 4). The focus group, which preceded the interviews, gave me an opportunity to listen to the respondents' thoughts and experiences before developing more interview questions. It also allowed me to "test" the information from the historical documents. The focus group gave the respondents an opportunity to share their experiences while being exposed to the perspectives of their peers.

The interviews were structured, in that, general questions were formulated ahead of time and the respondents were expected to answer the same set of general questions within the framework of the defined problem (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interviews were unstructured, in that, each focus group and interview was used as a basis for the formulation of questions for the next interview. They were also unstructured, because during the course of each interview additional questions were developed based on individual responses. The additional questions were specific to whomever I was interviewing, so the additional questions varied from respondent to respondent.

At the conclusion of each interview respondents were asked if they would like to share anything else with me. This gave them the opportunity to clarify responses and to share additional thoughts, ideas and experiences. This proved to be helpful, because in some instances I obtained valuable data.

The focus group, which focused on why the respondents chose to join black Greek-letter organizations, provided me with insight for the development of specific interview questions for the first round of interviews. The questions I

asked during the focus group were developed based on the five general research purposes stated in Chapter One. The questions I asked were:

1. Introduce yourself and tell what the purpose of a black Greek-letter organization is.
2. How did you find out about historically black fraternities/sororities?
3. Why did you choose to become a member of a black Greek-letter organization?
4. Why did you choose your organization?
5. What makes your organization different from the other historically black fraternities/sororities?
6. What types of activities are you involved in through your fraternity/sorority?
7. Has involvement in your fraternity/sorority led to involvement in other activities?
8. Do you think you would be involved to the same extent if you weren't a member of your fraternity/sorority?
9. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

The questions for the first individual interview emerged from the data collected during the focus group. The first three questions from the focus group were repeated because a malfunction with the tape recorder made it difficult to hear portions of the interview. In subsequent interviews, similar questions were asked in order to insure some level of consistency in the responses. The questions I asked in the first individual interview were:

1. What is the purpose of a black Greek-letter organization?
  2. Why did you choose to become a member of a black Greek-letter organization?
  3. Why did you choose your organization?
  4. How long have you been a member of your fraternity/sorority?
  5. What do you like most and least about being a member of a black Greek-letter organization?
  6. Why did you choose a historically black fraternity/sorority instead of a historically white one?
  7. When you hear the word brotherhood/sisterhood, what comes to mind?
  8. What have you gained from being a member of your organization and what have you contributed to your organization?
  9. Tell me about your family and the environment you grew up in.
  10. What does "blackness" mean to you?
  11. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?
- The second interview picked up where the first interview left off. The questions focused on black identity and the stages of Cross' black identity development theory. The questions for the second individual interview were:
1. Can you think of a time in your life when you didn't think about being black?
  2. Can you recall the first time you actually knew you were black?

3. Do you feel like you view the world from a black frame of reference?
4. Are you totally confident with your blackness?
5. Would you say that you are confident to the point that you can both embrace blackness and concern yourself with the issues of other people?
6. Do you feel that your fraternity/sorority influenced your level of confidence with blackness?
7. Have you had any personal experiences that put you in touch with your blackness?
8. As a black man/woman have you ever felt alienated or isolated on campus?
9. Has being a member of a black Greek-letter organization had an influence on your identity?
10. How do you feel about black people joining historically white fraternities/sororities and white people joining historically black fraternities/sororities?
11. Have you always been involved with black organizations?
12. What other types of organizations are you involved in?
13. Compared to your fraternity/sorority what have you gained from being a part of other organizations?
14. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

The final individual interview focused on campus involvement. The following questions were asked:

1. What types of leadership positions have you held within and outside of your fraternity/sorority?
2. Has your fraternity/sorority served as a springboard to other types of involvement?
3. Do you feel that the university encourages involvement in minority based and non minority-based organizations?
4. Are you comfortable in organizations that are not minority-based?
5. Do you feel that other organizations provide the same level of support as your fraternity/sorority?
6. Do you feel connected to the campus?
7. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

### Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method which consists of "comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105). The data were "unitized" or separated into smaller pieces of information. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that a unit of data must possess two characteristics: (1) "it should be heuristic, that is, aimed at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or to take, and (2) it must be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself, that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out" (p. 345). In this study, units of data were sentences,

phrases or paragraphs that were concerned with membership in a black Greek-letter organization as it relates to black identity development and involvement.

The individual units of data were placed on index cards and coded according to source and collection episode. The data were coded such that it was possible for me to track the original source, but it was not possible for anyone else to identify the respondents. As the data was being collected and coded, it was compared to the data that I already had and placed into categories. "Analyzing the data simultaneously with data collection enables the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 127). The process for categorizing the data was as follows:

(1) The card was read and its content was noted. The card was then placed into a category.

(2) The next card was read and compared to the other cards. If the unit was the same as the previous one it was placed into the same category. If it was different it was placed into another category.

(3) This process continued until all of the units of data were placed into a category.

(4) After all of the units of data were in a category, the categories were reviewed for overlap. In cases where there was overlap, the unit of data was broken down further and placed into the appropriate categories.

(5) The categories were compared to each other for relationships and themes. As the comparison continued, general themes emerged.

(6) I concluded that the categorization was complete based on “exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities and overextension” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 350).

(7) Each category set was reviewed a last time to make sure nothing was missed.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to whether or not the study is “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290) and whether or not the results of the study can be trusted. The concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research is comparable to the concepts of validity and reliability in quantitative research. In quantitative research, “Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the inferences researchers make based on the data they collect and reliability refers to the consistency of scores or answers from one administration of an instrument to another” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 138). In qualitative research, trustworthiness speaks to whether or not the research that’s being collected is of interest and whether or not research techniques that result in consistent data are being used. The criterion areas for establishing trustworthiness in the study were credibility, transferability, and dependability and confirmability.

### Credibility

In order to insure that the findings and interpretations were credible, prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checks were utilized. “Prolonged engagement is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain

purposes; learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). During the past two years, I have advised members of historically black fraternities and sororities. Through regular interaction, I learned about a culture to which I do not belong and developed trusting relationships with the members through my interactions with them in their individual chapters and in the NPHC. While collecting the data, I spent several hours per week in interviews and focus groups with the respondents.

There was a possibility for distortions on my part and on the part of the respondents. In order to combat the possibility of misinformation and distortions several measures were taken. One measure was asking the respondents throughout the interviews if they understood the questions. This decreased the possibility of the respondents misinterpreting the questions and reassured me that the questions were clear. Another measure was repeating the responses of the respondents back to them. This increased the likelihood that my interpretations of their responses were accurate. A third measure was allowing a period of time to elapse between the interviews. This gave me a chance to examine the data and prepare for the next interview, and it gave the respondents a chance to collect themselves, so they didn’t fall prey to fatigue. A fourth measure was realizing the limits of the data. Throughout this report I have noted the limited scope of the research and the possibility for shortcomings in the data.

Triangulation refers to “the use of multiple-data-collection methods” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). Data collection methods include the process of collecting the data as well as the sources of the data. The primary method for data collection was interviews. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted. The data sources used were historical documents and respondents. Historical documents were used to provide me with insight into the culture and as a basis for the development of interview questions.

Member checks involve “testing the data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions with members of the group from whom the data was originally collected” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). During the interviews I paraphrased what I thought the respondent was saying, and I incorporated their responses into subsequent interviews. The respondents were given the opportunity to review the transcripts and the information obtained from historical documents. The focus group was used to “test” the information I obtained from the literature review. This aided in the development of questions for subsequent interviews.

### Transferability

In naturalistic inquiry, the researcher is responsible for “providing the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). In the report, I attempted to provide detailed descriptions of the setting of the study, the thoughts, feelings and ideas of the respondents and the themes that emerged from the data. The results of the study

may not be generalized to all members of black Greek-letter organizations at PWIs, but through the thick description a similar study might be conducted or the results from this study might be compared to a similar study to draw broader conclusions.

#### Dependability and Confirmability

"The dependability of the inquiry is determined by examining the process and the confirmability of the inquiry is established by examining the products like data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). An audit trail was utilized to insure dependability and confirmability of the findings of this study. Audit trail refers to "a residue of records stemming from the inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 319). The audit trail for this study consisted of (a) raw data, the audio tapes and notes taken during the interviews, (b) data reduction and analysis products, transcripts of the audio tapes and unitized data, (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products, a final report that includes findings and conclusions as well as themes, definitions and relationships, (d) materials relating to intentions and dispositions, the research proposal which included the purpose of the study and general research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### Reporting the Data

The results of this study are presented in a report that includes narrative from the respondents. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

The results of the study are presented in this chapter. The chapter begins with brief descriptions of the researcher and the respondents. The results are then presented. The results are presented according to themes that emerged from the data. Narrative from the respondents is incorporated into the report. The thoughts, experiences and ideas of the respondents are presented as a group in order to show the range of viewpoints expressed.

#### Researcher

I am a 24-year old, African American woman from the South. Although I am from the South, I spent my formative years in the Midwest. I grew up in a family that identified heavily with blackness and with the struggle associated with being an African American in the South. My childhood memories include the food and music that are typically associated with the black experience and stories about picking cotton and the treatment of blacks in the South by whites, aspects of the black experience that were experienced by my mother and grandmother.

My experiences in high school, college, and graduate school include being affiliated with organizations that were minority-based as well as several organizations that were non minority-based. My quest for association with other African American men and women led me to become involved in several

minority-based organizations. My desire to be a part of the community led me to join several organizations and committees that were not race-related.

For the past two years I have been in graduate school at Iowa State where I have been employed as the NPHC Advisor. Although I am not a member of a historically black sorority, my job as an advisor sparked my interest in the organizations. My daily interaction with the students, the lack of information available on the students, and the theory I studied in a student development theory class led to my thesis topic. I will continue to work with members of historically black fraternities and sororities as well as member of historically white Greek-letter organizations as the Greek Affairs Coordinator at Western Illinois University.

#### Respondents

The respondents were Annie, Lawrence, and Keith (pseudonyms). Annie is a 24-year old, graduating senior from the Midwest who became a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority three years ago. Annie grew up in a community that was almost exclusively white. She remembers growing up as someone who was "too black to be cool with the white people and too white for the black people." With the exception of the many negative race-related encounters she has had with whites and blacks, her childhood mirrors that of a middle class white girl. College was a time for self-exploration for Annie. Her college years marked the point where she gained a higher level of confidence with her identity and her blackness.

Keith is an East Coast native who identifies with the culture and traditions associated with his Haitian lineage rather than those of African Americans. Keith grew up as an only child in an all black neighborhood. He identifies with the African American experience, but has a hard time commenting on what symbolizes blackness. He attributes this difficulty to the fact that he has never had anything to compare his all black experience to. Keith joined Omega Psi Phi fraternity because "it gave [him] something to do and because they were the ones [he] got along with." Keith has held several leadership positions in his fraternity and in the NPHC, but is not involved in very many other organizations.

Lawrence, a member of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, identifies himself as a leader in the campus community. Lawrence has always been involved in all aspects of campus life. Although he is very involved in his fraternity and the NPHC, Lawrence's involvement extends into the Government of the Student body where he is the Director of Minority Relations and the Department of Residence where he has been a Resident Assistant (RA) for the past three years.

### Results

The data analysis revealed four major theme areas. The four themes were: (1) background, (2) identity, (3) membership in a black Greek-letter organization, and (4) involvement. The themes are discussed separately and a brief summary is included at the end of each theme.

#### Background

The background and environment of the respondents can be examined in terms of (a) family, (b) neighborhood, and (c) schooling.

### Family

The respondents offered brief descriptions of their families. Two of the respondents had the shared experience of growing up with close relationships with their extended families. They shared the following:

Keith: I was brought up in a single parent household. My mother raised me... Brooklyn, New York. I have no brothers and sisters. I had a whole bunch of cousins though that basically acted like brothers and sisters, so that's how I pretty much came through. I had a bunch of aunts and uncles that helped me function. I can't complain.

Lawrence: [My mom] was nineteen and she got pregnant with me...She had me, my sister, and then she was pregnant with my other sister. My daddy...was gambling a lot...She couldn't take it, so she left... It was all of us and grandpa. All of us lived in the same house...When the people downstairs moved out we moved downstairs and we lived there...then my cousin and them moved...we was in third grade. They moved from the country, so it was like eight children in the house...my auntie and my mom, so we all lived in one room and my auntie and her children lived in the other bedroom. She lived with us until I was like in seventh or eighth grade and then she moved out. She was just right down the street at first.

The description the other respondent offered focused on the lack of close relationships with the extended family and on the lineage of the family.

