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## **Mattering: The African American Experience in Historically White Fraternities**

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Mattering: The African American  
Experience in Historically White Fraternities

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Administration

by

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B.S., University of Southern Mississippi, 1996  
M.A., University of Mississippi, 1999

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
Abstract .....	x
Chapter One – Introduction.....	1
Theoretical Framework .....	4
Critical Race Theory .....	4
Mattering.....	5
Significance and Implications of the Study .....	6
Statement of the Problem and Purpose .....	7
Research Questions .....	8
Overview of Methodology .....	9
Definition of Terms .....	10
Chapter Summary .....	12
Chapter Two – Review of the Literature.....	14
Overview .....	14
Introduction.....	15
Emergence of Social Greek Letter Organizations .....	16
Conception of Women’s Groups .....	17
The African American Experience.....	19
The Birth of Black Greek Letter Organizations .....	19
Conclusion .....	20
High Risk Fraternal Behavior .....	22
Alcoholism.....	22
Hazing .....	23
Racial Insensitivity.....	24
Greeks and Diversity .....	25
Conclusion .....	31
Critical Race Theory .....	31
Historical Overview .....	33
Key Concepts of CRT .....	34
Scholarly Explorations of CRT .....	37
Conclusion .....	40
Mattering.....	41
Marginality .....	42
Scholarly Explorations of Mattering.....	43
Conclusion .....	46
Mattering – A Proposed Conceptual Framework .....	47
Chapter Summary .....	49
Chapter Three – Methodology .....	50
Introduction.....	50
Rationale for Qualitative Exploration .....	51
Phenomenological Approach.....	52
Role of the Researcher .....	54
Researcher Assumption.....	54

Comfort Zone I .....	55
All Greeks are Divisive I .....	55
Racism is Common I .....	55
Pilot Study .....	57
Data Collection .....	58
Sites of Study .....	58
Gaining Access .....	60
The Participants .....	62
Contacting the Participants .....	63
Pre-interview Phase .....	63
Interview Protocol .....	64
Interview Phase .....	65
Post-interview Phase .....	67
Data Analysis .....	67
Trustworthiness .....	69
Ethical Considerations .....	69
Delimitations .....	70
Limitations .....	71
Chapter Four – Findings .....	72
Student Profiles .....	73
Descriptive Findings .....	78
Family Background .....	78
Assumptions of Fraternal Experience .....	79
Fraternal Interest .....	80
Recruitment Factors .....	83
Topical Findings .....	84
Covert Intolerance .....	85
Overt Intolerance .....	86
Perception of Intolerances .....	89
Fraternal Bonds .....	90
Other Emergent Themes .....	100
Perception of Access .....	100
Group Rankings .....	100
BGLO’s Traditions Respected .....	101
Discord with African Americans .....	102
Chapter Summary .....	104
Greek Contradictions .....	105
Chapter Five – Discussion .....	107
Study Overview .....	107
Major Findings .....	109
No Predisposition for Going Greek .....	109
Recruitment Drives Participation .....	111
Need, Status, and Image Drives Recruitment .....	111
Marginality and Mattering .....	113
Latent and Explicit Racial Insensitivity Exist .....	113
Downplay of the Influence of Race upon Acceptance .....	115

Incorporation into the Community.....	118
Stereotypical Greek Organizations are Race Holdouts.....	120
Dissonance with other African Americans .....	121
Conceptual Framework Revisited .....	122
Implications.....	124
Policy.....	124
Practice.....	125
Future Research .....	126
Conclusion .....	128
References .....	130
Appendices.....	145
Appendix A: Letter to Gatekeepers .....	145
Appendix B: Invitation to Potential Study Candidates .....	146
Appendix C: Participant Profile Form .....	147
Appendix D: Follow-up Telephone Call Script with Potential Study Candidates ....	148
Appendix E: Reminder Confirmation of Individual Interview Appointment .....	149
Appendix F: Research Consent Form .....	150
Appendix G: Interview Questions .....	152
Appendix H: Human Subjects Certification .....	154
Appendix I: IRB Approval.....	155
VITA.....	156



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographical Characteristics of the Sites of Study .....	60
Table 2: Overview of Participants by Institution.....	63
Table 3: Participant Demographic Overview .....	74
Table 4: Covert versus Overt Racial Intolerance.....	88
Table 5: Elements of Mattering .....	99
Table 6: Summary of Finding .....	109

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Mattering – A Proposed Conceptual Framework .....	48
Figure 2: Mattering – A Revised Conceptual Framework .....	123

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American participation within historically White fraternities. Participant perspectives were obtained through six interviews with African American males at four collegial institutions within the Southeastern Region of the United States. Critical Race Theory was utilized to framed issues surrounding race in a homogenous Greek context. A second lens, Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering, provided a comprehensive description of participants' feelings of significance within the inter-racial Greek experience.

Thematic findings indicate that although African American members are recruited to be a part of a particular historically White fraternity's brotherhood, they initially experience marginality. Through continued interaction, the fraternal bonds become strengthened with participants rising to varying levels of leadership within the group, and, mattering to their White fraternal brothers. Other themes related to African American participation within historically White fraternities include: (a) One or no family member that attended college, (b) no immediate family members that are Greek, (c) significance of race is downplayed, (d) limited fraternal knowledge prior to entering college, (e) recruitment is driven by image, status, and counter assumption, (f) stereotypical organizations are racial holdouts; and, (g) discord exist with other African Americans that disapprove of the inter-racial experience.

Keywords: Mattering, marginality, Greek, fraternity, Critical Race Theory, micro-aggression

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Social Greek organizations have tremendous benefits to the lives of collegiate members. Studies indicate that members of fraternal organizations form close bonds, have an increased ability to function within groups, are satisfied with the social connections created in college, and are more likely to give back to their undergraduate institution (Gregory, 2003; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Singer & Hughey, 2003; and Mauk, 2006). Conversely, Greek letter organizations have also been linked to inappropriate behaviors. For instance, fraternities and sororities have been plagued with issues surrounding race and exclusionary practices since their conception (Lee, 1955; Maisel, 1990; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Association of College Unions International, 2006; and Park, 2008).

At one time in the United States, racism prevented African Americans from joining existing White fraternal organizations (McClure, 2006). As a result, a separate system was created by African Americans (Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991; Rodriguez, 1995; Torbenson, 2005). Although the racially exclusionary bans on membership have been outlawed since 1963 (Chang, 1995), the collegiate Greek system continues to have ongoing troubles surrounding race. Campuses stretching across the United States have played host to White fraternal costume parties that have included blackface portrayals, Confederate uniforms, rap artists and slave buffoonery (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Lee, 1955; Association of College Unions International, 2006). These divisive episodes have no doubt continued to drive a wedge between the integration of a already heavily divided Greek life community as Reisberg (2000a) states that many students of color report that they are offended by the racist undertones of some Greek activities.

These offensive incidents may have had a negative impact on minority participation rates within historically White Greek letter organizations. Reports show that minority college student numbers have risen across the United States; yet, the makeup of the traditional fraternity has remained White (Reisberg, 2000a; Boschini & Thompson, 1998; and Chang & DeAngelo, 2002). According to Kimbrough (1997), the Greek system reflects the division that is present in American higher education. There is a color divide at institutions of higher learning and campus officials indicate that there is very little integration amongst various racial and cultural groups (Levine & Cureton, 1998).

Many of today's students seek associations that reaffirm their identities in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture (Duster, 1991). It has been noted that African Americans and minorities in general are comfortable interacting with students outside of their race, however, Whites self-segregate more than any other racial or ethnic group (Hurtado, Dey, & Trevino, 1994). Although issues of self-segregation move beyond Greek letter organizations, American colleges and universities "struggle with a racially dichotomous Greek system" (Kimbrough, 1997, p. 229). In a 2001 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, the legacy of bigotry at two universities was detailed by Hoover as he states,

The two distinct (Greek) systems are holdovers from the era of segregation, and many Greeks, both Black and White, tend to be suspicious of one another. Yet members of both systems have argued that forcing integration would be degrading to both Black and Whites alike (p. A35).

Still, Gose (1997) indicates that hidden obstacles that block Greek integration give way to feelings that historically White Greek organizations are maintaining the racial traditions of the past.

Not only has membership in the Greek system been divided along racial lines, so has the research into Greek life. A few studies have explored the issue of race in the historically White Greek system as related to Asian American students. Studies have found Asian sorority members largely downplay issues of race, and, that sororities deemed most prestigious had few minority members (Chen 1998; Park, 2008). Studies have also explored the African American experience within Black Greek letter organizations and traditional Greek involvement but little attention has been given to the African American experience within historically White Greek letter organizations. Because of the gap in the literature, there is value in studying African American participation within historically White fraternities and sororities (Chang, 1996; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002). Such studies could assist Greek leaders in understanding if diversity, or lack of, plays a role in declining Greek numbers. According to Reisberg (2000b), historically White fraternity membership has declined 30 percent in the past decade, while multicultural Greek organizations have thrived. Reisberg suggests that new groups will form and meet the needs of today's college student leaving those that refuse to change to die off (Reisberg, 2000a).

This research lends understanding into the lived-experiences of African American members of historically White social fraternities. In exploring the African American male experience, this research explains the role of race in African American involvement utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a lens to frame the findings. CRT seeks to understand social situations involving race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A secondary lens utilized to framing the findings is Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering. The theory provided an extensive understanding of the daily social integration process of the cross-membership Greek experience. The next section will outline how this research explained obscure racial meanings

hidden throughout the experience of African Americans that join historically White fraternities, and, how it was determined if the participants felt a sense of mattering.

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was created by scholars and activists who realized the civil rights movement had halted and sought new theories to challenge racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 4). CRT describes the relationship between supposedly race-neutral ideals and the structure of White supremacy and racism (Roithmayr, 1999). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT provides a lens for understanding how society is organized and hierarchies are formed along racial lines. CRT rejects the colorblind ideology which tends to downplay race by suggesting that we live in a race-neutral society where racism no longer exists (Park, 2008).

The CRT model was utilized for this study to provide a glimpse into the role of race in historically White fraternities and to make meaning of participants' perception of race, whether recognized or de-emphasized. The rarely studied social experiences of inter-racial Greek members were also explored in order to understand African American males' feelings regarding acceptance and inclusion. Utilizing the critique of liberalism tenet which challenges philosophies that race does not exist; and, counter-storytelling technique of the CRT that provides voice to marginalized groups (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), the aim of this research was to uncover if African Americans males perceive that they matter within these organizations. More specifically, are African Americans males incorporated into the community, experience inclusive participation, and are valued as members. The concept of mattering is covered in the following section.

## *Mattering*

A comprehensive description of participants' feeling of significance within the cross-membership Greek experience is provided by utilizing Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering. Rosenberg and McCullough were the first to conceptualize mattering in 1981, detailing five components of how an individual perceives importance and significance to others, interest shown by others, attention from others, dependence from others, and concern others feel for their future. This study will rely on four extractions from Rosenberg and McCullough's concept produced by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) which consist of: Attention, Importance, Dependence, and Ego-extension (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989; Amundson, 1993; Corbière, and Amundson, 2007). The first dimension of "Attention" captures an individual's feelings that others notice or are interested in them. The "Importance" phase indicates one's sense that people care about what they think and listen to them. The third dimension of "Dependence" includes feelings that one's contributions are valued and needed. Finally, "Ego-Extension" is an individual's feeling that others are concerned with their well being (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989; Amundson, 1993; Corbière, M. and Amundson, 2007).

The opposite of mattering is marginalization which is defined as feelings of not fitting in or not being needed (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). However, it is not known if African American males matter or are marginalized as participants within historically White fraternities. This study examined mattering within historically White Greek letter organizations in an effort to determine if African American males are incorporated into the community with their White co-members; and, experience feelings of acceptance, importance, and concern while enjoying



inclusive participation as members. This study utilized the concept of mattering as a frame for understanding participant perspectives.

### Significance and Implications of the Study

Numerous studies have explored the Greek Life experience at colleges and universities. Yet, very few have explored the entire African American Greek experience. As indicated by McClure (2006), the existing literature rarely distinguishes between Greek organizations at predominately White institutions with few minority members and Black Greek letter organizations. Yet, what is evident through review of the history and available literature is that the White Greek experience and the Black Greek experience are for the most part, different.

Kimbrough (2002) cautioned that it would be a mistake to group all Greek organizations together because of the uniqueness of the various types of organizations. The unique characteristics of each organization largely centers around race as there exist fraternities and sororities that are comprised of primarily White or African American members, and, a relatively new type of fraternal organization that embraces a range of diversities (Gregory, 2005). As stated by Gregory (2005), no longer are fraternities just Black and White, they are now composed of a variety of ethnicities, sexual preferences, and racial backgrounds. Despite these advances of inclusiveness of campus Greek life as a whole, individual Greek letter organizational membership remains divided. Still, integration happens.

This research will explore the Greek experience when the boundaries that hinder diversity are breached by African American males joining historically White fraternities. This study is particularly significant as there is little literature which details the minority experience within historically White Greek letter organizations, identifying the role of race surrounding their membership. Further, no study has framed the minority experience within social Greek letter

organizations utilizing the concept of mattering. This research contributes to the available literature on mattering, marginality, Greek life, and Critical Race Theory, providing those charged with working with Greek activities insight into measures that can combat long standing racial divisions. Policies can be initiated that define how all prospective members are recruited and integrated into Greek letter organizations. Greek mentoring programs can be designed for newly initiated Greek members to assist in social integration. This research signals the need for further study into other minority populations in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Future research may also explore the post-graduate cross-membership experience in order to determine if the fraternal bonds extend beyond the undergraduate level.

#### Statement of the Problem & Purpose

The historically White Greek system has been plagued with issues of racial insensitivity and exclusionary practices (Lee, 1955; Maisel, 1990; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Association of College Unions International, 2006; and Park, 2008). As cited by numerous studies, the typical fraternal organization is comprised of members that are normally White, conservative, and less sensitive to issues of race (Marlowe & Auvenshine, 1982; Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1986; Baier & Whipple, 1990; Burnett, Vaughan, and Moody, 1997). Despite racial issues, some students of color cross the Greek racial divide by joining historically White fraternal organizations. Yet, it is not known if African American males that join historically White fraternities feel they matter or are marginalized.

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American participation within historically White fraternities. This study provides understanding into the lived experiences of African Americans that join historically White fraternities. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a lens to view race, this inquiry

sought to uncover what role race plays towards their inclusion within the community. Utilizing a separate frame, this study provided participant's views of mattering and marginalization within the group. Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering is utilized to frame participants' feelings of acceptance with CRT providing a lens to identify the presence of racial issues and marginalization within the groups.

### Research Questions

Several studies have addressed the issue of race within social Greek letter organizations. Chang and DeAngelo (2002) found that White students were more likely to join a fraternity or sorority at institutions with nearly an all-White student body signifying that race matters to White prospects when selecting to participate in Greek life. Park (2008) found that Asian members of sororities downplayed racial issues. The studies by Chang and DeAngelo as well as Park indicated that racial politics occur within the Greek system. However, the aforementioned studies failed to explore the perspectives of African Americans. This study captures the African American male's inter-racial Greek experience answering the following questions:

Question one: How do African American males perceive the influence of race upon acceptance within historically White fraternities?

Question two: What are the experiences of African American males as they interact within historically White fraternities?

Question three: Do African American males feel a sense of mattering within historically White fraternities?

Question four: Are African American males incorporated into the community of a White fraternity, experiencing inclusive participation as members?

## Overview of Methodology

Numerous studies have explored the Greek life experience at colleges and universities across America. Yet, very few have explored the entire African American Greek experience and even fewer have captured the alternative Greek experience of African Americans. Although race is clearly an issue within fraternities and sororities, it often downplayed by Whites and minorities (Smith & Forbes, 1994; Park, 2008). This research explores the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American males' participation in historically White fraternities, utilizing a qualitative approach. This study provides understanding into the role race plays in historically White Greek fraternities and African American perceptions of significance as members. Because this study presents knowledge into the experience of African American males in their daily environment, the study is phenomenological in nature (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2003) explains that phenomenological research captures the essence of human experience as described by the participant.

Six participants from four universities were interviewed in an effort to capture individual perspectives of mattering within a social system while providing understanding of the role of race in a homogeneous culture. According to Glesne (2006), the qualitative researcher seeks to understand how the participants construct the world around them in order to make interpretations of the interactions in social settings. For this study, I wanted to understand the phenomena of the African American experience in historically White Greek fraternities. This research interprets the everyday experience of African American males, explaining their daily lives as participants of social Greek letter organizations that have very few members of color.

## Definition of Terms

The terms listed below will be used throughout this study to connect the research cited within the document:

*Black Greek Organization or Black Greek Letter Organization* shall be utilized to describe collegiate groups that are fraternal in nature and historically have held primarily African American membership. Black Greek Organizations will be used to refer to the nine predominately African American fraternal organizations comprising the National Pan-Hellenic Council formed between 1906 and 1922 (Kimbrough, 2003). The term “Black” shall refer to an organization while “African American” shall describe the race of people/individuals making up the memberships.

*Cross, Alternative, and Inter-racial Membership* will be utilized interchangeably to explain African Americans (and other minorities) joining or seeking membership into historically White Greek letter organizations or any individual joining an organization for which he/she is a minority within the group.

*Downplaying Race* will be used as a follow-up to past literature that found that fraternity and sorority members denied racial issues were significant, important, or, racial issues were de-emphasized.

*Fraternity* will be utilized to describe as a social Greek letter organization that has all male membership.

*Fraternal Organization* is defined by Gregory (2003) as “all men’s and women’s social fraternal organizations” (p. 4). Throughout this proposal the terminology shall be used to describe all groups as a collective regardless of race or gender.

*Greek Life, Greek Letter, or Greek* shall be utilized to explain the overall Greek experience or membership into a social fraternity or sorority:

All three terms are interchangeable, referring to members of Greek-letter social organizations, and not students from the country of Greece, nor members of honor societies. Also, much of the research referenced refers to both fraternity and sororities.

Therefore, the use of the term Greek students in the generic refers to both genders. When research is gender specific, the appropriate term will be utilized (Mauk, 2006, p. 239).

*Historically White Greek Organization or Historically White Social Greek Letter Organization* shall be utilized to describe the traditional Greek letter organization that is composed of predominately White members. It must be noted that not all social fraternities utilize Greek letters (Gregory, 2003). However, this terminology will be utilized to describe all traditional fraternal organizations with mostly White membership.

*Inter-fraternal Council* is utilized to define the governing body for historically White Greek letter fraternities.

*Intolerance* will be utilized to explain racial insensitive or a resistance to accept an individual based that individual's on race.

*Mattering* is defined by Rosenberg and McCullough, (1981) as "a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension" (p. 65).

*Marginalization or Marginality* is utilized in this study to explain feelings of isolation, alienation, or one's feelings that they do not fit in or are not needed (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

*Micro-aggressions* can be unconscious verbal, non-verbal, or visual elements of racism directed toward a person of color (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2001).

*National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) or Pan-Hellenic* is an “umbrella organization of historically Black Greek-letter organizations” (Gregory, 2003, p.423).

*Panhellenic* “is a Greek word meaning all Greek” (Gregory, 2003, p.424). It shall be utilized to describe historically White sororities that make up the National Panhellenic Council.

*Racial Holdout* will explain organizations segregated in terms of race, having no members of color.

### Chapter Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation in historically White fraternal organizations. According to Chang and DeAngelo (2002), “the participation rates of students of color in historically White fraternities and sororities is worthy of study” (p. 812). Chang and DeAngelo found that White students were more likely to join a fraternity or sorority at institutions with nearly an all-White student body. Their study indicates that student composition matters in Greek life, but more importantly – race matters. Although minority enrollment in predominantly White colleges and universities has grown significantly, the Greek life system has remained largely divided along racial lines (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Boschini & Thompson, 1998; and Reisberg, 2000a;).