Annie: ...My dad is from West Des Moines and he graduated from the same high school that I graduated from. Actually my aunts and my grandma, my grandpa and all that...There's a black family line that goes through West Des Moines. We're not...we're close, but not too close so I was never really around my cousins growing up and I fell into the same type of thing then that I did in junior high that I was too white so they never liked me anyway. So I never really had black whatever outside of like aunts and stuff like that...aunts and uncles and my great grandma and stuff like that. My mom's family is in Ohio and we would go there about twice a year...drive to Ohio and stay with my grandma. My grandpa is a slave descendant...either his mom or his grandma was actually born on a plantation, so I mean they're like fresh from the cotton fields and

stuff. My grandmother on the other hand is Dutch or French or something and Native American and black I guess. Her mother was Native American and I think the other parent was mixed with something and black, so I mean you look at my grandma and you don't see any type of...She looks like a little old white lady...so they had issues too. You know when he married her his family was like "no."

The relationship with the extended family was mentioned by each of the respondents in their description of their family.

### Neighborhood

The respondents described their neighborhoods in terms of demographics and socioeconomic status. Again, two of the respondents had a shared experience. They both grew up in neighborhoods that had people of color, were poor, and were divided. In their words:

Keith: I bounced around. I went from project, project, not project and I haven't been in a project in a while, but I'm still pretty much in the quote unquote hood...mostly black...There's a border. You have all of the black people here and all of the Jewish people here. I'm on the black side...As opposed to saying overall blackness in the whole neighborhood...where I'm at most...everybody I know is Caribbean at some point or the other...

Lawrence: The neighborhood was real, real rough... New Orleans is kinda different. It's like my neighborhood was black. It was like most [of the] people I hung with [were] on that side..the black side. On my block...just a block radius. It was big nice houses on this side...poor people on this side...kinda middle class on this side and this is like upper middle and this was like one block. It was kinda dumb when you think about it because when I take people in my neighborhood depending on what street you're driving down they think you live in a nice neighborhood. Then I take them through the hood to my house they be like "damn that's your house" and I take them to the next neighborhood and they say "oh, all right."

The other respondent grew up in a neighborhood that was the exact opposite. The following description was shared:

Annie: The neighborhood I lived in when I was in elementary school was an old retiring neighborhood of white people...then we moved to West Des Moines which is white suburbia.

Proximity to other people of color and socioeconomic status of the neighborhoods was what the respondents remembered most about the neighborhoods they grew up in.

### Schooling

The respondents made several references to the racial make-up of their schools and the impact that race had on the relationships they developed at school. This category includes the following subsections: (a) demographics, and (b) relationships.

#### Demographics

The demographics of the schools the respondents attended ranged from being all white to mixed to all black.

Annie: The elementary school I went to was a private elementary school of white people. I was the only black person in the school until my brother came and then there were two... Then I went to a public junior high school that had a portion of the inner city [going] there, so it was pretty well mixed for Iowa...Des Moines standards and boy, boy if I didn't fit in. I did not fit in. I was too black to be cool or whatever with the white people, but I was too white for the black people to like me, so it was like everyday folks were like threatening to beat me up after school. Then I went to the high school...the feeder school that my junior high went to...then we moved and the high school that I went to had about 2000 student and thirty of us were black in all four grades. You know out of 2000. Between 9 through 12 there was only thirty black students, so of course you know just

because your black doesn't mean you're...you know you only have thirty to choose from....

Lawrence: I went to an all black school. It was like four blocks from this white school. You had to walk through the white neighborhood to get to our school and they didn't have to walk through our neighborhood to get to their school so it was kinda hard you know in elementary school...They started making rules where we had to walk down certain streets to go to school and all this stuff just because it was getting bad I guess. I went to a white school for one year. I had class with other black students but all of them went to schools that were mixed or white. None of them came from a black school. I had never been around white students before and it wasn't the students that made it a bad experience. It was just the school in general. I mean because nobody treated me bad at the school. None of the students...I had friends, but I didn't have any white friends, but my classmates never disrespected me because they knew all the other black students. I just flunked out of the school because basically I didn't want to be there and that was the only way I could get out of it you know at the time so I just went to class and didn't do no homework. I mean it wasn't hard. I mean it was hard, but it wasn't like something I couldn't do you know. I just didn't do it because my mom knew I didn't want to go there but she made me. When I flunked out she called me everything in the book. I went back to a black school...

The racial make-up of the school was the first thing the respondents shared about the schools they attended.

### Relationships

The respondents expressed that the relationships they developed were impacted by their race. In elementary school the respondents had the following experiences with their peers:

Annie: ...of course it was always the you know you're my friend today you're not my friend today type of stuff, because you're little. It was carried to another degree because there was black too and all that type of stuff, so there was little racial incidents that would happen and stuff like that.

Lawrence: I think I was in third grade you know. We was walking to school...I think they went to a different school...and we just passed each other on the street. It was three of them and they just punched me in the face. I mean what could you do?

One respondent recalled the relationships she had with boyfriends in high school, the impact her race had on those relationships, and the influence a relationship with a white person had on her ability to fit in amongst her peers.

Annie: I started to fit in and actually become like a black girl in the [high] school instead of like this oreo is what they called then, but then I ended up dating this white guy so that just blew the whole thing out of the water. That was just not cool, because we ended up breaking up because he took a...well, I wasn't supposed to have a boyfriend so it's not like we actually went out on dates. It was more like a passing notes type of thing in school relationship...We took school pictures and I gave him a picture of me and he took it home and his parents were like "no", so he never talked to me again.

After moving to another high school, the respondent had similar experiences with dating.

Annie: ...I dated during [high school]. I dated a couple of black people. I dated white people too, but they all ended in some type of racial something. Like one person I dated I wasn't allowed into his house and so we ended up breaking up over that . Another person I was interested in his family kinda like cut it off before it was ever to be and then the last person I was with who was white who was my boyfriend when I got here. We ended up breaking up one because I got here and I was like woo wow, black men!!! It was fourth of July or something. We went to my family's thing, because when we had gone to a family event with him they were all like "no" and so he was trying to explain to me how...he was all on the marriage line or whatever but when we had kids that he didn't want everything in their lives to be black and I was like they're gonna be black you know. I mean depending on where we live I mean look at my life everything in my life. I will be their mother and I'm black, you know. So, anyway we broke up over that.

Despite good relationships with teachers, one respondent attributed the lack of teaching that went on at his school to the fact that he attended a black school.

Lawrence: I liked my teachers. They never taught me much, but they were good people you know and I think that was because I went to black schools and they expect black students not to know as much as white students and things like that especially at a black school, because they don't teach you on the same level...

The respondents believed race was an important factor in the relationships they developed in school.

#### Summary Discussion of Background

Race clearly played a part in the experiences the respondents had with their families, neighborhoods, and schools. In their families they either had close relationships or felt that they were rejected because they were "too white." The respondents automatically described their neighborhoods in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Throughout their formative years, the respondents developed a number of relationships and had a number of incidents at school that they believed were impacted by their race.

#### Identity

The respondents reflected on the different aspects of their identity development. This theme includes the following categories of data: (a) frame of reference, (b) blackness, (c) influence of black Greek-letter organizations, (d) external labels, (e) assimilation and (f) perceptions of white people.

### Frame of Reference

The respondents viewed the World from a black frame of reference and a "cultural, minority, non-white" frame of reference. They shared the following:

Annie: ...Now, yeah. Just because I notice...I pay attention to things that are going on from a I don't know if necessarily from a black but a cultural, minority, non-white perspective. My comments usually reflect things like that.

Lawrence: I try not to, but I do...I view the World from a black frame of reference, because everytime...this is a prime example...I notice when I talk about people who are black I don't mention what color they are. When I talk about anybody else I always got to mention what color they are. "That white dude so and so, that Asian girl so and so." I never mention "...that black dude this." It'll just be...I mean it's just a name you know.

The respondents offered the following rationale for their viewpoints:

Keith: ...I mean I'm not white, so I can't view it from a white reference and I just grew up around black people since I was born, so anything I know comes from that.

Lawrence: ...I try to give people the benefit of the doubt, but in most cases they don't deserve it...

The respondents believed they viewed the World from a non-white frame of reference.

### Blackness

In reflecting on their experiences, the respondents discussed their identities in terms of being black. This category includes the following subsections: (a) blackness realized, (b) blackness reinforced, (c) confidence with blackness, (d) identifying with blackness, (e) commonality of the black experience, (f) meaning of blackness, and (g) symbols of blackness.

### Blackness Realized

The realization of their blackness was something that each of the respondents experienced differently. One respondent shared that blackness wasn't something that was thought about.

Annie: I don't know if I thought of myself as...sometimes I probably thought of myself as other. Not white. Not necessarily that I was black, but that I wasn't white. I mean I don't think I necessarily doubted it but you know it just wasn't...it wasn't a point of interest you know. I don't know to the point where I accepted my blackness or whatever I guess it would probably be college. That's when like people who were growing up with me were like I remember when you were in high school. I wasn't the same black I guess that I would be now. Of course I was a teenager too, so.

Another respondent described the experience as follows:

Keith: It's not like no special event happened. It was just like I looked in the mirror. I just know it was a long time ago.

A third respondent recalled blackness being constant and recalled a childhood confrontation with a white person.

Lawrence: It's always been a constant thing. You always knew you was black. It meant something to be black you know. I can't think of anything except for when I was two or three. I don't remember being black then. I never thought about being black. It was just like I was just a kid but then once I turned four and all that stuff happened. The first time I probably knew I was black was around that time around four years old I knew that I was black but I forgot about it. Probably when I was four...you know I had the white boy confrontation...

The respondents indicated that blackness wasn't something they usually thought about.

### Blackness Reinforced

Since the realization of their blackness, the respondents have had several experiences that reinforced their blackness. The experiences had to do with them feeling like they were being treated differently than a white person. In their words:

Annie: You know when I see white people just walk out in front of my speeding car just because they just know I'm going to stop...when I know I don't have that privilege. I never expect anybody to stop you know what I'm saying. Or when I go some place. That's how you know [you're black], because you don't expect anything to go right for you. You know? If anything can happen wrong you pretty much figure it's going to. Not because of you're karma or whatever, but because you feel that's how the world does it, you know.

Keith: There was a time when we were playing football and we had a scrimmage in Bensonhurst I believe and we rolled over there and we was coming back from the game and we was about to go to a store and right when we got up to the store...we was about eight deep with black folks and a few Hispanics. The owner of the store...it was a little white lady...came out, closed, locked up the door, and switched the sign to closed...there was white folks walking around and the store was open. The minute we came up...black folks...the store became closed like that and it wasn't like she tried to hide it either. She stood behind the little door looking and waited until we left before she made it open again.

Being treated differently than white people in everyday situations reinforced the respondents' blackness.

### Confidence With Blackness

When asked if they were confident with their blackness each of the respondents gave an emphatic "yes." One respondent shared the following:

Lawrence: Oh, yeah. I'm the man...yeah I'm confident in that but like my particular culture I guess where I grew up it's perpetuated. I mean I have confidence enough but I don't think it's one hundred percent confidence yet and maybe that's because I'm still in school. Maybe that's because I'm not out being successful at what I want to do. Once I get to that point then probably I will have total confidence.

The respondent believed that although he is confident, other people's inability to understand his ethnicity and culture could be a hindrance.

Lawrence: I mean I have confidence in my ability but I think that ethnicity and a lot of people who don't understand it will hold you back you know.

The respondents were also asked to discuss whether or not they felt confident to the point that they could both embrace blackness and concern themselves with the issues of other people. Each of the respondents felt that they were. In their words:

Annie: ...I know who I am especially as far as my race is concerned and I think I've been through enough turmoil and denial and desire to be something else you know that by the time I become settled with myself and my issues I realize that others have issues...

Keith: ...I usually try to look at everything from all points of view whenever anything pops up.

Lawrence: Yeah, I'm that kinda confident. I mean I don't look at people in a negative way when I do say "that white boy this or that Asian girl that". It's just something you find yourself doing because you don't associate with them normally....In most cases I find that I don't address a problem as a race problem even though in most cases it comes as a problem dealing with race you know. I try to deal with it as a person to person problem.

Although confident to the point of being able to both embrace blackness and be concerned with the issues of others, a respondent shared the following:

Annie: ...I don't know that I would get into the whole outside of race minority or fights or struggles type of thing. I mean I'm not down for gay-lesbian rights, but I have no reason to protest or deny you know. I mean that's not my issue, however, I mean I do find myself arguing and fighting for mostly Western hemisphere minorities...