A few studies have explored the issue of race in the historically White Greek system as related to Asian American students. Park (2008) found that although Asian women can offer instances where race mattered in sorority life, the issue of race was mostly downplayed. Park, as well as Chen (1998) found that sororities deemed most prestigious had few minority members. Chen also found that race played a significant role within organizations where Asian members

denied it was a factor. However, does race matter in the cross-Greek membership experience of African Americans and do they recognize its significance? Further, do African Americans that join historically White Greek organizations feel that they matter? This study provides insight into the experience of African American members of historically White fraternities while identifying the role of race surrounding their membership.

This study delves into the issue of race to obtain perceptions of the significance of mattering versus marginalization within the White fraternity system from the standpoint of the African American member. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a lens to view race, this inquiry uncovers what role race plays towards African American integration within the fraternal community. Participants' perception of mattering was explored by incorporating a separate frame, Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering. Utilizing qualitative means, this research explains obscure racial meanings throughout the experience of African Americans males that join historically White fraternities and provides understanding of those members' feelings of mattering while a member of the organization.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### Overview

This chapter will present relevant literature on Greek letter organizations, Critical Race Theory, and theories of mattering, beginning with a brief introduction. This review of the literature shall continue with a historical sketch of Greek letter organizations. The majority of the available literature regarding the Greek community centers around high risk behavior, especially issues of alcohol and hazing. Therefore, an overview of the present literature on fraternity and sorority life in relation to high risk behavior shall be explored to present an overall understanding of the perception of these groups and lead toward issues associated with race. After a synthesis of related literature on fraternity behavior, the review shall continue with an overview of the rarely explored issues of diversity and minority experience within historically White Greek organizations. The concluding section shall include relevant studies that help with identifying the gap in the scholarly literature, lending relevance to this study.

The literature that frames this study and will be utilized in analysis is presented in the final two sub-sections: (a) Critical Race Theory, (b) Mattering, and concluding with the (c) original theoretical framework. The literature included within this review was obtained utilizing online databases including Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Journal Storage (JSTOR), PsycINFO, LexisNexis, and ProQuest. Keyword searches included terms such as Greek, fraternity, sorority, discrimination, mattering, marginalization, isolation, African American involvement, social integration, diversity, and college involvement. University of New Orleans and Southeastern Louisiana University catalogues and interlibrary loan resources were also tapped for references unavailable online.

## Introduction

In 1776, William and Mary College became host to the first social fraternity in the United States (Gregory, 2003). “While the basic purpose for fraternal organizations, at least those developed as historically White organizations, was social in nature from their beginning, these organizations have had other central foci” (Gregory, 2003, p 6). According to Torbenson (2005), early fraternities and sororities were comprised of individuals that shared values and ideals while maintaining close associations. In their beginnings, sororities and fraternities also concerned themselves with providing campus activities as well as correcting perceived wrongs of the university administration and advocating for student rights (Torbenson, 2005). Ironically, correcting wrongs did not include offering membership to African Americans as racism prevented non-White membership into early fraternities and sororities (McClure, 2006). As a result, African American fraternities and sororities began to form across the United States beginning in 1906 (Rodriguez, 1995; Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991). Lead by civil rights initiatives, in 1963 Federal law was established to prevent de jure discrimination (Chang, 1996) and many fraternal groups discontinued their bans on inter-racial membership (Hughey, 2007). Yet, Greek letter organizations are still largely segregated to this day.

As Chang (1996) expresses, colleges and universities are more examples of society’s racial ills rather than the example of ideals for racial relations. Beyond race, fraternities are host to a range of other social ills. Despite the principles outlined in their founding, today’s fraternal organizations are typically regarded for their own wrongs in their pursuit of high risk and undesirable behaviors (Gregory, 2003). To understand these organizations and the problematic situations that plague them, one must first understand their history and the events surrounding their creation.

## Emergence of the Social Greek Letter Organizations

Greek letter organizations have a rich history that expands more than 200 years and consist of an evolution from literary societies to the symbolic representation of student life in American higher education today (Mauk, 2006). During the 1820's and 1830's undergraduate students created a movement that changed the landscape of the American college with the establishment of the social fraternity (Gregory, 2003). The first of such organizations was Phi Beta Kappa founded in 1776 on the campus of the College of William and Mary (Gregory, 2003). Although fraternities in the form of literal societies existed before the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, this new form of brotherhood was created to fill the emotional and social needs of its members beyond curricular pursuits (Gregory, 2003).

According to Binder, because many of Phi Beta Kappa's members were tied to the Masonic order, many of the organization's rituals are similar to that of Masons (Binder, 2003). Binder states:

They chose a set of Greek letters to denote the group, established a set of values and principles, wrote a ritual that encapsulated these values, made secret their proceedings, created a motto and shield, and incorporated a secret grip or handshake (Binder, 2003, p. 32).

Phi Beta Kappa, like most literary societies, wanted to expand the boundaries of knowledge beyond the framework of the classroom, to engage in extra-curricular pursuits of the students choosing such as debates (Binder, 2003). The group carried out its original purpose for over 50 years, according to Binder, until a rising tide of "Jacksonian republicanism" created the anti-Masonic scare that lead to the group's inability to remain secret (p. 33). As a result of a fear of

secret societies, Phi Beta Kappa divulged its secrets and became an honor society, which it remains to this day (Binder, 2003).

The woes of Phi Beta Kappa could not halt the expansion of social fraternal organizations. The first organization resembling the college fraternity of today was Kappa Alpha, established in 1825 (Binder, 2003). Kappa Alpha was followed by Sigma Phi and Delta Phi in 1827, Beta Theta Pi in 1839, Phi Delta Theta in 1848, and Sigma Chi in 1855 (Binder, 2003). As the movement continued to spread throughout the United States, the organizations adopted many of the rituals, principles, and practices of Phi Beta Kappa. Most notably, they prescribed to a mission of advancing the social standing of the fraternity's members, thus, taking on the role of "social fraternity" (Binder, 2003).

#### *Conception of Women's Groups*

Fraternities were not limited to men as women also joined secret societies in order to provide support for female students who were the first women enrollees on many college campuses (Singer & Hughey, 2003). According to Singer and Hughey, the first female fraternity came around the 1850's and was indeed coined a "fraternity" as there was no Greek word meaning sisterhood. The Latin word for sisterhood, "sorority", was adopted in 1882 by Gamma Phi Beta (Singer & Hughey, 2003). Unlike men's groups, numerous sororities claim firsts: 1. In 1851 Alpha Delta Pi became the first "sisterhood". 2. The Philomathean Society, later renamed Phi Mu in 1900, was created in 1852. 3. I.C. Sororis was created in 1867 and is regarded as the pioneer in the creation of women's groups to resemble men's organizations. In 1888, the national organization formally changed the name from I.C. Sororis to Pi Beta Phi. 4. Before Phi Mu and Pi Beta Phi changed their name, Kappa Alpha Theta was created in 1870

allowing the organization to identify itself as the first Greek letter organization for women (Singer & Hughey, 2003).

Despite the similarities between the men's and women's groups, they held drastic differences. Although Singer & Hughey indicates that there have been instances of women joining historically male fraternities, the aforementioned women's groups symbolized the stand-alone independence of women's fraternal organizations which continued throughout the 1900's. This independence expanded their focus beyond that of their male counterparts. Early women's groups provided academic assistance to members, some placed emphasis on philanthropy, and many fundraised for scholarships (Singer & Hughey, 2003).

During the time most of these fraternal organizations were created, their membership reflected the student body which was largely White and Christian (Hughey, 2007). As non-Whites began to integrate campuses, resistance measures were placed to bar their membership into White fraternal organizations. Lambda Chi Alpha held to its exclusionary policy as late as 1953 pledging only non-Semitic Christians (Hughey). Consequently, Pi Lambda Phi was formed in 1895 as the nation's first non-sectarian fraternity, accepting men of all religions (Hughey). Jewish students who would not be accepted by other fraternities often founded local chapters of Pi Lambda Phi (Hughey). Until Jewish students began to formulate their own fraternal groups, fraternities were "domains of Protestant students" (Binder, p. 35). Although it was the Jewish that lead the way, it would be the African American movement that would pioneer a system, although separate, equal in historical significance to their White counterparts.

## The African American Experience

Historically, African Americans have struggled for equality within the United States. Because of the hardships left by slavery, the fraternal movement was also difficult for African Americans as Kimbrough (2003) writes:

The road for students of color, particularly Blacks, was more challenging than that of White women or men in their pursuits of fraternalism. The first Blacks did not graduate from colleges until the 1820's, and these were isolated cases at Northern institutions. With slavery not abolished until 1865, most Blacks were not permitted to learn how to read or write, so any type of formal education was a rarity, experienced only by those free Blacks in the North (p. 77).

Even as slaves, the new Americans viewed literacy as their path to freedom and many defied plantation masters' mandates, learning to read and write in secrecy (Williamson, 2000). African slaves progressed from risking their lives in learning to read to overcoming barriers placed before the doorsteps of colleges (Williamson). Eventually, John Russworm became the first African American to receive a bachelor's degree from Bowdoin College in 1826 (Williamson). Throughout, the ultimate path toward the freedom of African Americans was navigated by a constant pursuit of knowledge. That same thirst for knowledge and desire to advance a people propelled the African American fraternal movement with the creation of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. This section will profile the African American collegial experience that led to the creation of historically Black fraternal organizations.

### *The Birth of Black Greek Letter Organizations*

Just as in society, African Americans on many predominantly White college campuses were isolated and segregated from the general student body which led to academic struggles and

issues of retention (Ross, 2000). In 1904, after six students at Cornell University failed to reenroll at the university, other African American students created a study group to remedy the educational issues experienced by students. The success of the study group sparked the desire to expand into a permanent group. Out of necessity, seven collegians birthed the first African American collegiate Greek letter organization, Alpha Phi Alpha in 1906 (Ross, 2000). Although African American groups such as Alpha Kappa Nu, Pi Gamma Omicron, Gamma Phi and others existed before and during the time of Alpha Phi Alpha, the African American collegiate fraternal movement was not established in earnest until Alpha Phi Alpha (Kimbrough, 2003). With the establishment of the first African American fraternal group, a period called the “Foundation Era” was launched between 1906 and 1922 with the creation of seven additional African American organizations: 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), and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority (1922) (Kimbrough, 2003). In 1963 Iota Phi Theta was founded in direct response to an era of activism; but also, a time where fraternal organizations were known for destructive behavior (Ross, 2000). With the creation of Iota Phi Theta, what Lawrence Ross (2000) has coined the “Divine Nine” was completed. The nine African American groups “emulated their White counterparts in structure, while at the same time incorporating aspects of racial identification, cultural heritage, and social uplift” (McKenzie, 2005, p. 181).

### Conclusion

By the early 1900’s three types of fraternal groups separated by gender and race rooted themselves across American campuses. In the 1960’s under pressure from university officials as well as the legal community and political activists, historically White fraternal groups dropped

their constitutionally bound clauses that prohibited non-White membership (Hughey).

According to Hughey, African American groups had already removed racially exclusionary language from their constitutions before most White groups. Despite such moves, fraternal integration did not follow, instead, the types of fraternal organization continued to expand.

Gregory (2005) indicates that no longer are fraternal organizations just African American and White, they are now composed of a variety of ethnicities, sexual preferences, and racial backgrounds. Progression of the types of Greek organizational inclusion has been a remarkable gain for colleges and universities. Yet, Greek letter organizational memberships within each type remain divided today, especially along the color line.

Beyond a divided membership, colleges and universities have realized a tremendous benefit from housing fraternities and sororities on campus. According to Mauk (2006), members of Greek letter organizations are retained by an institution at a higher percentage than non-members of Greek letter organizations. Further, in spite of the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases being reported on campuses, members of Greek organizations use safe sex practices at a higher rate than non-members (Mauk). Greek affiliation has been linked to high college satisfaction, high completion rates, as well as a high ability to function within groups (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001) and the benefits extend beyond college. Alums of fraternities and sororities give more time and money to civic causes than the general population (Gregory, 2003).

In contrast, Greek letter organizations have also been linked to inappropriate behavior. Fraternities and sororities have been known for out of control parties, alcohol abuse, and hazing throughout history. Despite the apparent benefit to campus life, they bring a great deal of liability as they too often engage in high risk behaviors as outlined in the next section.



## High Risk Fraternal Behavior

### *Alcoholism*

Numerous studies point to the problematic activities of fraternity and sorority life, especially as related to alcohol. Despite their founding principles in the early 1800's of service to mankind, academic scholarship, student development, and the maintenance of integrity, Greek values began to shift as early as the 1950's (Barry, 2007). Straus and Bacon found that Greek organizations were stereotyped as social clubs for drinking in 1953. Decades later, this has remained a defining characteristic. Following Straus and Bacon, numerous publications point to the issues of alcohol and its impact on Greek life. Wechsler (1996) found that 80 percent of sorority women and 86 percent of fraternity men residing in Greek chapter houses were binge drinkers. Although the numbers for Greeks living away from chapter houses was only slightly lower, this study raises concerns that a culture of alcoholism persists in Greek residences. Still, the problem associated with alcohol and Greek life is widespread. A finding by Barry (2007) indicates that Greeks not only consume alcohol at higher quantities than the general population but they also misperceive the risk associated with abuse. Based on Barry's findings it appears that alcohol becomes a key part of the social aspect of being Greek. Seemingly, this study lends credence to the stereotype that Greek organizations are drinking social clubs and points to a disturbing behavior that binge drinking has become customary within fraternity and sorority life.

The custom of binge drinking starts early in the Greek membership intake process. Kuh and Arnold (1993) uncovered that regardless of being underage, a high level of alcohol is consumed by the fraternity man and active members regulate the consumption of pledges. In fact, fraternity members are less likely to accept someone that does not drink (Barry). Thus, for the potential member, drinking becomes part of the rite of passage, solidifying full status as a

member (Kuh & Arnold, 1993). One can glean from these studies that a high cost is paid for this risky behavior. In fact, collegial institutions have suffered severe consequences from alcohol abuse within the Greek system which includes not only adverse effects to the organization and the individual; but also, property damage and death (Wechsler, 1996). Many of these consequences occur when alcohol is mixed with the intake process as 90 percent of hazing deaths are related to alcohol (Eigen, 1991; Rutledge, 1998).

Hollmann (2002) indicates that:

Since 1990, more deaths have occurred on college and university campuses as a result of hazing, pledging and initiation accidents, and fraternal alcohol-related incidents than all recorded history of such deaths (p. 11).

Although not all of the deaths were Greek related and alcohol related, Hollmann (2002) cautioned that “alcohol abuse and hazing are closely related and must be addressed as addictions” (p. 14).

### *Hazing*

Even separate from alcohol, hazing is an issue college and university officials continue to grapple with, especially amongst fraternal organizations. Campo, Paulos, and Sipple (2005) collected questionnaires from 736 undergraduate students and found that the most commonly reported forms of hazing were drinking games and sleep deprivation. The authors also found that students overall viewed hazing as harmful; yet, 36 percent of the respondents had participated in hazing activities and believed it was fun (Campo et al., 2005). This study points to the significance and recklessness of hazing within the Greek community. Cokley and Wright (1995) explored students’ attitudes toward pledging across racial lines. The authors surveyed 280 students finding no difference in attitudes toward hazing between African Americans and

Whites. However, African Americans were more likely to favor mental and psychological exercises. Neither Whites nor African American students were in favor of physical hazing; yet, both groups indicated that some form of proving worth was needed. The findings were also consistent across gender lines (Cokley & Wright, 1995). This study indicates that students expect some form of hazing and view hazing as a necessity in proving worthiness to join a Greek letter organization.

### *Racial Insensitivity*

Fraternity executives point to issues with alcohol as a major factor in declining numbers while some experts have suggested a need to hire undercover police to investigate rogue fraternal groups that haze (Ruffins, Chenoweth, & Evelyn, 1999). Despite the issues presented by alcohol and hazing, the biggest public relations nightmare for colleges and universities has probably been related to fraternal organizations' insensitivities toward race. There is no shortage of episodes of historically White fraternities and sororities donning blackface. The divisive behavior of these fraternities and sororities have mocked, incensed, intimidated, and harassed people of color with their racially charged acts of hatred. The blackface parties have been entitled "cotton pickers" and "Jim Crow Bizarre" and have included hostile actions such as depictions of lynching, and Confederate soldier and Klan costumes (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Lee, 1955; Association of College Unions International, 2006; Journal of Black Issues in Higher Education 2001; Tolerance.org, 2002). Although these incidents indicate racial intolerance within the traditional Greek system, few studies have captured the non-White experience within Greek life in an effort to gain an understanding of minority acceptance within the White Greek system. The next section will explore studies that have broached the subject.

## Greeks and Diversity

According to Chang and DeAngelo (2002) many White Greek organizations have remained segregated since their inception. Although outlawed today, many had bylaws which prohibited integration. Overall, White Greek organizations have self-segregated; but, Chang and DeAngelo pondered, what would happen to participation rates when campus diversity increased. According to the authors, Greek organizations tend to attract like-minded members. Their study yielded that White student participation in Greek life was higher at campuses with 91 percent White enrollment or higher. Further, institutions in the South had heavier White Greek participation than institutions in most other regions. Chang and DeAngelo's research gives meaningful insight into White participation in Greek programs. Yet, the article does not indicate possible reasoning why Whites participate more at institutions with low diversity numbers, only that race matters. Further, African American students were not polled because their Greek system is separate from that of White organizations. It would be useful for future research to expand on Chang and DeAngelo's findings related to campus demographics to determine if actual membership of minorities within historically White Greek organizations deterred White participation.

Chang and DeAngelo suggested that fraternities recruit the same type of members or members that share the group's common features. Another study indicates that the commonalities may go beyond race to include economics. Levine and Sussmann (1960) set out to determine how students that attend rush (fraternal recruitment) and pledge differ from those that do not attend rush. It was found that income does play a significant role in pledging. Students with higher incomes were more likely to attend rush, while poorer students cited a need for work. In addition to financial standing, the image of fraternity life increased the likelihood

that students that viewed themselves as fraternity material would attend rush. On the other hand, less sociable students and poor students would more than likely exclude themselves from rush. Students from higher income families tended to rush regardless of social skills.

Most profound in the study by Levine and Sussman (1960) is that the fraternity image of gregariousness and party-loving attracted like-minded individuals and those that did not meet those ideals excluded themselves. Those that sought extra-curricular excellence also flocked toward fraternal membership. However, the article did not indicate if social class impacted the fraternities vote or bid during rush. Thus, it cannot be determined if the fraternities excluded poorer students that rushed; only that, these students excluded themselves by not identifying with fraternity image or citing a need to work during their collegiate tenure. This study did not explore fraternity image from a minority perspective. As such, it is not known if minorities are attracted to White groups or exclude themselves from membership based on fraternity image or because of income.

In 1996, Chang studied Greek letter social fraternities and sororities by focusing on race relations and racial identity. Utilizing data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Chang sought to understand how racial dynamics influenced White participation in Greek letter social organizations; what conditions allowed for students of color to be accepted into majority organizations; what type of students of color participate in social fraternities and sororities; and, what the findings suggest about racial identity. Chang inferred that Greek letter organizations are exclusive social clubs for White students. Moreover, the presence of racial conflict on campus increases the likelihood that a White student would join a Greek organization to find shelter from the racial tension or to perpetuate that tension. In contrast, a campus with a healthy appreciation for diversity holds a negative impact on Greek participation rates. Minority

participation within historically White groups occurs when those minority participants hold the same values, beliefs, and attitudes of the Greek organization. This study provides a great lens to view the true impact of race on the fraternal system as well as the necessity to fit the mold of the group dynamic in order to gain membership regardless of color.

However, Chang (1996) does not ignore the shortcomings of this research as he discloses the participant selection process as a limitation. Chang made assumptions, based on participants' self disclosed interaction with other students of color, to decipher which of the sample taken from over 300,000 students were of-color participants in White Greek letter organizations. Chang utilized a "cross-tab" to distinguish if African American Greeks were members of African American organizations or historically White groups as he states, "students that participate in a race specific organization are assumed to socialize less with students of another race" (p. 15). Although historically Black colleges and universities were excluded from the sample, there seems to be no real assurance that the complete sample was composed solely of students of color that were members of historically White Greek organizations based on the premise indicated by Chang. As Chang admits, alternative Greek participation is low. Thus, the assumption that a student's infrequent association with another race indicates participation in a race-specific organization severely limits the study. As such, to truly understand the rarely observed alternative Greek experience, one may best be served by utilizing a qualitative approach capturing the lived experiences of minority cross-Greek participation experience.