After thinking about her previous statements, the respondent shared the following:

Annie: ...if the point should come up I mean I'm down for fighting for whoever you know what I'm saying just for the simple fact that it doesn't matter and that if others are so easily downtrodden then I'm next you know so.

The respondents were confident enough in their blackness to focus on the issues of people of other races and ethnicities.

### Identifying With Blackness

The respondents spoke about a variety of ways that they began to identify with blackness. Keith believed that he had always been in touch with his blackness. He attributed this to the environment he grew up in.

Annie shared that she started to identify with blackness during the second semester of her freshmen year at ISU. She attributes this to being around other black people.

Annie: Just being around black people that were black because that's who they were...not black because they spoke the slang or they dressed this kinda way or they acted...but black because they were black...educated, well-spoken all that type of stuff.

Annie believed the blackness she identified with in junior high was different from what she experienced at ISU.

Annie: It was different from junior high, in that, what I saw then as being black was just the music and the...you know that type of thing. I mean it was great, but it doesn't necessarily mean that I am black you know what I'm saying. So, when I came here and I saw upperclassmen and my peers and they were black doing things...and...still fighting for whatever cause and still claiming blackness just as much as my ignorant junior high friends I mean I guess that's when it started. My boyfriend was a Que, so I ended up moving in with him...so basically I lived with him and his frat for a while and then I got deeply involved in Black Student Alliance, and I met these two black girls on my floor and so we always hung out together you know and they were teaching me stuff about like you know pressing combs and you know box relaxers.

Annie recalled that her blackness manifested itself in her language. She shared the following reaction to the slang she began to use:

Annie: ...I remember my parents telling me we sent you away to go to college and you come back talking like this. You know. I was like "daddy this is black English." This was before all of the Ebonic stuff came out or whatever. It was just funny, because he was like I don't understand what happened to you. You went to college you know and came back with all of this slang.

Lawrence credited his fraternity for helping him to identify with blackness.

Lawrence: I pledged...A lot of people they use the fraternity to hold on to their blackness that's why they don't want to let nobody in of other cultures and stuff like that. I mean particular chapters not necessarily the organizations so, I feel it does...I feel like it's more or less a false sense of putting you in touch with your blackness per se because my blackness is not going to be your blackness you know. It's going to be actually it's going to be...ultimately my blackness is my skin color.

The respondent shared more on what helped him to identify with blackness.

Lawrence: ...A lot of things put me in touch with it, because it made me realize where I was and who I am. I mean even coming to Iowa State. I mean because coming here from New Orleans ain't nothing no similarities. I mean it was like stepping from Kansas to Oz you know ain't nothing like home and it made me realize what I really am and I mean it's not saying that some black people don't come from those situations because there are a lot that don't but for me a personal experience I mean church everything because I mean I've been to white churches and black churches and ain't nothing alike so I mean everything put me in touch with who I am when I'm around my own people. I understand it. When I'm around other people I really do understand it because that's when you see a difference when you see something to compare it to.

The respondents believed environment, people, and personal experiences, like joining a fraternity and attending church, put them in touch with their blackness.

#### Commonality of the Black Experience

The respondents commented on what they thought they had in common with other blacks through the black experience. Keith stated that the fact that he was from the same location as some of his black friends at ISU meant that they had a shared black experience. He also stated that relating to black people from all white environments has to do with the common experience of being human.

Lawrence shared that it's easy for him to make light of the more serious issues that face blacks in America when it's done with people who have had the same experiences. In his words:

Lawrence: ...Some things we do as a people as a collective group we all think the same about...I mean we joke a lot about things that we probably would cry about if we took it too seriously. I mean thinking on the level of...I mean we were joking the other night about the forty acres and a mule thing. Black people joke about it, but if we really think about it we've been shafted as a

people in this country you know. I mean if we took it that seriously it would put enough anger or hurt or pain in you. In this collective spirit with my fraternity I mean we talk about those things. We talk about everybody. It's just funny. Now it's funny. As a fraternity, when we talk about race and culture and identity and all those things it may come up in that setting. I mean you really realize that you are black.

The commonality of the black experience was defined by the respondents in terms of location, humanness, and being able to relate to each other.

### Blackness Defined

The respondents were asked to define blackness. They included race and skin color in their definitions.

Annie: I guess it's my race. It's my color of my skin.

Lawrence: I'm only black because that's my race you know. I don't think nothing makes you black but your skin color. Not because I'm black because we were slaves not because I'm black for none of that because I'm black you know....You black because you was born with dark skin you know. That's it. It's not about how many food stamp checks you got. It's not about how many fights you've been in. It's not about what kind of clothes you wear. It's not about how you talk. I mean none of those things. It's just that's how you were born.

Annie included a history of struggle in her definition.

Annie: I think it's more of a story more of a history that I can claim kinda like Delta except I didn't...I was born into my blackness and not necessarily Delta, but because I have been party to some of the things that may have happened to like my parents you know. Obviously I wasn't there in the sixties and I wasn't there during slave revolts or anything like that..It's a pride type of thing too, because and this kinda relates back to Delta because it's like if not necessarily me I guess but it's my descendants, or my people or people who look like me, act like me...whatever...to go through all of that stuff and I'm still kickin' it you know or able to. Then I might be able to do my share too you know. To know that regardless of whatever happened I mean we're still movin' on. We're still comin' up. We're still

fighting...to know that because of our struggles and stands and what not other people have been able to take a stand in our shadow or we've been able to move over and pass the spotlight or whatever. However you want to look at it. But, yeah. So, I think it's more of a pride to have the birthright of such a rich history. But, I think it's the ability to or the gift or the birthright to be proud of your story. You know what I'm sayin'. Cuz I wouldn't want to be white if for no other reason just their history.

Lawrence agreed that blackness could be associated with a struggle, but also acknowledged the struggles of others.

Lawrence...It carries a load as far as the struggle but I mean people always questioning me because I always say well shit everybody been enslaved you know during some course in time. It's just that our enslavement has been so recent that you know we still pissed off you know...two thousand years from now it's gon' be somebody else getting enslaved in some kind of way. I mean right now the third world countries is like slavery I mean people working for ten cent a day you know. I mean that ain't no money. I mean that's like working for free and people don't understand. To me that's slavery and it's still going on you know, but in our little reality ain't nobody every whooped me with no chain. I've been beat up and called nigger before, but that wasn't slavery you know.

Keith defined blackness in terms of location and actions. In his words:

Keith: Where all of the black people are at...if you have...a bunch of black people here and you have like about four white people in a group of about lets say 20 black folks and you take this white person and you bring them to like here chances are he's gon' hang out with all of the black people. Now black people not from where he's from will think that he's trying to act black, but per se if that's all he knows is black folks and he's around the black culture then...he's not trying to be black...that's just what he knows. So I believe that black is exact, is basically how ever the black folks act in a certain area. Black folks from Chicago are different from black folks from New York...actions...like communication. How you conversate with each other, how you dress. Actually communication and how you dress pretty much details the beginning of the culture. Everything else usually just works from there. Cuz okay, you got your communication out

of the way. That's how you talk with people...slang, your method of talking to people. Outside of slang just how you approach yourself with other people. Then you have how you dress. That basically labels you as where you're from. Cuz, I'm in clothes usually about three sizes too big for me. That's New York right there. Everything else would just basically be your own personality I guess however you take those things and attribute them to other people.

Blackness, then, could be defined in terms of race and skin color, history, struggle, location, and actions.

### Symbols of Blackness

The respondents shared what symbolized blackness to them as well as what they thought society saw as symbols of blackness. This subsection is broken into symbols of blackness according to the (a) respondents, and (b) society.

#### Respondents

One respondent remembered music and food as symbols of blackness.

Annie: We listened to Parliament, Isaac Hayes...Who else? Luther Vandross and Lou Rawls and I guess music. That's all I'm trying to say. The food I guess, because I mean I knew what soul food was and I think sometimes when I talk to people about having...I learned how to clean chittlins in junior high you know. I mean I'll clean 'em cook 'em whatever...I could do it. You know, I can go outside and find greens in the yard. Things that people [say] "oh, those are weeds." How 'bout not. You just ate those last night for dinner you know. You didn't know but you really did. So, I guess that type of thing.

Although she experienced black music and food, what she saw as symbols of blackness, she still didn't feel that other people acknowledged her blackness.

Annie: I don't suppose there's too much more, because I guess there isn't too much more, because when I got around other black people it didn't seem like I was black according to black life standards type of things.

Another respondent, whose experience growing up was completely black, had a difficult time sharing what he thought symbolized blackness. He shared the following:

Keith: I can't really say what symbolizes blackness, because see if you're just in a black neighborhood just the neighborhood. I mean like you walk outside and you see black people. It don't get no...Like let's say if I walked outside and I saw white people and I went somewhere else and saw black people I could compare, but if I'm just walking outside seeing black folks then the neighborhood's black then there's nothing more black to see.

### Societal

Annie shared a lengthy account of the standards of blackness that were forced on her during her childhood. Throughout the account she shared why she didn't fit the standards. In her words:

Annie: First and foremost [blackness] was an attitude. I didn't have any type of attitude you know good, bad or indifferent. They didn't like that. My language was not even close and I mean I didn't understand any of the slang. I had no idea about that type of thing. I didn't live around any of them I mean because I still lived in the old retired neighborhood you know so my neighborhood was not characteristic of a black neighborhood. I mean there weren't kids and stuff like that. I didn't really know any of the dances because you know I could mash potato somethin' awful...boy, boy...I could do the cha cha and the waltz and all that kind of stuff that my mom taught me...the pony...the twist, but I didn't know what the prep was you know if someone were to say the wop or whatever. I mean I learned in junior high but coming in I didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't have any of their experiences of parties...folks just coming by and everybody was kickin' it and to the negative degree that I didn't know what Mad Dog was. You know what I'm saying. Everybody was like oh yeah we...you know the high school kids...we can get some Mad Dog. I was like some who. You know what are you...I mean I was totally naive to the whole world outside the older white people around me, so that and then I didn't dress the same I mean everything...I was a Molly Ringwald of sorts. You know her character like *Pretty in Pink*

and *Breakfast Club* type of person. I mean well considering I had just came from this private school or whatever, so everything I had matched....overly matched actually. I mean just my whole package was not into the blackness as they would characterize it, but then we were in like junior high, so you know. I hadn't seen any black movies you know. People were like oh *Cooley High* and all that. I never saw those. I didn't know who Dolemite was. None of those. Nothing. Nothing.

She used her vocabulary as a defense when she got into situations where she was teased about not fitting the societal standards of blackness.

Annie: ...What kinda worked in my favor but also against me was when people started making fun of me or whatever I would talk above their heads because I could. You know, because I had the vocabulary to speak to an adult or at maybe high school level and they would be like what. You know, what are you saying? I remember my favorite line was you must be living in a world of pretenses and they would look at me "WHAT!!!"

Lawrence believed that society tends to associate blackness with a struggle.

He offered the following:

Lawrence: I've learned and I've witnessed that most people associate black with a struggle. They don't associate it with nothing else you know..That's what the poems do about so caught up in your skin tone and in your struggle that you refuse to realize that you struggling now because you so caught up in saying that we struggled you know. I mean just get through your struggle now and make it better so you won't have to tell that story again you know and that's how I see it. I'm trying to make it better so I won't have to tell that story when I'm seventy-five years old to my children...that this whole thing is a struggle and y'all gon' be poor because I'm poor. You know hopefully I'll have some money and y'all won't have to struggle like I did and you can deal with something else rather than dealing with the past.

Lawrence also shared that society associates blackness with Africa.

Lawrence: I don't know nothing about Africa, so I can't say you know well I'm from Africa, the motherland, blah blah blah. All I know is Habari Gani because somebody else said that

and...people say you need to research this that and the other and I'm like but I mean after four hundred and something years that can be my origin but that's not my home you know. I mean me going to Africa ain't going to mean no more than me going back to New Orleans you know. Well, New Orleans will probably mean more and...I don't even know who my great, great grandfather was so how am I going to tell you about Africa.

Lawrence expressed his feelings on the self-affirming and empowering poems that are written about blackness.

Lawrence: I guess a person who quote unquote call themselves black...you know they use all these forms of what black means...You know how you have to tell yourself things to empower you and make you feel good about yourself. I don't think I have to do that you know. I don't tell myself anything to make me feel good about myself. I just have to achieve and do what I need to do and people these days have to write all these poems about I'm black because of this and that and that and none of that stuff makes you black.

The symbols the respondents associated with blackness resulted from the environments they grew up in. Annie saw the music she grew up listening to and the food that she learned to cook as symbols of blackness. Keith, who grew up in a totally black environment, couldn't comment on what symbolized blackness, because he never had anything to compare his experience to. The respondents believed that societal symbols of blackness were attitude, language, dances, social experiences, style of dress, movies, Africa, and self-affirming poetry.

### Influence of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

The respondents believed that it was possible for membership in a black Greek-letter organization to influence identity development. Two of the respondents shared that it influenced parts of their identity.

Annie: I think by the time I reached my sorority I had already reached that...It may have polished it just for the simple fact that it is an African American organization a black organization... Like I said I don't think that it necessarily did it or was a focal point or transition and all that kinda stuff because I don't believe I would've joined the organization if I wasn't secure about that anyway. As far as me and my identity I think it's helped with self esteem, because I consider my organization to be selective and to know that I'm following in the footsteps of other great women who my sorority also selected. Then just of course life experiences and just growing I guess has helped with my identity and framing who I am, but that would be true of anything. I don't think it's necessarily focused on Delta except for the fact that Delta takes up a lot of my life you know. It could have been anything, because everyday I think helps shape my identity or who I think I am and who I am to everybody else.

Lawrence: Me being me Lawrence no, but as me being able to show people parts of me probably, because I can't step without being in a fraternity. I mean I can't step around no party. I can't show that part of myself that's proud of being in a group without being in a fraternity unless I was playing football or something because that's the only things I can compare it to you know.

Keith felt that membership in a black Greek-letter organization might have an impact on someone who hasn't had the experience of being around black people.

Keith: It might help people who ain't been around black people that join the frat and that might help, but I been around black folks from jump.

Being part of a black Greek-letter organization enhanced Annie's self esteem, allowed Lawrence to show different parts of himself, and had no impact on the identity of Keith.

#### External Labels

The respondents believed that others assigned labels to them based on what they saw their identity as. They shared the following with regard to race and ethnicity related labels:

Annie: I mean not necessarily that I too much care or have a preference over being black or African American except that I feel if you're going to categorize me you should do so as you do yourself and everybody else you know. I mean if I sit down across the table from somebody and they're like oh well I'm brown oh well then I'm black you know, but if I sit across the table from somebody and they're like well I'm a Chinese American well I guess then I'd be an African American you know.

Lawrence: I mean this is how we're called those names...ethnicities and all that stuff. People say African American because your origin is Africa and you're American...whatever. I just say...I guess I would say I'm African American because of political correctness, but I'm black.

The respondents stated that labels were also imposed on them because of membership in a black Greek-letter organization. In their words:

Annie: Okay, the worst part of it would be the label...I to some degree lost my individuality...my cloak of invisibility has been lifted only to put just another blanket on. I'm never myself anymore. I'm that Delta who...you know. "Annie...Who is that? Well, you know she's that delta who"...whatever they decide to tag on. Good, bad, or indifferent...Either they always say the one who's always smilin' or they say the one who is a Que in the step shows. That's I guess people who don't really know. They always say "oh, I know you. You were the one in the stepshow." Yeah, okay. They always remember like the very first show I was ever in too which is just crazy to me, but none the less.

Keith: ...You get this basic bad label cuz you're a Greek male...You get just like a negative vibe from people. It seems like you always get labeled as a Que whenever you do something bad and then whenever you do something good you're an individual, so either which way. It should either go both ways one way or both ways the other way, so it's either I'm an individual and I do something good or bad or I'm Keith the Que whether I do something good or I'm Keith the Que whether I do something bad, so which ever which way. As long as it's consistent I don't really mind...I don't believe I make that big of a difference between Keith and Keith the Que.

Lawrence: ...One common thing is when people label us as having a gang mentality just because we wear colors and throw up signs and have calls and things like that...which I think is stupid, but it happens...

The respondents acknowledged that they were labeled by others. They expressed more dismay at being labeled for being a part of a black Greek-letter organization than they did over racial labels.

### Assimilation

The respondents recognized that assimilation plays a part in identity development. Annie shared that as a child there was a desire to assimilate.

Annie: ...When I was younger I did want to be white just because of my surroundings I didn't see anything...well one I didn't see anything positive, per se, to be black and not that there was anything negative, but I didn't see anything that said no really you should want to be who you are and everything that I was around was white and in order to get along with my little friends you know and that type of thing. I didn't have any black role models other than my mom and dad really...We didn't necessarily go to church and my dad's family was although fifteen minutes away distant. My mom's mom looks white, so it was just kinda the whole why can't I just be...Why is it necessary for me to look like this type of thing?

Lawrence shared two experiences where he was, in a sense, forced to assimilate.

Lawrence: My momma made me [go to a white school] because she thought that would make me a better person and I hated it because I would have to change totally to fit in. I mean I had to speak properly and I started doing it not noticing what I was doing until I went home in my neighborhood and people stopped wanting to be around me. Now I had to dress differently. I couldn't wear street clothes like I would to my other school because nobody wore street clothes to school. They wore preppy looking outfits...

Lawrence: ...even though I didn't try to do it or it wasn't my intention I believe I have assimilated you know to this environment you know so it's like I can fit into all of the circles and nobody looks at me like a sore thumb whereas you know most minority students on campus are looked upon that way...

Lawrence shared his views on assimilating through membership in both historically black and historically white fraternities.

Lawrence: ...just like this other black dude I know who wants to be a Sigma but I don't think he want to go through the process of being a Sigma...and he acts [white] period...and I asked him what would be his prime interest and I think the same way he acts like [white] that he really don't want to act [white] you know and I said well I mean Sigma ain't gon' change the way you act. I mean that's more of a self exploration thing. I mean you can be in my fraternity and all that stuff, but you gon' act the same way. I mean ain't nobody gon' be like you need to speak more like this and that...

Lawrence: ...In a white fraternity you gotta straight up be in their eye a black white boy to get in or even to fit in....

The respondents discussed blacks assimilating to white and blacks, who didn't have a black experience, assimilating to black.

### Perception of White People

The respondents generally had a negative perception of white people.

They shared the following:

Annie: I mean everywhere they've gone they've destroyed something you know. So that's not cool....I'm not too fond of them either, but I think that's funny though, because in my upbringing I've never been assaulted by or threatened to be assaulted by a white person before you know but they scare me now...

Lawrence: Now white folks I mean it was funny because when I first got here they either hated you or they felt sorry for you. So when they feel sorry for you they help you and when they help you like that it doesn't really serve a purpose. I only met one person my first year here that was white that helped me because they genuinely helped me and cared about what was going on with me...

The respondents believed that white people were destructive, threatening, and apathetic to blacks.

### Summary Discussion of Identity

The respondents discussed identity in terms of six topics. Those topics were: (a) frame of reference, (b) blackness, (c) influence of black Greek-letter organization, (d) external labels, (e) assimilation, and (f) perception of white people.

The respondents believed they view the World from a non-white, black, cultural, and minority frame of reference, but they felt that blackness wasn't something they remembered really thinking about. They did, however, recall experiences where they were treated differently than white people. These experiences reinforced their blackness.

In spite of the bad experiences they had with white people, the respondents believed they were confident enough with blackness to both embrace blackness and be concerned about others. The respondents credited their environments, the people in their lives and personal experiences for helping them identify with blackness. They believed that the blackness they identified with was a shared experience among black people.

Blackness was defined by the respondents and they shared what symbolized blackness to them and to society. The respondents associated blackness with history, a struggle, location and actions. They believed some of the things society associated blackness with were behavior, style, and Africa.

The respondents discussed the influence that membership in a black Greek-letter organization could have on identity. Overall, they believed that parts of their identity had been enhanced by their respective black Greek-letter organizations.

Discussion of the external labels assigned to the respondents yielded negative responses, particularly when the labeling that results from being a member of a black Greek-letter organization was discussed. The respondents seemed indifferent to race-related labels that were imposed on them.

On several occasions the respondents commented on assimilation. They spoke of their experiences with assimilation as well as the assimilation others go through as a result of membership in a Greek-letter organization. To my surprise, they discussed black people assimilating to white through a white

Greek-letter organization and black people assimilating to black through a black Greek-letter organization.

The respondents shared their perception of whites while discussing black identity. They viewed white people as destructive, threatening and apathetic to blacks.

#### Membership in a Black Greek-Letter Organization

The theme of membership in a black Greek-letter organization includes the following categories of data: (a) knowledge of black Greek-letter organizations (b) purpose of black Greek-letter organizations, and (c) joining a Greek-letter organization. Each category is discussed separately.

#### Knowledge of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

The respondents found out about black Greek-letter organizations from a number of different sources:

Annie: My father is in a black fraternity, so I knew about it, but I didn't really know. Some of my mother's friends are in organizations. When I came to Iowa State is when I really found out about it. Also, at my high school there were people who sorta had a high school sorority. It started at one high school and they had their shirts and their letters.

Keith: *Sports Illustrated*...Emmett Smith was on the cover and actually, from *School Daze*. Then I saw Emmett Smith on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. That's when I found out about the Sigmas and then when I came here I found out about everybody else.

Lawrence: *School Daze* I think was the first time I ever seen a black Greek. Since then I mean my high school had little groups with the Kappas and Omegas or whatever. I think the first time I knew what it really was was when I first went to Xavier.

Keith and Lawrence found out about black Greek-letter organizations through *School Daze*, a movie about Greek life at a historically black college and each of the respondents credited an institution of higher education as the place where they “really” found out about historically black fraternities and sororities.

### Purpose

The respondents shared what they thought the purpose of a black Greek-letter organization was:

Annie: To provide leadership and to uplift the community through community service and education.

Keith: ...provide uplift for the community and to provide a sense of brotherhood for the members and to give the members a chance to network with people that you wouldn't be able to network with before.

Lawrence: The purpose is to provide a service to the community and to provide leadership. Also, a chance for upliftment within our community, especially the black community. To unify African Americans. To provide support for the members. Also, to help each other as I guess citizens more or less succeed in this country. It's a network of successful or leaning towards success type of people.

The purposes shared by the respondents were similar in nature and they were also similar to the purpose statements presented in the Historical Summary of Black Greek-Letter Organizations in Chapter Two.

### Joining a Greek-Letter Organization

This category is covered in four subsections: (a) rationale for joining a black Greek-letter organization, (b) rationale for joining a particular black Greek-letter organization, (c) blacks joining historically white Greek-letter

organizations, and (d) whites joining historically black Greek-letter organizations.

#### Rationale for Joining a Black Greek-Letter Organization

The respondents commented on why they chose to join black Greek-letter organizations.

Annie: Cause everything else in my life was white, so I really didn't feel like I had a choice. I mean I could be a part of anything and be a part of a white organization. There was no need.

Keith: Because I'm black. I mean it was that basic. In fact it came in my head like in junior high school. I was like I'm going to be in a frat whenever I get to college. Then I saw *School Daze* and then I knew there were black frats so I was like I'm going to be in a black frat when I get to college. Which one had to be decided of course....A black Greek-letter organization. It gave me something to do.

Lawrence: That's an easy question really. I mean first of all before I came to Iowa State I never had a white friend before. I never knew anybody white except for people whose cars I washed or grass I cut or garden I...I worked for. I mean the first experience I had with a person who was white they called me a nigger and punched me in the face. I chose to be a member of a Greek-letter organization period because of what they represented in my eye which was...I'm not going to say I never had it, but I never seen it. I never seen people help people because they wanted to . I seen them doing it for what they could get from it. I never seen people have true brotherhood or friendship or whatever you want to call it. I seen backstabbing and friends killing each other over a dollar...things like that going on, so I mean I guess it more or less was something that served the purpose at the time when I decided to pledge.

The respondents indicated that the main reasons they joined black Greek-letter organizations was that they are black and they liked what the organizations represented.

### Rationale for Joining a Particular Black Greek-Letter Organization

The respondents discussed why they chose to become a member of one black Greek-letter organization over the others.

Annie: I decided to be a Delta because everything in my life was always white, so when I came to school those were organizations that were black. I chose Delta because a lot of the people I knew were Deltas. Then, looking at stereotypes of what organizations were supposed to be. I knew there were stereotypes and I was asking about it. I was asking for the stereotypes. I was most pleased with what I heard about Delta I guess. Then also because of the sisterhood that I saw on campus among members of Phi Chapter at that time. It seemed like that was something that wasn't in the other organizations. Also because of its other members you know through history and in politics and education and the fine arts. People that...prominent Deltas. That was another reason and because when I was looking up to see what organizations did I think that year Delta did not have one party, but everyone else had parties and all Delta did was programs, so that turned me on too. I mean I like to kick it, but I can kick it without being in an organization. That was neat too. I think that they were about business.