In a recent study, Thompson (2000) probed minority participation in historically White Greek letter organizations utilizing mostly qualitative means. Although a survey was also utilized, the study primarily gathered perspectives through interviews and focus groups with minority members of predominantly White fraternal groups. Survey results uncovered that,

unlike their White counterparts, students of color were more likely to receive financial aid, have a parent that did not attend college, and less likely to have a family member that was a member of a social fraternal organization. Further, in exploring membership into historically White organizations or ethnic fraternal groups, minorities make a decision to join without exploring the alternative group. Thus, no consideration is given to an ethnic organization if a student considers joining a historically White group first. Factors that lead to consideration include recruitment by members, diversity of membership, knowing members, peer interest, and a comfort with a particular organization and the membership. Findings also suggest that benefits of membership were perceived to be building friendships and support systems, leadership and growth opportunities; while a barrier to membership included feelings of intimidation with the organization (Thompson, 2000).

Thompson's study is particularly significant since minority members described their experience as positive which may signify that they felt a sense of mattering. The study captured the minority experience; but, given the United States' contentious racial history, it would be beneficial to isolate a study to only capture their experience versus minorities as a whole. Further, the study by Thompson was carried out at a Southwestern Research I Public University. A study in the Southeast region of the United States could provide a glimpse into the racial politics in another region with a history of racial intolerance toward people of color.

Hughey (2007) explored the alternative membership from the perspective of the White members of historically Black Greek letter organizations. "Despite differences, most White members of historically Black Greek letter organizations report substantial accord and unity" (p. 67). White members that participated in Hughey's study did report some resistance to their membership from African American Greeks, but mostly, from Whites who view Whites that

associate with non-Whites as “second class citizens” (p. 66). Overall, White members of historically Black groups felt a sense of belonging and although they reported that their race was an issue, it was not downplayed. Hughey found that reasons Whites joined Black Greek organizations included: Positive portrayal of members versus the traditional fraternal stereotypes, admiration of certain members, sense of unity, to gain a support system, and to extend the fraternal bonds beyond college graduation. Alternatively, reasons that hindered White participation in historically Black Greek organizations included a lack of awareness, fear of hazing, and apprehension toward gaining a true sense of welcome. This study utilized a combination of qualitative methods, literature, and sociological analysis. What is significant about Hughey’s study is the finding that suggest that White members acknowledged the role of race in their membership; however, they felt a great sense of brotherhood and sisterhood.

In a 1994 study by Smith and Forbes, White sorority members believed that African Americans continued the divide between the Greek systems. Sorority members described the White system as open to all, despite a nearly all White membership. Smith and Forbes’ participants believed that African Americans that were interested in joining the White system were steered toward the historically African American Greek system. Smith and Forbes’ study indicate that race is often downplayed or there is a denial that race is a major issue within the fraternal system causing groups to remain homogenous. This denial or blame shift was evident despite some participants’ acknowledgement that their sorority would not vote for a non-White person to become a member (Smith & Forbes, 1994). Although this study provides an understanding of how race plays a significant role, again the perspectives of minority members are missing.



Two studies explored the minority Greek experience from the perspective of Asian American students. Chen (1998) studied Asian American members across all Greek sororities and confirmed Smith and Forbes' findings that race is largely downplayed in the fraternal system. In a study that included 18 Asian American females who attended a predominantly White institution in the Southeastern region of the United States, Park (2008) examined perception of acceptance and marginalization in the Greek life system for which half were members and half were not. Critical Race Theory was utilized to analyze the interviews in an effort to determine: How Asian American women both inside and outside Greek Life view sororities; if race still matter in sororities; and, how Asian American women recognize the role of race or downplay its significance in their perception of sororities. The phenomenological study attempted to understand the lived experiences of Asian Americans that participated and did not participate in Greek letter organizations. The study took place at one institution where students were solicited via email and through "snowball" sampling (asking participants to identify other potential participants). The author found that women who were critical of women of color being assigned less prestigious houses still defended the rush (sorority membership intake) process. Further, participants believed sororities lacked diversity because the institution lacked diversity. Similar to the Smith and Forbes' finding, one participant insisted that ethnic centered organizations are discriminatory, not White sororities. It was also indicated that sororities that were considered in high regard (most prestigious/popular) had fewer minorities. Park's study provides a practical theoretical framework for viewing the issue of race while providing an understanding of how the realities of race are ignored or deemphasized in defense of the sisterhood.

## Conclusion

Each of these studies indicated that race matters within the fraternal system. However, all ignore the perspectives of the African Americans that join historically White Greek letter organizations. Utilizing the groundwork established by all of the studies, this research will explore the African American male experience within historically White Greek letter organizations. Like Park (2008), this study will utilize Critical Race Theory to examine the perception of acceptance and marginalization held by African American male students based on their view of the White Greek System. Much like the purposes of the studies by both Chen and Park, this study seeks to determine if race matters within the White Greek system, by exploring mattering from the perspective of the individual. This study will help bridge the gap in the literature and provide an understanding of how race shapes the historically White fraternity system. The next sections will explore the lens that will frame the study's findings. CRT will be utilized to give voice to marginalized individuals within historically White Greek letter organizations and to uncover obscure hints of racism. A secondary lens will be employed to provide an in-depth understanding of individual experiences. Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering will provide understanding into individual feelings of acceptance. Mattering shall be discussed in the section following a review of CRT.

### Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) seeks to understand social situations involving race and creates a means of changing racial issues (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT provides a means for investigating and transforming the connection between racism, race, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The theory explores similar issues of the conventional civil rights movement, yet, it "places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group and

self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; p. 3).

Theorists employing CRT believe racial oppression is deeply rooted in the fabric of America and is a naturally occurring aspect of society (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006). Such scholars argue that it is impossible to reach institutional neutrality and objectivity because the dominant majority fails to acknowledge the positive benefits of their whiteness, and, recognize truth for them is their own perspective (Delgado, 1989); thus, maintaining privilege and racism in society (Bell, 1993; Calmore, 1995; Harris, 1993, Ladson-Billings, 2000, Pompper, 2005).

CRT exposes institutions’ preservation of whiteness and marginalization of color which creates a power dominance that limits individuals of color the ability to identify their reality or speak out against racism (Pompper, 2005; Taylor, 1998). These theorists discard any notion that “racial disparities are an accidental byproduct of otherwise neutral practices” (Moran, 2005; p. 906). CRT intellectuals believe instead that after centuries of oppression, racism is deeply entrenched in everyday life and continues to subordinate non-Whites (Moran). In reaching this conclusion, these scholars “rely heavily on the victims' perspective” in order to capture their truth through personal narrative, providing voice for the oppressed (Moran, 2005; p. 906).

Originally, CRT was utilized primarily in the legal arena; yet, it emerged into a medium to reveal covert racial meanings across numerous institutions of society (Pompper, 2005). This section will provide a historical sketch and a brief glimpse into CRT’s educational application followed by an introduction of key concepts. The section will culminate with a review of several studies employing counter-storytelling methodology of CRT.

## *Historical Overview*

CRT emerged in the late 1970's and early 1980's as a vehicle to view racial dynamics in law with legal scholars asserting that society and its courts must understand the mistreatment of people of color due to their race (Matsuda, 1995; Williams, 1991). Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman are credited with working with multi-disciplinary scholars to create the theory as they saw that traditional civil rights methods of "filing amicus briefs, conducting protests and marches, and appealing to the moral sensibilities of decent citizens produced smaller and fewer gains than in previous times" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 212). According to Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn (2004), CRT has its roots in the critical legal studies (CLS). However, CRT emerged from the CLS movement because scholars believed that although CLS emphasized critique of the liberal legal tradition it did not account for race and provide a means for transforming racism (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn, 2004). CRT's founders also believed CLS failed to account for the perspective of the oppressed and limited their capacity to effectively evaluate institutionalized racism (Yosso et al.).

As a result, a group of scholars involved in critical and feminist legal studies officially created CRT at a conference in Madison, Wisconsin in 1989 (Scheppelle, 1994). Focusing on the experiences of the oppressed, CRT was fashioned to bring forth excluded perspectives in order to contest the myth of court neutrality, exposing the adversity faced by people of color within the legal system (Scheppelle, 1994). Although CRT's initial use was for the legal arena (DeCuir & Dixon; Solórzano and Yasso, 2002), activists and scholars across various disciplines contributed to the creation of the theory realizing that the civil rights movement had halted; and, they sought new theories to challenge racism in order to prevent a "roll back" of the progress that had been made in race relations (DeCuir & Dixon; Solórzano and Yasso, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic,

2001, p. 4). These theorists challenged that civil rights movement reforms produced racial progress; instead, those reforms serve the interests of White society (Ansley, 1989; Grindy, 2008).

Today, the theory is utilized across many disciplines. In education, for instance, CRT is used as a theoretical and analytical framework for understanding the impact of race and racism with the goal of initiating change both in and out the classroom (DeCuir & Dixon; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002):

“CRT advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin” (p. 25).

Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn (2004) states that “In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced CRT to the field of education. What followed was a horde of multi-disciplinary works that utilized the theory to reshape beliefs of racisms, uncovering how race structures social systems, policies, practices, and communities. Over the past decade, most CRT usage in education has focused on the utilization of the tenets of CRT in qualitative methodology to confront subtle as well as overt racial discord (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, & Lynn, 2004). The next section will introduce these key concepts of CRT, as well as provide an understanding of CRT’s use of the victim’s perspective to address racism through counter-storytelling.

### *Key Concepts of CRT*

CRT describes the relationship between supposedly race-neutral ideals and the structure of White supremacy and racism (Roithmayr, 1999). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) the theory provides a lens for understanding how society is organized and hierarchies are formed

along racial lines. In an educational forum, CRT can be utilized as a frame to discover, evaluate, and bring about change in those hierarchical structures to eliminate the racially divisive subordinate and dominate positions (Solórzano & Yosso). Ladson-Billings (1998) states that CRT provides a means of conveying the experiences and realities of oppressed individuals by utilizing several tenets: Permanence of Racism, Whiteness as Property, Interest Convergence, and Critique of Liberalism (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Bell, 1980).

CRT is based on the premise that “race and racism are central, endemic, permanent, and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how U.S. society functions” (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, & Lynn, 2004, p.4). This principle represents the “Permanence of Racism” tenet of CRT, meaning racism is invisible, yet, pervasive (Bell, 1995). Basically, “because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 213). A permanence of racism creates hierarchies politically, economically, and socially which creates White privilege and oppression of people of color (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

CRT scholars also believe that the United States is built on property rights which gives Whites the ability to include and exclude (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This concept guides the second tenet of “Whiteness as Property”. This tenet suggests that whiteness is a possession with valuable and pleasurable benefits to be consumed or disposed (Harris, 1995). Delgado (1989) insists that Whites see the truth and reality only when it is their perspective. Whites are reluctant to acknowledge how Whiteness has positively shaped their reality (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Helms (1990), Whites become uncomfortable when racism is uncovered and typically respond with denial and racial isolation. Although not with ill intent, this response may simply be the

easiest coping mechanism (Tatum, 1994). Yet, Bergerson (2003) states “if White as race is taken into consideration, it is impossible to ignore the privilege that comes with this race: the privilege to not think about race” (p. 57). Thus, this tenant exposes the advantages afforded through being White and forces White people to recognize race and the privileges and disadvantages that come with being one race or another (Bergerson).

“Interest Convergence” is the third tenet of CRT. The essence of this principle suggests that basic civil rights are granted only when they serve the interest of the dominant race (Bell, 1980). For example, the tenet suggests that the historical *Brown versus the Board of Education* decision was made in the interest of Whites and not for the benefit of African Americans (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). “CRT theorists cite empirical evidence” such as White women benefiting more than African Americans from affirmative action programs to support their contention that civil rights legislation continues to serve the interests of Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 212). CRT scholars argue that in order to get the needs of African Americans met, the place where “the interests of Whites and people of color intersect” or converge must be found (p. 212). For instance, creating desegregation compromises such as magnet and advance placement programs to prevent White parents from removing their children from public school education (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The final principle of CRT, “Critique of Liberalism”, questions such constructs as neutrality and objectivity, rejecting the idea of a colorblind society (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). As stated by Nebeker (1998), a refusal of the majority to see color amounts to a denial of minority perspectives. Glover (2007) indicates that policies and practices rooted in colorblind ideals downplay race and fail to alter the consequence of race in everyday life. “Color-blind policies ironically exacerbate this situation by serving to effectively silence criticism about White

privilege from people of color” (Glover, p. 196). The colorblind ideology leads people to downplay race and resort to statements such as “I do not see color” (Park, 2008, p.109). CRT rejects the notion that we live in a colorblind society and racism is a thing of the past.

Researchers are able to reveal these tenets are through the method of “counter-storytelling”, which cast doubt on deeply embedded societal myths carried by the majority by using the testimony of the minority (Matsuda, 1995; DeCuir & Dixon; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Counter-storytelling provides a voice to the marginalized by countering unchallenged assumptions of a majority culture providing a “rich way of understanding knowledge from communities of color” or the stories of individuals that go untold (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 172; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These various forms of stories or narratives allow a means to evaluate discourse that perpetuates racial stereotypes (DeCuir & Dixon; Ladson-Billings, 1998, Ladson-Billings, 2000). Stories or knowledge provided from the perspective of the dominant party provide a one-sided, order maintaining construction of reality that neglects the realities of the oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rappaport, 2000; Delgado, 2000; Glover, 2003). CRT uses counter-stories to provide readers with “a challenging account of preconceived notions of race” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 11). In summary, counter-stories provide the voices that are missing to challenge accepted beliefs of society. The next section will review several studies that employed counter-storytelling to give voice to the oppressed.

#### *Scholarly Explorations framed by CRT*

In a study of the African American experience within gifted programs, Henfield, Moore, and Wood (2008) interviewed 12 African American students in the Southeastern mid-Western regions of the United States to uncover hidden challenges faced by participants. This study



sought to provide educators with information from the participant's perspective that might provide insight into recruiting and retaining African Americans for gifted programs. The interviews were conducted utilizing America Online (AOL) Instant Messenger in order to increase participation levels by eliminating the need for face to face interviews. Findings indicate that gifted students face peer rejecting and ridicule, discouraging treatment by teachers and few outlets for problem resolutions; yet, students recognized the advantages of gifted education. This study gave voice to minority participants of a gifted program utilizing a non-threatening approach, comfortable to the participant. Although a questionable procedure, this study provided insight into alternative methods of retrieving data when dealing with sensitive subject matter.

Butler, Carter, and Dwyer (2008) utilized CRT to examine 1000 survey responses at Laura Plantation in Louisiana in order to provide analysis of interest in slave narrative as opposed to dominant culture analysis. The researchers found that White tourists overwhelmingly took more interest in dominant culture analysis (Butler, Carter, & Dwyer, 2008). Surprisingly, they also found that foreign born tourist's interest in slave narrative far outpaced that of Whites and even African Americans. This supports the CRT concept that truth for the dominant culture is their perspective. Yet, this research does not utilize the stories of the slaves to share their perspective. CRT provides voice to the oppressed and "researchers that employ this theory make explicit their concern for marginalized groups and show a deeply rooted desire to expose, advocate, and confront injustices concerning them" (Henfield, Moore, Wood, 2008: p. 436). This study only proves "market demand, rather than a political movement, will cause the counter narrative of slavery to upset and challenge dominant narratives associated with the tourist

plantation” (p. 300), but, does not take an advocacy position by delivering the voice of the oppressed to contradict dominant thought.

Utilizing qualitative methodology, McDowell (2004) reviewed the experience of racially and nationality diverse students to gain an understanding of race within marriage and family therapy education. Eight master’s level marriage and family therapy education students elected to participate in the study. McDowell found:

Themes of racial awareness, racism, strength and resistance, and creating kinship resonated with literature on critical multicultural education and were consistent with tenets of CRT, including the acknowledgment of racism and recognizing the impact of multiple intersecting identities; interrogating socially constructed, dominant-culture knowledge; valuing voices from marginalized locations; and commitment to social justice (p. 305).

Selection of participants is most relevant in this study as careful consideration was given to select participants with enough postgraduate experience to share insight, yet, not too far into the program to have lost memories of their early experience.

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) utilized CRT to uncover micro-aggressions and their impact on campus climate at three universities. The authors described micro-aggressions as subtle insults. Micro-aggressions can be unconscious verbal, non-verbal, or visual elements of racism directed toward a person of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2001). Utilizing 10 focus groups which included 34 African American students, the researchers uncovered that racial micro-aggressions are ever-present throughout the academic and social experiences of African Americans. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso employs CRT to provide insight into how seemingly harmless insults can negatively impact the academic and social fabric of an educational system.

## Conclusion

“CRT essentially posits that race, as well as the meanings attached to race, is socially constructed and that researchers cannot ignore it as a powerful aspect of human social life” (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; p. 435). Thus, this research will not ignore issues of race within the social Greek structure and will employ CRT to frame race within a system that has continued to be structured along racial lines since its onset. Because of the obvious racial divisions within Greek life as a whole, and, racial intolerances perpetuated by historically White fraternal organizations, the issue of race cannot be ignored while studying inter-racial membership. As CRT theorists believe of race in society and social situations in general, it should not become a non-issue in Greek life inquiries. Like research done by Park, this study utilizes CRT to explain obscure racial meanings throughout the experience of African American members of historically White fraternities; and, to challenge the notion that race does not matter and is not an issue.

CRT provides a means to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 63). As such, the method of counter-story telling was utilized for communicating the experiences and realities of the marginalized within the Greek system in an effort to provide understanding for the improvement of a racially divided system (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Further, the Critique of Liberalism tenet was incorporated to uncover race neutral/color blind beliefs that “silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) best summarized CRT’s objective, indicating that “stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated: If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be

capable of deconstruction’’ (p. 43). In summary, by initiating awareness, change can be recognized and inter-racial Greek members can gain acceptance and feel that they matter.

### Mattering

Mattering is a feeling a person has that they are significant to others (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Rosenberg and McCullough, (1981) defined mattering as “a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as a ego-extension” (p. 65). In essence, one feels that they matter when someone else cares for them and is attentive to and appreciative of them. According to Gravenkemper (2007), we have a natural desire to belong; and, Amundson (1993) states, “through involvement in mattering experiences, people meet their basic needs for relationships and meaning in life” (p. 147).

Rosenberg and McCullough conceptualized mattering in 1981 describing it as an interpersonal perception of being noticed and important to other individuals. According to Rosenberg & McCullough, (1981) interpersonal mattering consist of five aspects of ones’ feelings that others: (a) view them as important and significant, (b) show interest in them, (c) pay attention to them, (d) depend on them, and (e) are concerned with their future (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Dixon, 2007). Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) were the first to apply the mattering concept to a higher educational setting. In explaining adult college student adjustment, they condensed Rosenberg and McCullough’s concept to four dimensions: Attention, Importance, Dependence, and Ego-extension (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989; Schollsberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1988; Amundson, 1993; Corbière, and Amundson, 2007). This study will utilize these extracted dimensions to frame the study. They are defined as: 1. Attention: “The feeling that someone notices or is interested in you. For example, when you enter a room, people acknowledge your presence and

make you feel welcome” (Amundson, 1993; p. 146). 2. Importance: The sense that people care about what you think, interested in what you are thinking, feeling, and doing. Others ask your ideas and others listen to what you have to say. 3. Dependence: “The feeling that your contribution is valued and needed. For example, you may be a member of a team and feel that everyone is counting on your participation for the development of ideas” (Corbière, M. and Amundson, 2007, p. 56). 4. Ego-Extension: The feeling that others are concerned with your well being (successes and failures) (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schollsberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1988; Amundson, 1993; Corbière, M. and Amundson, 2007).