Keith: Mine, because the bruzz could step. They were the ones I got along with the most and that's actually basically about it.

Lawrence: Why I chose my organization I guess the same thing once I decided I wanted to be in an organization because that was the hardest part cause there was no reason to really trust growing up. When you learn you see a difference not necessarily right away but you see the difference in people you know over time. I chose my organization because I mean one they're consistent. Two...people are who they are. They don't try to be one type of person. They don't try to escape who they are through the organization. None of that. It's just real I guess. I wasn't expected to be something else...just to be in the organization. If I wanted to be quiet I could be quiet. If I wanted to be loud all the time I could be loud all the time. I mean not saying I'm either one, but I mean it's a wide spectrum and they all...it's different types of people going toward the same goal and it's not about trying to clone each other and kinda like that you know.

The respondents also discussed the following in this subsection:

- (a) contributions to their organizations, and (b) benefits from the organization.

### Contributions

The respondents believed they contributed to their organizations in a leadership capacity and also by being proud of and loyal to their organizations.

### Leadership

The leadership of the respondents is exhibited in the time and energy they dedicated to their organizations. In their words:

Annie: I know I've done a lot of stuff, but what makes it different from any other Delta you know that's what I'm supposed to do. You know it's kinda like if your job is to drive the bus and you're like "everyday I drive the bus." Yeah, you know there are twelve other bus drivers that work here too...Maybe I've inspired some people to accept who they are and deal with it. If you like it keep it and if you don't change it, but who cares otherwise...I guess since I'm smilin' all the time perhaps I made somebody happy or something. I know I provided sisterhood. Hopefully I've mentored some people...I've been a leader in Delta, but I think a leader more so a leader not as someone who delegates, a leader as someone who follows correctly...that I set a good example type of thing.

Keith: I'll start with what I've contributed. The bruzz are still here. The bruzz was on their way out. Now they're here and I don't believe the bruzz are going anywhere. Besides that I've done a lot of stuff. The bruzz have a web page now thanks to me. The last few Cabarets I've done all of the...that's a bunch of little stuff though, but usually I do most of the paperwork stuff...flyers, program books for the Cabaret...I kept the bruzz in check...gave the people that quote unquote ethical bruh to look at. The different one that they'll be like well they're all crazy, but he's the chill one. Every chapter needs one of those people.

Lawrence: Time, sweat and tears. No I'm just playing, but that's part of it you know. I think since I became a member of my fraternity I contributed everything really. I mean my time is limitless toward them. I had to learn to try to cut back....I've

become a leader on this campus and I guess that shines to my fraternity, but I think that contributes too, because just like we use those famous people...for Iowa State I guess I would be one of those famous people. I think I contributed a lot. I mean I facilitated programs. I initiated programs, helped them with the step show...[gave] my ideas, my direction, my creative background. I road trip with them you know. That's my contribution...just fellowshipping. I put together a retreat for them...for the chapter just because we really needed it and we're going to do it now every semester because they liked it so much.

Leadership is also exhibited in the positions the respondents have held in their organizations and in the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Annie: In my sorority I was Sisterhood Chair...then I was First Vice President, Second Vice President...That's the Dean of Pledges and then I served on various committees.

Keith: I'm the President of the organization for the last year and a half. I actually started off as an officer. I was the Secretary before that. I went from Secretary to President. I'm also functioning Treasurer right now too.

Lawrence: [In my fraternity] I've served as President, Vice President, Black Greeks Association (BGA) rep when it was BGA. I've only been NPHC rep for a couple of weeks. Through my fraternity I've served as NPHC President, Treasurer, Recorder...Internal Development Chair and I [helped] on different committees...I became a regional officer...the National Pan-Hellenic Council Undergraduate Member at Large.

### Pride and Loyalty

The respondents commented on how they show they are proud of and loyal to their organizations. They offered the following:

Annie: I've tried to make Delta's name greater than what it was before I came in, because that's what we always say...Delta doesn't make you. You make Delta, so Delta is only as great as you make her. That's true, so I think I've done that.

Keith: The fact that you would keep your letters and basically work to uphold the name of your organization and for example,

if I was to go to...pick an outlandish state...Utah. Okay, if I was in Utah. Now, I'm a member of Omega Psi Phi. Loyalty would be me when I get to Utah try to look around to find other members of Omega Psi Phi to get with. Now okay I'm a member and go somewhere else and I'm just there and no one knows I'm a member except myself that makes no sense to me. I think that defeats the purpose.

Lawrence: I think I don't discredit it. I don't do anything negative that would shine on...I wouldn't do it anyway, because it would shine on my momma too you know so it's kinda a double-edged sword...I'm frank and honest about it you know. I don't say it's all fun and games and all good. I feel like leading by example as a human being. I'm a good person. A good man and all that kind of stuff. It helps shine light on the organization because when we talk about people and we say these famous people we always talk about people that are good in the public's eye you know and I feel like ten or fifteen years from now they could be talking about me. Lawrence...he's a Sigma you know. That's just the way I see it, so I feel like the best way to show that you're proud is just to be a proud person.

### Benefits

The respondents recognized that just as they contributed to their organizations they also gained from them. They shared the following when asked what they gained from being a member of their respective organizations:

Annie: ...something Delta has done for me is to make me realize and accept who I am. I've learned how to forgive through Delta and I think through my behavior I might have inspired other people to do the same....an appreciation for work. An appreciation for some women. It definitely helped my outlook on women and I guess then therefore black women.

Keith: It made me more talkative. What I got from the frat is probably I got to communicate. It taught me to communicate better with people. Now I'm more talkative to people I don't know....worked on network skills and it gave me a place to release frustrations. I gained everything from the frat...I mean the frat came first and then came everything else, so the frat...I got everything from the frat and then just add everything else. I just used it.

Benefits is broken into (a) relationships with black men/women, (b) brotherhood/sisterhood, (c) family, (d) support, and (e) involvement opportunities.

### Relationships With Black Men/Women

The respondents were asked if they thought they would've developed relationships with black men and women if it weren't for their fraternity or sorority. Their responses follow:

Annie: Nope! It wouldn't happen. I mean even women are great now...this might sound shady, but I have a reason to love at least a portion of them now you know because of my sorority....I guess a girlfriend is a means to an end, because it's someone to go with you to go out some place, but not somebody to be with when you go out...That's what it has turned out to be except with my sorors and I guess like I said I consider them to be family.

Keith: Outside my regular little crew probably not.

### Brotherhood/Sisterhood

The respondents acknowledged their organizations as brotherhoods and sisterhoods. They shared the following when asked what came to mind when they heard the word brotherhood or sisterhood:

Annie: Delta. It does. In Search of Sisterhood, the book about Delta. My sorors, tough love, sucking it up, a security blanket, kickin' it, eating...that's all about sisterhood, an extended family...

Keith: The fact that I can go anywhere and be taken care of completely with no problems. The fraternity is a brotherhood and that's something totally different than a club where you just be friends and outside of the club no telling whether you're going to hang out with that person again. You might just like that person because he plays a good game of pool or y'all believe

in the same quote unquote issue at that time. Outside of that it's like hum.

They also shared that brotherhood and sisterhood ranked among the things they liked most about their organizations.

Annie: Wow, the thing I like most is the sisterhood when it's real cuz just because you know I mean you have trifling folks in and outside of your organization, but sisterhood when it's real I think is the best part. The second best part is being able to do through Delta through the community. I think the third best part is being able to say I'm a Delta and knowing what Delta stands for you know to say I'm a part of it.

Keith: Brotherhood is what I like most. Steppin'...that's another one of the most.

Lawrence: What I like most about being in a black Greek-letter organization...One is that I like the brotherhood...the sense of pride that people have you know...being a part of an organization such as a black Greek-letter organization. I like that it's not just a club. It's something that you make a lifetime commitment to. I like the unselfish nature that it's not about what you gon' do for me. It's about what can I do for you. That's real important to me at least.

### Family

The respondents discussed at length their feelings that their organizations were like families.

Annie: Wow! What have I gained? A family...an extended family. I guess a family of brothers too, because you know Ques and stuff...I think it's even different from your actual family, because they're your family...your actual family is your family because they are you know but sorors are your family because they share the same beliefs and they chose to be a part of your family so it's different. It's kinda like having a child and adopting a child. You love them both. There's no one is better than the other but there is a different feel...

Lawrence: Family.. I think about love you know...unconditional in most cases. I mean because I know...even at Iowa State...I

mean I got some frat brothers who are not questionable as frat brothers, but people judge them very harshly you know and I don't take what other people say and run with it. I mean it's like my brother at home...I mean I love him to death and I know some things that he does isn't right...that unconditional love comes in and it's probably because we have shared experiences you know. I mean I could talk to any of them about something that I went through as far as either going through a process or as far as in life and they may come from different backgrounds, different areas of the World or the country. We can relate...That's not saying all people can't relate, but we do relate you know and that's the important thing and people who don't relate they try to. They try to understand at least and have compassion and sympathy for that situation and that's important to me to strengthen any type of bond between people and to have bonds between men is very unique you know in today's time you know cause most people aren't united and when they are united they're under one organization such as Phi Beta Sigma or any other fraternity or they're part of the NAACP. That's what unites them or something. I mean it's not just being united unless you just real close friends you know and that's only like a hand full of people and in that sense I mean it's very important.

### Support

Each of the respondents believed that their fraternity or sorority provided them with support. One respondent shared several thoughts on the supportive nature of his fraternity.

Lawrence: I feel like they love me whether I do good or wrong. Any of those other groups if I do something bad I feel like they'll just alienate me like they do everybody else. I don't feel no loyalty. I don't feel no loyalty from those groups if something was to go the wrong way whereas in my fraternity I do. I don't feel the love whereas if something went the wrong way then my fraternity would give towards me...In those groups...basically you go there to do whatever and if you do well fine. If you don't you're out the door, so it's like a job...I don't feel the support like I feel with my fraternity where I can go out...it's sad to say it this way...I can go out, beat my wife, punch my child in the face and come back and they gon' love me. They gon' tell me I was wrong and all this stuff, but they gon' still love me like a mother loves

her child who's a criminal who's a drug dealer who's whatever. They don't like nothing they're doing but they love their child and that's something I don't think I would ever get from any other group outside of my family, so I mean that's the sad truth but that's the way it is and that's probably the best thing and the worst thing about being in a fraternity period.

### Involvement Opportunities

Each of the respondents recognized the potential for their organization to serve as a springboard to other involvement opportunities.

Annie: No. I'm sure it could but I haven't had enough time and when I really really got into Delta in working and doing stuff like that I didn't get involved too much into other organizations because I wanted to keep my grades up and stuff like that so no in that sense but probably yes when I leave undergrad you know what I'm saying. When I don't have grades and busy work whatever when I'm in my career doing what I want to do and that type of thing. I guess I could see where it would happen you know like if I had learned a lot about you know whatever. Oh, how 'bout Parliamentarian of NPHC. I forgot about that but see hey Delta helped with that actually. Oh, and I guess I was the rep too hum. Anyway, Delta did assist with that because I mean I knew parliamentary procedure kinda, but I really learned it through Delta so then I would have never been Parliamentarian of any organization ever if I hadn't been a Delta, so I guess I can say that. So yeah.

Keith: Well, yeah, it's a springboard if you choose to take it, but I haven't chose to take it, because I don't have time to take it, because like now...now outside of NPHC now you know other people want your input on anything like who knows there might be a group somewhere in the union that wants to have a meeting about something and they want you because your in an organization and you represent X amount of people so that can open those doors for you.

Lawrence: Um somewhat. I don't know if its a springboard. I have to back up...I got into the fraternity that...and then upon that I became an RA also consequently, so I probably blame the combination of the two on springboarding me and as far as my freshmen year I was in Emerging Leaders Leadership Academy and I did a lot of leadership training type things so I

probably...and I was in Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) so that was kinda like a big deal too, so all those things combined probably springboarded me into the big leagues you know as far as working within organizations and things because I've always been involved since I've been here now that I think about it...way more than the average student with different activities and things, so I wouldn't say it springboarded me. I'd probably say that it's like glue. It keeps me together as far as when I'm in other activities.

The respondents joined their respective organizations because they felt they fit in and because they like what the organizations represented. They contributed leadership and pride and loyalty to their organizations and they gained relationships with other black men and women, brotherhood and sisterhood, a family, a support system, and involvement opportunities.

#### Blacks Joining Historically White Greek-Letter Organizations

When asked how they felt about black people joining historically white Greek-letter organizations it didn't really matter to Keith and Lawrence. They shared the following:

Keith: ...black people joining historically white I have no problem.