### *Marginality*

On the opposite end of the mattering spectrum, a person feels marginalized when they feel they do not fit in or are not needed (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Rosenberg and McCullough related feelings of unimportance to profound feelings of isolation, irrelevance, or meaninglessness in adolescents. Rosenberg and McCullough found that individuals that felt they mattered were less likely to commit acts of delinquency. However, marginalization was tied to depression (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981). Marginality produces feelings of insignificance as Elliott, Kao, and Grant (2004) surmise:

If people do not share themselves meaningfully with us, if no one listens to what we have to say, if we are interesting to no one, then we must cope with the realization that we do not matter. The world not only can but does get along without us, and we are truly irrelevant (p. 339).

Cuyjet (1998) suggest that African Americans students are more likely to feel marginalized than other college students. Perception of unimportant leads to a profound sense of isolation (Rosenberg & McCullough). Tinto (1993) linked isolation to a void in peer contact

when African Americans are concern. For African Americans at predominately White institutions (PWI's) of higher learning, social integration comes about as a result of social contacts with peers (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) posits that the values and norms of African Americans attending PWI's differ from their White counterparts making it difficult to successfully integrate into a supportive community. Because of these differences, African Americans may have sought refuge within organizations that aided in their social integration. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) indicate that despite open access to organizational membership as a whole, African American students continued to seek association in multicultural organizations because these organizations fostered mattering. In summary of Tinto's, and Sutton and Kimbrough's conclusions, African Americans are less likely to experience marginality in what Duster (1991) describes as associations that reaffirm their identities in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture.

### *Scholarly Explorations of Mattering*

Although mattering to society and within larger communities was studied from a general sense in the 1940's (Fromm, 1941; Dixon, 2007), Rosenberg and McCullough are credited with first conceptualizing mattering in 1981 (Dixon, 2007). Despite the introduction of the theory over 20 years ago, the concept went mostly unstudied until the late 1990's (Dixon, 2007). Since that time, numerous studies have explored the concept across a range of sub-populations. According to Dixon, her 2007 study was the first to view mattering from the perspectives of older adults. Dixon found that older adults feel they matter most to their children. On the opposite end of the age spectrum, one study examined mattering from the perspective of 133 step-children and their perceptions of mattering to their stepfathers and their non-resident biological fathers. This study suggests that mattering should be considered for both the step-

father's role and the non-resident father's role as it is significant in parental relationships and can lead to mental health issues in adolescents. (Schenck, Braver, Wolchik, Saenz, Cookston, Fabricius, 2009).

Exploring the concept from a mental health perspective, Taylor and Turner (2001) linked mattering to symptoms of depression. Findings "confirm that mattering is significantly and negatively associated with depression" and "revealed that changes in mattering over time are predictive of changes in depression" with variations by gender (Taylor & Turner; p. 322). Elliott, Colangelo, and Gelles (2005) proved that there is a relationship between mattering and suicide ideations, suggesting those that matter are less likely to commit suicide. Lewis and Taylor (2009) explored mattering in religion across racial and ethnic backgrounds findings that religious association and secular integration are independently associated with perceptions of mattering; and, African Americans report higher levels of mattering than Whites due to their higher levels of religious participation.

In viewing correlations in status and roles in mattering, Schieman and Taylor 2001 found that women and men view mattering differently. In a study that included 462 high school students, Rayle (2005) found that females perceived that they matter more (overall and to their families) than do males and mattering served as a predictor of overall female wellness. These two studies point out that women and men view mattering differently which signified a need to differentiate sororities and fraternities in this research. Specifically, Rayle's findings indicated a need to narrow the focus of this study to concentrate on one gender in the exploration.

Amundson (1993) addressed the role of mattering in an employment setting for both the counselor and their clients. Utilizing four elements of mattering (attention, importance, dependence, and ego-extension); Amundson detailed how employment counselors can ensure

that they and the unemployed feel a sense of mattering. In “giving attention” people should feel welcomed in the counseling setting. Amundson posits that acknowledging “importance” means taking the client seriously and listening to them. Empowering the unemployed to help others is the purpose of the “dependence” dimension of mattering according to Amundson. Finally, Amundson defines mattering through “ego-extension” as a “sense of accomplishment that comes by helping clients” (p. 149). Amundson’s study indicates that Schlossberg et al., modifications of the mattering dimensions can be utilized in the counseling setting and may be utilized to explain perspectives of other sub-populations which provide credence to utilizing the concept in cross-Greek membership analysis.

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) studied the adult college transitional experience becoming the first researchers to utilize the concept of mattering to measure student experiences in a higher education setting. The authors reviewed the re-entry of adults into the college environment after a period of life transition. The three phases of the adult learner experience as defined by Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering to outline the adult college experience are “Moving in”, “Moving through”, and “Moving on”. “Moving in” for the adult student means receiving information to assist with re-entry to college. “Moving through” means finding coping services to deal with transitional issues. Finally, the last phase assists the adult learning in “moving on” and preparing for post-collegiate life (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering).

Almost ten years later, Cuyjet (1998) collected more than 1000 surveys from five collegial institutions with five different Carnegie classifications (Research I, II, Doctoral I, II, and Masters I). The surveys were administered in classes with a high African American enrollment yielding a 32% African American participation rate. Utilizing an instrument based on



Schlossberg's five components of mattering, the research assessed students' perceptions of mattering prior to entering college and within the college environment. Results yield that African Americans perceived their environment differently from their White counterparts and were more likely to feel marginalized. African Americans have negative responses toward all levels of campus interactions with the exception of academic advising. Cuyjet suggests that advising may be the key to addressing marginalization, training staff to give a personal touch in subtle ways. Cuyjet did not consider faculty involvement, student interactions, or co-curricular activities which may limit findings. However, it successfully explored mattering on the college level linking perceptions of mattering to such interpersonal things as faculty remembering a student's name.

### Conclusion

According to Dixon (2007), as early as 1941 mattering within larger organizations and corporate entities was measured by Fromm. Work by Fromm (1941) included a general or societal aspect of mattering to a larger group; while, interpersonal mattering relates to perceptions one has that specific individuals view them as significant (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Dixon, 2007). Although Greek organizational mattering can be explored from the large group perspective as in the Fromm study, this research is concerned with how African American male members of White Greek letter organizations perceive their mattering to individuals within those organizations. Thus, the study will review mattering through the lens rooted in the Rosenberg and McCullough concept.

CRT will be utilized as a lens to uncover hidden racial meanings and to give voice to the marginalized. A person feels marginalized when they feel that they do not fit in or are not needed (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) concept of

mattering will provide a comprehensive conception of the daily social experience of African American members of historically White fraternities. The African American male Greek experience within historically White organizations shall be explored across four dimensions of mattering: Attention, Importance, Dependence, and Ego-extension (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Modified to capture the Greek experience, the dimensions for this study are illustrated in this study's original conceptual framework in the next section.

### Mattering – A Proposed Conceptual Framework

This study shall be framed utilizing four reduced elements of the original concept produced by Schlossberg et al., (1989) including: Attention, Importance, Dependence, and Ego-extension (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schollsberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1988; Amundson, 1993; Corbière, M. and Amundson, 2007). In Figure I, mattering within the organization is captured inside of the smaller circle. The first dimension, “Attention”, captures an individual’s feelings that others notice or are interested in them. In Figure I “attention from fraternity members” represents this view. “Thoughts, ideas are respected” represents the “Importance” phase which indicates one’s sense that people care about what they think and listen to them. The third dimension of “Dependence” includes feelings that one’s contributions are valued and needed. This is represented inside the smaller circle of Figure I as “Contributions are valued and needed”. Finally, “Ego-Extension” is an individual’s feeling that others are concerned with their well being. To capture this category, this research reviewed how White “fraternity members showed concern for the well-being” of African American members (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schollsberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1988; Amundson, 1993; Corbière, M. and Amundson, 2007).

The opposite of mattering is captured in Figure I by arrows pointing to feelings of marginalization, all within the organization but outside of the smaller circle of mattering. Although discrimination is not included within the theory, “intolerance” was added to explain another possible source of participant marginalization for which CRT will frame. A dual membership within an organization is captured by Figure I: mattering (small circle) versus marginalization (outer ring). The circle and arrows used to illustrate the concept are not drawn with solid lines as an individual may move between mattering and marginalization at different points of their Greek participation due to such things as membership intake of new fraternal members that may value or devalue them as African Americans at different points in their fraternal membership. CRT frames the entire organizational experience, making known hints of subtle racism in the experiences of African American male members as well as giving voice to the marginalized.

FIGURE 1 - Mattering – A Proposed Conceptual Framework



## Chapter Summary

William and Mary College played host to the first fraternal organization in 1776 (Gregory, 2003). By the early 1900's three types of fraternal groups separated by gender and race rooted themselves across American campuses. Today, according to Gregory (2005), fraternities and sororities are comprised of a variety of ethnicities, sexual preferences, and racial backgrounds. Still, membership is largely divided along racial lines with a small number of minorities seeking alternative Greek memberships.

Scholars have largely ignored the cross-Greek membership experience concentrating instead on issues of alcohol and hazing in Greek life. This study helps to fill the void left by scholars, qualitatively exploring the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation within historically White fraternal organizations. Utilizing Critical Race Theory and the concept of mattering this research explores the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American participation within historically White fraternities. The third chapter of this proposal shall outline the steps that were taken to complete this qualitative inquiry.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Numerous studies have explored the Greek Life experience. Yet, very few have explored the entire African American Greek experience and even fewer have captured the alternative Greek experience of African Americans. Previous studies on alternative Greek participation have found that factors leading to cross involvement of minorities include recruitment and diversity of membership; yet, more diversity has a negative impact on White student participation rates. (Thompson, 2000; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Chang 1996). Although race is clearly an issue within fraternities and sororities, its role is often de-emphasized by Whites and minorities (Smith & Forbes, 1994; Park, 2008).

The purpose of this research is to explore the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American participation in historically White fraternities. It is not known if African Americans that join predominately White fraternities feel they matter or are marginalized. Thus, this study was designed to explore the following research questions:

1. How do African Americans perceive the influence of race upon acceptance within historically White fraternities?
2. What are the experiences of African Americans as they interact within historically White fraternities?
3. Do African Americans feel a sense of mattering within historically White fraternities?
4. Are African Americans incorporated into the community of a White fraternity, experiencing inclusive participation as members?