Lawrence: I really don't care. Probably because of where I came from. You did what you wanted to do. I don't care.

Lawrence expressed that he didn't care as long as the black experience wasn't "shunned."

Lawrence: What I care about is how that affects how you treat people. If you gon' join a white fraternity and then you gon' start shunning black folks and all this stuff then we got a problem. I mean if you gon' think because you're in a white fraternity that makes you white oh you really got problems and things like that, but if you're just joining because generally you like those bunch of guys or whatever and you just want to chill

with them that's your business. I don't care you know I mean as long as it's serving a greater purpose in your life cool I don't care. I'm happy for you, but you know the negatives usually become the part that stand out you know and I find that to be true especially here with black people I know that join the white fraternities. I mean that's what they do. Not saying they do it openly and overtly but they do it in their own way...If it becomes a habit whereas you don't care about your own people and your own people will be black people if that's your upbringing you know...I mean you selling yourself out. That's my whole take on black people joining white fraternities.

Annie had strong feelings against black people joining historically white Greek-letter organizations.

Annie: Hated it!!!!I guess if that's what you want to do as far as a black person joining. If that's what you what to do and that's your upbringing...I think it's a waste just because talking to white people about their organizations I mean it's something you do now...and quite honestly you can do that something now without being a part of the letter organizations...I kinda feel like it's a waste when you could just kick it for no reason and you could kick it with them for no reason or do whatever when the alternative seems so great to be a part of a lifetime organization...talented tenth...and that type of history and community service...giving back and all that type of stuff and being a leader instead of sittin at Panhellenic discussing whether or not you like if Interfraternity Council is having a keg at their party...

The respondents acknowledged that the decision to join a white Greek-letter organization is a personal one.

#### Whites Joining Historically Black Greek-Letter Organizations

The respondents commented on whites joining historically black Greek-letter organizations.

Annie: I don't see the need... Well, I must have grown, because I guess with each situation it's different. On our last line we just had a Chinese American cross and it's funny because often times okay when I've spoken to white women who are now my sorors

you know and I say well what was your interest in joining our organization and they say things to me like "well I grew up around black people" and like as a matter of fact at my regional convention there was a soror who just crossed and this was her response to that question that she grew up around black people that she has always liked black people and her fiancee is black and she's going to have his baby and I was like so really what does that have to do with Delta?...I would be proud of Delta for holding up her oath and allowing you know other races to be a part of our sorority, but I guess I really just need them to say something earth shattering or I need their actions to overwhelmingly say oh well you're down for the cause, because if we're all standing out on the street together all have on para and something happens which way are you turning you know? So it's just that you know and sometimes I mean granted people today are not responsible for what happened years ago although I feel that's a cop out because it's perpetuated by people today, but I just kinda look at them and say the reasons we have our organizations are spearheaded because we couldn't be a part of yours so why don't you just let us have our organization.

Keith: Now white people who join black historically black I always wondered why, but you know it depends because sometimes white folks grow up with black people so all they know is black people so when they get to college they not trying to act black...that's just all they know so they might want to do that. I don't have a problem with it. I just be wondering why sometimes. They'll be going through a whole lot more stress than anyone else.

Lawrence: I say I don't care if they genuinely are like it's like I don't know a white person here that's like that...I hate people to do something for the excitement of doing this new culturally devastating breakthrough type of thing and I don't believe it serves a purpose, because I mean I wouldn't take a black person who said something stupid like that so why would I take anybody else that wasn't black, but I don't care about you know...It ain't the color of the skin it's what's within...

Treatment of Whites Who Join Historically Black Greek-Letter Organizations

One respondent shared that although he wouldn't have a problem with a white person joining his chapter, he wasn't sure how other brothers would react to that person.

Keith: I wouldn't have a problem, but I'd have to inform that person of like the consequences that may occur from them being white and in the organization. If he was to meet other bruzz from somewhere else they might just take offense to that and just be al little more aggressive towards him...

Another respondent also acknowledged that different white fraternity brothers might be treated differently by different chapters. He offered an account of the different ways white fraternity brothers are treated by their black fraternity brothers.

Lawrence: They told us about...I mean it's a difference. People say you go to every school and it's the same. It ain't the same at every school in no organization. This weekend was a prime example. Some of the frat brothers came up. We had a lot of white frat brothers who came up to the step show from Nebraska. It was like they had six or seven on line and five of them were white on their line. We dapped them up...treated them like everybody else...one white Omega came. Boy they acted like he was an outcast you know...One dude acted like he was about to beat him up I mean and the other ones was like yeah and then his frat from his school...They were black. They kinda intervened. It was like a long debate or something because of his race or his lack of rhythm or whatever and I'm like he's wearing the same letters you're wearing and if that ain't good enough then what's this all about you know because to me it's like working at McDonald's. If you working at McDonald's and this person is working at McDonald's down the street y'all still both work for McDonald's you know so what you gon' say. You don't work at my McDonald's and this is how they were acting. This is what I got from the whole thing.

He also commented on the attempts made by others to embarrass a white person they didn't know was a part of a black-Greek letter organization.

Lawrence: We were at the party and like they had a step show and they had asked one of those dudes to come up. They didn't know he was a Sigma, but he came up. He was a white dude and they didn't think he was gon'...I think they was trying to embarrass him, because they figured he was a white dude you know. He took his shirt off and held a Sigma up...blue phi. He started stepping and stuff and they was like what. Everybody was all like "what" and it was just funny. Everybody was just laughing and I was laughing because they didn't know he was a Sigma. They just thought he was just some white dude they could get up there and watch act stupid you know yeah. I mean just to see that. It was interesting...

Overall, the respondents were open to white people joining historically black Greek-letter organizations as long as they were genuine and as long as they realized that they might get negative reactions from others.

#### Summary Discussion of Membership in a Black Greek-Letter Organization

The respondents credited an institution of higher education for being the source of most of their information on black Greek-letter organizations. They shared what they thought the purpose of black Greek-letter organizations was. They made several references to the community and all of them used the word uplift in their definition.

According to the respondents, the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization was influenced by race, what the organization stood for and how well they fit into the organization. They commented on what they contributed to their respective organizations and on what they gained from them.

Leadership was a major contribution and they spoke on several occasions about the brotherhood or sisterhood their organizations provided.

The respondents shared their feeling on blacks joining historically white Greek-letter organizations and whites joining historically black Greek-letter organizations. The respondents expressed more concern over blacks joining historically white Greek-letter organizations than they did over whites joining black Greek-letter organizations. They shared their perspectives on the treatment of whites who join historically black Greek-letter organizations. The believed treatment varied according to chapter and situation.

### Involve ment

The respondents spoke about involvement in terms of (a) minority-based organizations, (b) non minority-based organizations, (c) encouragement to get involved, and (d) connection to ISU.

#### Minority-Based Organizations

The majority of the involvement the respondents have had in minority-based organizations has been with their fraternity or sorority or the NPHC. When asked if they had always been involved with minority-based organizations two of the respondents said no and another shared the following rationale for his involvement in minority-based organizations:

Lawrence: ...because I always been black and always live in black neighborhoods and I've always been to black schools...everything has been black black black.

Some of the other minority-based organizations the respondents have been involved in are Black United Students of Iowa, Black Student Alliance,

Minority Support Group, Minority Theater Workshop, the Body of Christ Christian Worship Service, Emerging Leaders Leadership Academy and Summer Enrichment Program.

### Non Minority-Based Organizations

In examining their experiences in non minority-based organization the respondents spoke of (a) leadership positions, (b) benefits of involvement, and (c) level of comfort.

#### Leadership Positions

The respondents shared the following with regard to leadership positions in non minority-based organizations:

Annie: I've been a founder...Honors Education Club. I've been President of the Honors Education Club and obviously since the first black President, first female President...I was President of my house floor, Vice President of my house floor, Social Chair of my house floor...Oh, hey...I was on Government of the Student Body (GSB) too. I was a senator for my college. I've been members of organizations like a dancer in a certain group or in the choir or something like that...I used to play sports...soccer...

Lawrence: I'm on GSB Cabinet [Director of Minority Relations] which is culturally diverse. I'm the only black person in the room though. I've been Minority Coordinator for Career Day for the College of Business and Liberal Arts and Science. I've been on management team for STV9 [campus TV channel]...

The respondents were involved in so many different organizations outside of their fraternity or sorority that they had a hard time remembering all of them.

Annie: I have my resume sitting over there. Why don't I just read that. Is that necessary?

Lawrence: I mean it's a lot of things....I should just have a written list to read off. I can't think of everything. You know it's been four years.

Throughout their years at Iowa State the respondents have taken on a number of leadership positions in non minority based organizations.

### Benefits of Involvement

The respondents believed that they benefited from being part of non minority-based organizations. When asked what they gained from the organizations they shared the following:

Annie: A good foundation in being a part of an organization to allow me to springboard off and grow and blossom in another organization.

Lawrence: ... you get a sense of pride when you accomplish things because...like being an RA. I mean when I first became an RA it was a challenge and then it became something I was good at...the RA job probably was the best thing that happened for me being here I mean as a person that and my fraternity, because the RA job helped me to grow as a person and my fraternity helped me to apply that growth.. As an RA I learned to communicate. I learned to speak better because you had to and it was something I did...I had to do everyday and I learned to I guess integrate without assimilating you know I'm still being me I mean I act how I want to act and it's accepted because I'm not being disrespectful towards anybody else in the process and through my fraternity I mean I learned to apply it...Like when I facilitate programs that we do and things like that people are shocked because half the programs we do we don't bring all these outside people to do them for us like most fraternities and sororities. We do them ourselves and the only time we ever bring somebody in is if they're an expert and in that case we need them, because you don't know everything but simple think tanks and things like that you don't need to bring in an expert because...when you go in the world you have to be able to talk, carry conversation, facilitate, lead a discussion and all of those things. You learn that...I learned it through the RA job and I learned to apply it through my fraternity and in both cases it paid

off pretty well. I mean I don't think I had too many bad experiences here.

The respondents believed they gained skills in non minority groups that could be carried over into other involvement experiences.

### Level of Comfort

The respondents were asked to comment on their level of comfort in organizations that are not minority based. In their words:

Annie: Yeah and not yeah. I mean I guess the organization has to be something I'm really interested in though just because I've really grown tired of me having to explain my whole life to get everybody to decide to do a project you know what I'm saying. It's not like I'm saying well hey instead of a bake sale why don't we have a chittlin' sale. You know it's not like I'm doing anything like that but it just seems like everytime you get involved in something something always comes up where you just you either have to bite your tongue or check somebody or get over and act like you didn't hear it or play the dumb role or something and it's just too much energy is expended on not caring about being who I am you know to get work done and I mean I can do it. I can sit and laugh and joke and ha ha with the rest of them and people I suppose wouldn't notice and it really has to be something that I feel greatly towards or a monumental event for myself you know or I'm creating history or something like that you know. I'm not interested but it's not because I feel uncomfortable it's just I don't have the time to put forth and act like I'm not hearing and seeing the things that I'm hearing and seeing.

Lawrence: I feel like it's a certain edge you have going into the room because not because you expect people to...not that you want people to come at you sideways or crooked or basically as if playing on their assumptions because everybody has assumptions. There is nothing wrong with assuming, but you don't act on those assumptions. You wait and see what's really there...or prejudices...whatever you want to call them...I mean I found it easier for me because of the name I made for myself here to do what I need to do, but it's not easy for everybody because a lot of people don't have names and they'll just step on you and keep walking...

They compared the comfort level in non minority based organizations to the comfort level of their fraternity or sorority.

Annie: ...They don't care. A sorority is not just an organization it's a family like I said before...Organizations provide opportunities for you to serve you know as far as your community or you peers or whatever but it just seems totally different. There is a different feel to it. You're not just doing it because it's a cool thing to do. I mean you're doing it because it's part of your national or international thrust or it's a epidemic you know a big deal. It's a nationwide you know it's something. It's not just because you know...and then too I mean not to say that I haven't had any falling out with sorors or that every soror that I see is my best friend and lifelong soul mate, but there's a connection there, an understanding and a feeling even an emotion that you just don't get elsewhere...The people don't care. They're just in the organizations I mean just like I said for monumental reasons because it's a....their resume or their advisor said to do it or you know it's cool or their friends are involved. I don't know something but not because it's a family and you have the same morals. Well, the same idealistic morals and what not. It's not like that and I don't expect the same from them either. I mean honestly when I leave those meetings I expect not to see these people again or hear from them until the next meeting whereas with my sorors I mean I expect to leave the meeting with them. I expect to talk to them about ten minutes later. I expect to kick it with them that night or study or whatever, so it's really different and I expect them to care about what I have to say even if they don't I expect them to pretend where I don't care with the other people think or do or say.

Lawrence: I mean nothing else really compares to it because you don't feel like a family in none of those groups you just work. I mean probably Greek-letter organizations probably sports teams I mean there's nothing else on earth like it except for unless you're at like a black school band you know. I mean college band, because it's like a fraternity to be in the band. I mean that's basically it...I see it the same way with other organizations but the thing is the difference between those organizations like STV-9 that I worked with or KURE [campus radio station] or even like NPHC the cabinet I mean the cabinet or the body besides just being my organization. The difference is it's like work. It's not

something that I feel. I mean you feel the things that go on in it, but it's not something like you feel like you like my fraternity...

One respondent shared that the comfort and support level in non minority-based organizations could be enhanced through establishing relationships.

Lawrence: ... I don't think they provide enough...any support actually in that sense maybe on GSB cabinet because of the relationship I have with individuals it will be I mean somewhat where I would feel support from the President you know and it would trickle down through his Vice President and his Chief of Staff and because of my other affiliations as being an RA and things like that because the chief of staff is an RA too. We communicate on those levels also so it's like in that realm that kind of way you may feel a little support...

Although the respondents believed they benefited from involvement in non minority-based organizations, they felt that their level of comfort in those organization was different from what they experienced in other organizations, black Greek-letter organization in particular.

#### Encouragement to get Involved

The respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the encouragement Iowa State gives them to get involved. Two of the respondents felt that the university encouraged involvement.

Annie: I think Iowa State is all about getting involved and being a part of such and such a group, clique, whatever...being active and doing something which is what I think is so funny about the well-rounded student concept and graduating in four years. It's kinda like an oxymoron....Iowa State is full of join me opportunities I think.

Keith: Well, yeah because they got that big ol' Club Fest where they have everything out. There's always flyers up...I guess it's

just up to the individual student to go seek them out if he wants 'em cause they around. You can find them.

Another respondent was passionate about his feeling that involvement in minority based organizations was not encouraged unless it was something that brought recognition to the university.

Lawrence: I don't think it encourages involvement in minority based organizations at all actually. I think this university exploits minority groups, because in my experience everytime it's something that a minority group does it makes it seem like okay now we can say that minority groups...minority groups...We can brag as if the university is the thing that's making this happen you know.

He offered several examples of situations where he felt the university exploited minority based organizations. In his words:

Lawrence: Like when the international students did that thing with their own week the university make a big deal out of it as if they were the ones doing it. I mean their help...like not help...they do help I guess as far as student groups GSB and stuff but I mean it makes it...it seems like its played up to make it seem like oh this school is a good place to be now that we have this. I mean BSA when they had the pageant the black pageant it was so much negativity toward us...I say us as in the black people....towards the group not having the pageant, but once the pageant took place it was so much positivity as if they was all behind it in the first place which they were not you know and it's funny to me how the university does that all the time. I think the same would be true for the black Greeks on campus because I mean since I've been here its been like a negativity towards Greek life...black Greek life...whatever, but at the same time when we do something big like say Greek Fest and it's a success and the Daily covers it like it did last year everybody says oh you guys do so much but that's the only thing you knew that we done you know, because you don't take an interest in us and you don't play us up like you would do a normal mainstream group you know and this school is all about assimilation. It's encouraging you to be what it would consider regular and regular is no the minority groups. It's not the multicultural groups, its none of those things. Even though we're screaming

diversity, it's the baseline mainstream groups, because those are the groups that get most of the funding. Those are the groups that get most of the coverage and those are the groups...within the papers and things...and those are the groups that get most of the attention from the administration as far as positive attention so I mean those are the messages right there that come from the university and it's not just administratively. It's within the student fabric. It's wrapped within that also, so I mean I don't agree that the university as a whole.

The respondents shared opposing view points on the amount of encouragement the university gives them to get involved.

### Connection to ISU

The respondents shared the degree to which they felt connected to ISU.

Annie: I feel connected to the campus because I spent six years of my life here growing and learning and sharing and experiencing and observing and loving and hating and just all of that. It's a major part of my life. Six years is an enormous part of one's life. The only other time in my life that I spent six years doing one thing was elementary school you know, so...wow, that was a pretty profound statement wasn't it. How 'bout that ...I'm going to say it one more time. The only other time in my life that I've done anything for six years is elementary school wow. I mean I just thought about that, so of course I would have to be dead for Iowa State for me not to be connected to Iowa State in some way, shape or fashion. I'm not saying that when I walk through the halls of Lagomarcino or when I'm on campus and hear the Campanile chime that my eyes get misty and my heart goes a flutter and I think about all of the glorious moments. No, that doesn't happen, but I mean I do feel a connection here and it's kinda funny because I have been here for a little while so the people that I met when I first came in were leaving when I got here and there are people that have since come and gone so it's more of you know what it's like? It's a connection that you feel like at the end of a movie when the person is just sitting there and the theme song is playing and they're just pondering or when you see them driving away and they watch the city they're leaving get smaller and smaller. You know it's that type of connection. The I remember when type of thing or a Barbara Streisand *Memories* type of feel because I know when I'm leaving I'm not coming back. I don't want to be here you know

so there's no like woo I'm going to miss Iowa State...No that's not about to happen. I mean not Iowa State. Maybe my friends, but if I were with them at another school or in another city I would be just fine you know, so.

Keith: To the campus...to the people on the campus...I don't know about the campus per se, but the people I interact with.

Lawrence: Not culturally, but I mean on a business standpoint as far as activities people know me. They know who I am. They know what type of person I am and...now I don't feel like I have to go in a room and people say who is he all the time. Who is he? Why is he here? What's his agenda? People always know where I'm coming from and if they don't most people know me enough to know that I'll just tell them. It's nothing to hide. Academically I don't feel connected because I feel, except in certain areas, like a lot of instructors here they either take pity on you...

Two of the respondents shared that despite feeling connected to ISU in some way or another, they had experienced feelings of isolation and alienation.

Annie: As a black women. One time I thought I was about to get jumped in the subway. Subway restaurant or I guess as a black women I realize that I'm a double minority...Often times on campus or in campus town when I when I'm the only women and then I'm a black woman and I'm around a lot of white males I have a tendency to become nervous. Just because I don't trust them which I think is kinda funny because my whole background you know what I mean I used to date them you know what I'm saying. But I do I feel very uncomfortable like they could like they could rape me or something or take me away or kill me or...I remember one time I was coming up the stairs from subway. Subway used to be like in the basement of a building so at street level you walked downstairs and so I was coming upstairs and these three white guys were coming down and I thought God don't. You know I mean if you're going to take me just don't let it be right now.

Lawrence: All the time. Yeah, I mean. Yes, I have felt alienated all the time. I think it's like again I think I feel like I fit a double standard...not a double standard...a double edged sword you

know. Coming from where I come from I felt alienated by my own black folks when I first got here especially. I mean it was hard I had to...I always said I would never assimilate, but I have assimilated a lot at least for them because I mean we had the so called ghetto people here and all of them stuff but it's more like a glorification and I had to learn how to speak. I had to learn how to do a lot of things communicate and things like that. All my slang had to go out the window, because people couldn't understand it... Now white folks I mean it was funny because when I first got here they either hated you or they felt sorry for you. So when they feel sorry for you they help you and when they help you like that it doesn't really serve a purpose...The alienation especially I mean just by having black skin you're going to be alienated by white people automatically and it's not white people as in every white person you see. It's just white people in general especially at Iowa State, because most of these people ain't never seen no black people until they came here until they have to...

The respondents believed they were connected to the people at ISU. They shared experiences where they felt alienated or isolated.

#### Summary Discussion of Involvement

The respondents' discussions of involvement focused on (a) minority-based organizations, (b) non minority-based organizations, (c) encouragement to get involved, and (d) connection to ISU.

The respondents were involved in a number of minority based organizations, but their discussion of these groups was somewhat limited. They commented more extensively on the non minority-based organizations they were involved in. They were involved in leadership positions in the organizations and felt that they benefited from being involved in the organizations, however, they acknowledged that there was a different level of comfort in those organizations.

The respondents believed that the university, to a certain extent, encouraged involvement in campus life. In spite of encouragement to get involved and the feeling of being connected to ISU, the respondents shared situations where they felt alienated or isolated.

### Conclusion

The respondents spoke about their background, identity, membership in a black Greek-letter organization and involvement, highlighting that they believed race impacted each. They spoke of the benefits of involvement in black Greek-letter organizations and other minority and non minority-based organizations.

Chapter Five includes discussion, conclusions of the research, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of the study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the results according to the research questions that guided this study. The results are then discussed in terms of conclusions that were beyond the scope of the research questions. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

#### Discussion of the Results

The purpose of this study was (a) to examine and describe the relationship between black identity development and the decision to join a historically black fraternity or sorority and (b) to identify if involvement in a historically black fraternity or sorority influences involvement in the campus community.

The research questions that framed the study are listed below. Each question is followed by discussion of the results that pertain to that question.

1. Is the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization informed by racial identity development? The respondents shared that they joined their respective black Greek-letter organizations at a point in their development where they were both confident with their identity as an African American man or woman and desired to be around other African American men and women.

The level of confidence with their blackness they expressed mirrored Cross' internalization stage where an individual is confident enough with blackness to

be concerned with the issues of others. The desire to be around other black men and women reflects Cross' Emersion Phase of the Immersion-Emersion Stage. In the Emersion Phase the individual desires to spend time with other blacks in the spirit of kinship. This stage represents a turning point from the old to a new frame of reference.

2. Does a student's readiness factor into the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization? The respondents indicated that they were at a point where they were secure with themselves when they joined their respective organizations. They also indicated that one of the reasons they joined a black Greek-letter organization was that they wanted to be around other black people.

3. Is a student in Cross' Immersion-Emersion and Internalization stages more likely to become involved in a black Greek-letter organization than a student in Cross' Preencounter and Encounter stages? The respondents expressed that they joined their respective fraternities and sororities at a point where they were confident with their identities. They shared that they were confident to the point where they could embrace blackness while concerning themselves with the issues of others. This reflects Cross' Internalization stage.

The respondents discussed their blackness at length. They indicated that before participating in this study, they had not formally evaluated their level of confidence with blackness and the role of blackness in their lives. They appeared to be very comfortable expressing their thoughts and discussing their experiences. They did so in terms of blackness realized, blackness reinforced,

confidence with blackness, identifying with blackness, commonality of the black experience, meaning of blackness, and symbols of blackness.

The respondents recalled situations where their blackness was reinforced by society. The situations they shared were situations where they felt they were treated differently based on the color of their skin. When asked how they felt about these situations the respondents were indifferent. Annie replied that "it's just how the world does" and Keith stated that he was "upset" when it happened, but "nothing more." Thus, the respondents expected society to respond negatively to their blackness.

In spite of the negative experiences, the respondents believed that they were confident with their blackness. In fact, they believed they were confident to the point that they were able to both embrace blackness and be concerned with the issues of others. When asked how they knew they were that kind of confident they emphasized that they try to look at issues from all points of view and that they try to deal with issues as people issues. The level of confidence the respondents expressed is similar to what would be experienced in Cross' Internalization stage. The individual in this stage is secure in his/her blackness and deals with situations from more of a humanistic point of view.

The respondents comments on their feelings on black people joining historically white Greek-letter organizations and white people joining historically white Greek-letter organizations also indicated that they were in Cross' Internalization stage. Two of the respondents did not have many feelings about black people joining historically white Greek-letter organizations and the

other respondent had strong feelings against it. When asked about the reverse the respondents didn't have a problem with it as long as the individual seeking membership was genuine and realized that they might be treated differently by members of other chapters and other organizations. They felt that the decision to join one type of organization over the other was a personal decision. Again, this line of thinking is in line with the thinking of an individual in Cross' Internalization stage where an individual is confident enough to accept others and concern themselves with another person's issues.

The high level of confidence with blackness resulted from being able to identify with blackness. Keith, whose life was nothing but black credited his environment for helping him to identify with blackness and Annie and Lawrence credited people, membership in black-Greek letter organizations, and personal experiences for enabling them to identify. Annie recalled that as she started to identify more with blackness her linguistic patterns changed. This particular situation mirrors Cross' Immersion-Emersion stage. In this stage an individual deals with positive feelings toward blacks or anger towards whites and immerses him/her self into blackness.

In speaking about blackness, the respondents shared that there were some common things about the black experience. The respondents defined the commonality of blackness in terms of location, humanness, and being able to relate to others. Keith shared that black people from the same location have a common experience and that black people who grew up in different areas of the country are able to relate because of their humanness. Lawrence shared that it is

sometimes easy to make light of the more serious societal issues that surround being black in America when you can do it with someone who has had a shared or similar experience.

The respondents were asked to define blackness and to comment on what they felt symbolized blackness. Their definitions of blackness focused on race and skin color, history, struggle, location, and actions. The respondents emphasized that they were born into black skin. They also emphasized the story of struggle that is associated with blackness. Annie was proud to "have the birthright of such a rich history," and Lawrence acknowledged the struggle, but also acknowledged the fact that black people aren't the only ones who have been enslaved at some time or another. He brought up the fact that there are people being enslaved as we speak. Keith focused his definition of blackness on location in terms of being "where all of the black people are at" and actions like communication and style of dress.

The respondents expanded what they felt symbolized blackness to include personal symbols as well as symbols or standards that are imposed on them by society. Keith, whose entire life has been black, had a difficult time discussing what symbolized blackness. He attributed this difficulty to the fact that he didn't have anything to compare the blackness he experienced to. Another respondent shared that the music she listened to and the food she ate as a child were symbols of blackness.

The societal symbols of blackness shared by the respondents mirrored the stereotypes that society associates with blackness. For example, Annie shared an

extensive account of the standards of blackness that her peers used to judge her as a child. She also shared why she felt she never fit the standards. Some of the standards were attitude, language, style of dress, dances, social experience, like partying, and knowledge of black movies and a famous character, Dolomite, in blackploitation movies of the seventies. She used her nearly perfect English as a defense against her peers. She described herself as having the "vocabulary to speak to an adult." Not only did Annie experience negativity when dealing with whites, she also developed defenses for dealing with the negative situations she found herself in with her black peers.

Another stereotypical symbol of blackness imposed by society is Africa. Lawrence mentioned this and spoke to the fact that he doesn't know anything about Africa and that "going back to New Orleans, [his home], will probably mean more to him than going to Africa." This respondent also expressed his feeling about the self affirming and empowering poems that are written about blackness. He felt that achievement, not self-affirming poems, was more of a symbol of blackness.

In spite of evidence of the Internalization stage, the respondents expressed negative thoughts about white people. They spoke of them as being destructive, threatening, and apathetic to blacks. The belief that white people are negative could relate to both the fact that the respondents had negative experiences with blacks and to the positive light that their blackness is viewed in. In most instances, when the respondents spoke negatively about blackness they did so in reference to negative encounters they had with white people. The respondents'

negative Encounters with whites and positive experiences with blacks are similar to Cross' Encounter stage.

4. What is the relationship between a student's black identity development, membership in a black Greek-letter organization and involvement? The results indicate that blackness constantly interacts with every aspect of the respondents' existence, including membership in minority and non minority-based organizations. Throughout the interviews the respondents spoke about their membership in black Greek-letter organizations and involvement experiences in terms of blackness. The respondents shared that their decision to join a black Greek-letter organization was informed by their race. They spoke about the black Greek organizations as if they were a natural choice. They chose to be in black Greek-letter organizations because they were black and they chose their particular organizations because they liked the people in the organizations and what the organizations represented.

The respondents acknowledged that membership in a black Greek-letter organization could impact their identity. They spoke positively about the fact that their organizations enhanced parts of their identity. One Lawrence felt that he could do things through his fraternity that he couldn't do as himself, like stepping. Annie credited the organization for polishing her identity by improving her self esteem. Each of the respondents felt that they wouldn't have joined their organizations if they weren't already pretty confident in their identities. They joined the organizations at a point in their development that

closely resembles Cross' Internalization stage where the individual has developed a high level of confidence with being black.

The respondents spoke very little about their involvement in minority-based organizations. Most of the involvement they mentioned was in their fraternity or sorority or the NPHC. The respondents had a tendency not to share or express surprise at being asked to share things that seemed like a natural part of the African American experience. They may have viewed their involvement in minority-based organizations as a given.

The discussion on involvement in non minority-based organizations was extensive. It included leadership positions, benefits of involvement, and level of comfort. The respondents shared that they had been involved in non minority-based organizations in leadership positions. Annie was proud of the fact that she was not only a founder, but also the first black and female president of a non minority-based organization. The respondents believed that the skills they gained from being involved in those organizations could be utilized in the other organizations they were a part of. Despite being involved in leadership positions, the respondents noted that there was a different level of comfort in the organizations, especially in comparison to the black Greek-letter organizations they described as extended families.

The respondents were asked if they felt the university encouraged involvement in both minority and non-minority based organizations. There responses were extreme, in that, Annie and Keith felt that Iowa State did a good job of encouraging involvement and Lawrence felt that involvement in

minority based organizations was not encouraged. In fact, he felt like minority-based organizations were exploited.

5. Does membership in a black Greek-letter organization serve as a springboard to other types of involvement? Through membership in a historically black Greek-letter organization, the respondents were able to get involved in the NPHC. They served the NPHC in a number of different leadership capacities. They acknowledged that their involvement in NPHC stemmed from their membership in a black Greek-letter organization. They also acknowledged that a black-Greek letter organization has the potential to serve as springboard to other involvement, however, they noted that their restricted amount of free time made it difficult to use the organization as a springboard.

#### Conclusions of the Research

The following conclusions were beyond the scope of the research questions:

1. The scope of Cross' black identity theory is limited. The black identity development theory posited by Cross in the seventies spoke to certain aspects of the experiences of the respondents. With the exception of the respondent who had always been surrounded by blackness the respondents experienced the stages at some point in their lives. The lack of applicability of the theory made it difficult to analyze the experiences of the respondent who had always identified with blackness.

Cross' theory seems to be dated in the sense that the theory has not evolved with the times. The theory was developed during a time of crises for

African Americans in the United States. Although the status of African Americans in the United States hasn't changed rapidly, the college experiences of African American students of today is different from what African American students of the seventies experienced.

2. Blackness impacted every aspect of the respondents lives. While sharing their experiences, the respondents constantly shared them in the context of being black. For example, when asked to comment on their backgrounds, the respondents focused on impact race had on their families, neighborhoods, and schools. They discussed their families in terms of relationships they developed with other family members. These relationships were extreme, in that, they were either close or distant. There was no middle ground. Annie shared that she felt her experiences with her extended family were negative, because she was "too white," despite her black skin. The respondents commented immediately on the demographics and socioeconomic status of their neighborhoods. They used words like poor, projects, and suburbia in their descriptions. They also focused on the fact that their neighborhoods were divided according to race and class. The experiences the respondents had in school were discussed based on demographics and the relationships they developed. They stressed the role of race in the relationships they developed. They perceived that their race impacted their relationships negatively. For example, Annie spoke about several experiences she had dating white men that all ended with some type of race-related incident. Lawrence expressed that he liked his teachers, but felt that the student-teacher relationship and their inability to teach him were impacted by

his race. Throughout the discussion on background the respondents made references to their race and the impact that race had on their background. Most of the time the experiences that they shared were negative.

During childhood the respondents had what Cross' would describe as Encounters, negative experiences with whites or positive experiences with blacks that lead to a questioning of the frame of reference and an acceptance of a new, black frame of reference. The respondents did not state that the experiences lead them to question their frame of reference, however, it did seem that it would be impossible for these types of race-related experience to have absolutely no effect on the development of a positive black identity. This stage did not encompass the experiences of the respondent who had a totally black background.

3. Involvement enhanced the college experience of the respondents. The respondents shared the benefits of involvement in a black Greek-letter organization as well as the benefits of involvement in minority and non-minority-based organizations. The major gain of involvement in a black Greek-letter organization was relationships. The organizations served the purpose of providing supportive relationships and business networks for the respondents. The biggest gain of overall involvement was leadership skills. The respondents held a number of positions in black Greek-letter organizations, minority-based organizations, and non-minority based organizations. They attributed the development of skills like communication and parliamentary procedure to their membership in these groups.

The respondents believed they contributed to their organizations. The contributions they mentioned most frequently were leadership, pride, and loyalty. Leadership encompasses both time and energy and the leadership positions the respondents have held in their fraternity or sorority and the NPHC. They respondents believed that their pride and loyalty were evidenced by them working to uphold the name and reputation of their respective organizations.

The respondents also believed they benefited from membership in a black Greek-letter organization. The benefits centered around relationships and involvement opportunities. They felt that they developed relationships with black men and women that they might not have otherwise and the felt that they became a part of a brotherhood/sisterhood. They often described this brotherhood/sisterhood as a family. The brotherhood/sisterhood and familial nature of the relationships ranked among the things the respondents like most about membership in their organizations. The relationships they developed were described as supportive.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

While conducting this study, several topics for future research came to mind. The following topics could be explored further:

1. The relationship between black identity development and membership in a white Greek-letter organization.
2. Comparison of campus involvement for members of historically white Greek-letter organizations and members of historically black Greek-letter organizations.

3. The relationship between gender and involvement for members of black Greek-letter organizations.
4. The leadership experiences of black students at PWIs.
5. Factors that discourage involvement among African American students on predominantly white campuses.
6. Identity development of black students who have always identified with blackness.
7. Comparison of the leadership/involvement experiences of black students at PWIs who are Greek and non-Greek.
8. Perception of membership in a black Greek-letter organization by black non-Greeks.
9. Black to black assimilation

APPENDIX A  
ISU HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Last Name of Principal Investigator Branch

**Checklist for Attachments and Time Schedule**

The following are attached (please check):

12.  Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
  - a) purpose of the research
  - b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #'s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see Item 17)
  - c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research and the place
  - d) if applicable, location of the research activity
  - e) how you will ensure confidentiality
  - f) in a longitudinal study, note when and how you will contact subjects later
  - g) participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject
13.  Consent form (if applicable)
14.  Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)
15.  Data-gathering instruments

16. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:

First Contact

February 17, 1997

Month / Day / Year

Last Contact

April 10, 1997

Month / Day / Year

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

May 31, 1997

Month / Day / Year

18. Signature of Committee Chairperson

Chair Date

Department or Administrative Unit

2/26/97 P.M. Keith in Ed

19. Decision of the University Human Subjects Review Committee:

Project Approved     Project Not Approved     No Action Required

Project approved with the understanding final questionnaire will be submitted when it is available following initial focus group

Patricia M. Keith

Name of Committee Chairperson

3/5/97

Date

Signature of Chair

**APPENDIX B**

**RESPONDENT INTRODUCTION LETTER**

April 7, 1997

Dear:

As a graduate student working towards a Master's degree in Higher Education, I am conducting my thesis research on the relationships between black identity development, the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization and campus involvement. The purpose of the study is to examine and describe the relationship between black identity development and the decision to join a black Greek-letter organization. I am also interested in identifying if involvement in a black Greek-letter organization influences involvement in the campus community.

The Greek Affairs Office identified you as a member of a black Greek-letter organization. I would appreciate it if you would consider participating in this study. Your participation will include involvement in two focus groups and three individual interviews, each lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes. The focus groups and interviews will be taped for the purpose of insuring accuracy. You will be asked to give feedback on the data collected and to check the accuracy of the interpretations of your responses.

Your responses will be kept confidential. The data will be coded and will be accessible only to you and me. All identifying factors will be eliminated in the written report. Your participation in this study is voluntary, so you can choose to discontinue participation at any time. If you choose to discontinue participation your data will be destroyed or returned to you.

Your participation in this study will help in furthering the knowledge of the experiences of members of black Greek-letter organizations at Iowa State. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 233-9973 or 294-1023. I will be contacting you to discuss your participation in this study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kimberly J. Branch  
Graduate Student  
Professional Studies in Education

**APPENDIX C**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe the relationship between black identity development and the decision to join a historically black fraternity or sorority and to identify if involvement in a historically black fraternity or sorority influences involvement in the campus community.

Respondents will be involved in at least three individual interviews and two focus groups with other respondents. Each interview and focus group will be audio taped and will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Respondents will be asked to give feedback on the data collected and to check the accuracy of the interpretations of their responses. Respondents may be directly quoted in the written report. Participation in this study is voluntary and a respondent may choose to discontinue participation at any time. In return for their participation, each respondent will receive a copy of the written report.

The researcher will keep all responses confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in the written report. Should, at any time, the respondent choose to discontinue participation in the study the respondent's data will be destroyed or returned to the respondent. Also, the respondent's data will not be used in the written report.

By signing this form, both the respondent and the researcher understand and agree to uphold the responsibilities outlined.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Respondent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

Kimberly J. Branch  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

405 E. 6th Street, #1  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

Ames, IA 50010  
\_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip

H: (515) 233-9973    W: (515) 294-1023  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witnessed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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