This chapter will begin with a rationalization for a qualitative study in the phenomenological tradition. I will then outline the strategy for which the data was collected beginning with defining the role of the researcher and sharing the results of a pilot study. The chapter will continue by describing the research site and participants, the data collection and analysis, and methods utilized to control for trustworthiness. Finally, delimitations and limitations to the study will be disclosed. Before conducting this study, the proper Internal Review Board (IRB) requirements were met at the University of New Orleans regarding research involving human subjects as well as each institution where research was conducted.

### Rationale for Qualitative Exploration

The problem of this study is it is not known if African Americans that join historically White fraternities feel they matter or are marginalized. Utilizing a qualitative approach, I gathered the perspectives of individuals that participate in social Greek letter fraternities composed of predominantly White membership in order to gain an understanding of their experiences as African American members of those organizations.

Glesne (1999) indicates that in qualitative inquiries the researcher examines human experiences that are poorly understood. Very few studies capture the African American Greek experience and even fewer explore cross-membership into historically White organizations. Thus, this study fills the gap by providing understanding into the under studied concept of inter-racial Greek membership.

I chose a qualitative approach in order to capture the essence of a human experience utilizing a human tool instead of inanimate means such as surveys, inventories, and computers (Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) posits that when organized into a series of events or stories, verbal communication can provide vivid meaning, proving to be more persuasive to

policymakers than quantitative summarizations. As such, one on one interviewing was the primary method of collecting information; providing understanding of the role of race in historically White social Greek letter fraternities, and, capturing the mattering experience of African Americans. By using the qualitative method of interviewing I captured individual perspectives of a social system to provide understanding of a racially homogeneous culture.

Qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular social-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions (Glesne, 2006, p 4).

As such, it is my hope that the findings can be utilized in shaping policies toward diversity education, especially as related to recruiting, training/orientation, and mentoring within fraternal organizations. According to Glesne (2006), the qualitative researcher seeks to understand how participants construct the world around them in order to make interpretations of the interactions in social settings. Therefore, I captured participants' perceptions, assumptions, and feelings based on their social interactions with fellow fraternal siblings. Participants' everyday experiences were recorded and explained making this study phenomenological in nature.

#### Phenomenological Approach

Because this study seeks to understand the experience of African American males in their daily environment, the study is phenomenological in nature. "A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concern or phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). For this study, I sought to understand the phenomena of the African American experience in historically White social Greek letter fraternities. This research interprets the everyday experience of African Americans to explain their daily lives as

participants of social Greek letter fraternities that have very few members of color. Creswell (2003) indicates:

A qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narrative, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theories, or case studies. The research collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (p.18).

Creswell (2003) explains that phenomenological research captures the essence of human experience as described by the participant. By studying a small group of participants the research seeks to understand their lived experience (Creswell, 2003). This subjective process involves the exploration of themes and participant statements to derive at meaning of the social construct of study (Creswell, 1998).

Inter-racial Greek letter organization participation is rare (Chang, 1996). Thus, an in depth understanding of the experience of this small group can best be obtained by examining the themes presented within the statements of participants (Creswell, 1998). The lived experiences of the participants in this study were the daily lives of African American Greek fraternity members. The phenomenon of study is participation in historically White Greek letter fraternities. In order to truly capture the phenomena, I realized that my assumptions regarding the experience must be addressed. Researchers bias or assumptions can interfere with the interpretation of the participants' experiences and must be dealt with by an acknowledgement or



bracketing any held bias (Creswell, 1998). In the next section of this chapter I shall indicate my role as the researcher was as well as lay out the strategies utilized for bracketing assumptions.

### Role of the Researcher

Researchers must clearly define their roles (Glesne, 1999). I had a dual role in the study. In qualitative studies the researcher becomes the main research instrument (Glesne, 2006). Thus, my first role in study was the research instrument as defined by Glesne, asking questions, observing, and looking for patterns.

Secondly, my role in this research included monitoring of personal subjectivities. For instance, in my responsibility as a student affairs administrator, I work with student members of the Greek community in various capacities. I have advised several historically Black Greek letter organizations. In my capacity as a conduct officer, I have adjudicated cases involving Greek organizations. I am married to a member of a Greek letter organization and I have friends that are members of various groups. These associations have influenced my impressions of Greek letter organizations allowing for the formation of assumptions and could misshape the findings without proper governance. Thus, my role as assumption monitor was just as vital as the role of research instrument in order to maintain research credibility. Researcher assumptions shall be addressed further in the next section.

### Researcher Assumptions

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), subjectivity disclosure is vital in the reader's ability to determine research credibility. I realized after choosing this study that I have various assumptions about Greek life and racial issues in general. In this section I am disclosing my assumptions an effort to ensure research credibility. In 1992 Glesne and Peshkin identified

“subjectivity I’s” to identify subjectivity. This concept is utilized below to indicate my personal biases:

1. Comfort Zone I. I hold a belief that people are comfortable with other people that are like themselves. Thus, they are reluctant to meet and interact with people different from themselves. I believe that people get comfortable in routine and fearful of removing themselves from what they have come to know as normal based on their upbringing. I believe African Americans are more adaptive and better able to adjust to uncomfortable situations because African Americans are usually the minority in schools, neighborhoods, et cetera.

2. All Greeks are Divisive I. I believe the overall Greek experience is divisive on both sides of the racial coin. As a freshman student, I along with three friends attended a session called, “It’s all Greek to me” which was an informational to educate freshmen about the African American Greek groups. We were not allowed to attend the session for one particular group because the members told us that they did not allow “pretty boys” in their frat. Basically, we were stereotyped by our looks and dress and would have been denied membership had we attempted to pursue the organization. My feeling is that regardless of color, Greeks will find a way to separate themselves so that they can discriminate against others based on their differences.

3. Racism is Common I. I assume that White fraternities and sororities discriminate against African Americans. At my current institution of employment, I have witnessed an organization’s “Afro-Party”. I have sat in the audience of a multicultural step show and gazed in amazement as one White group took the stage imitating rappers and making a mockery of the Afro-centric Greek tradition of stepping. Further, I believe White members of Greek organizations view their fraternal groups as the last bastions of White authority, privilege, and

supremacy. They maintain that order by recruiting those that fit the mold and are most importantly, White. When membership is challenged, some will allow integration; but, full siblinghood is not given. This assumption has intrigued me most and drives the desire for this study as I wonder why an African American would join an organization that on the surface appears to oppress diversity of membership.

This subjectivity disclosure was made in an attempt to establish objectivity in the research findings. My goal is to make the unconscious, conscious. Ignoring these feelings would make the research one-dimensional and fail to capture the true essence of the participants' experiences. Throughout the research process, I explored alternatives when my subjectivities arose in order to view my thoughts through a different lens. I also recorded notes in order to “tame” my subjectivity while conducting the research and debriefed with a peer.

Disclosing subjectivity aids in insuring trustworthiness, as the researcher is aware of preconceived notions and recognizing when they appear. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), subjectivity disclosure is vital in the reader's ability to determine research credibility. Researcher bias or assumptions can interfere with the interpretation of the participants' experiences and must be dealt with by acknowledging or bracketing any held bias (Creswell, 1998). Thus, I have attempted to provide a full disclosure of my assumptions as related to this proposed study. I checked my personal biases through a process described by Creswell (1998) as bracketing throughout the study in an effort to monitor my subjectivity. Further measure for insuring research credibility will be discussed later in this chapter. First, I will give a brief understanding of the pilot study that preceded this research.

## Pilot Study

Interviews were conducted with four members of historically White Greek letter organizations in the fall of 2008. The participants consisted of three African American males and one African American female from one liberal arts university located in the Southeastern region of the US. The field test was conducted in order to test questions and results against the research questions, conceptual frame, and related literature. Utilizing only Critical Race Theory as a frame, the pilot research explored the issue of race in relation to African American participation in historically White fraternal organizations.

Emergent themes indicated that the participants experienced full acceptance into their prospective historically White Greek organization. Yet, participants acknowledge that their race was an issue. Perspectives from participants indicated that they experience a range of racial insensitivities. Despite the racial overtones from some of their White counterparts, participants reported acceptance and being a valued part of the siblinghood. Yet, I did not have a lens that conceptualized “belonging”. Thus, I decided to add a dual lens in order to frame individual’s significance within the organization; incorporating the concept of mattering.

The pilot only included one female and her experiences differed from the experiences of the men in terms of racial insensitivities realized and the social integration progress. Further, the incorporation of the mattering concept yielded research by Schieman and Taylor (2001) and Rayle (2005) indicating that mattering differs along gender lines. As a result, I decided to separate fraternities from sororities in this research, narrowing the focus to concentrate on one gender in the exploration.

## Data Collection

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people that are purposive, rather than random, to be studied in depth within their context. Purposeful sampling was utilized for this study to select African American male participants with an in-depth study of their experiences based on the participant selection criteria of membership in White Greek letter social fraternities. Qualitative research also utilizes participants that are purposefully selected to help the researcher better understand the problem and questions being studied (Creswell, 2003). As such, ethnic minorities beyond African American cross-members were not included as participants in the study as the problem, purpose, and questions relate only to African American participation. Further, Schieman and Taylor 2001 found that women and men view mattering differently. As such, this study was narrowed to focus on the African American male inter-racial Greek experience.

### *Site(s) of Study*

Sites of study were chosen primarily as a matter of convenience to the researcher in terms of travel, access to participants for follow-up, and ability to establish collegial cooperation. However, consideration was given to select sites with well-established Greek communities; and, care was given to select institutions with similar profiles. Inter-racial Greek letter organization participation is rare (Chang, 1996). Thus, in order to gain enough participation across a probable meager pool of possible participants, I recruited participants at four universities. The sites of study included four institutions in the Southeast region of the US, all four-year public universities with an average student enrollment of 14,000. The possible risks and discomforts associated with participation in this research project included among other things possible damage to the participants' reputations. Thus, I minimized risk by removing all identifiable

information which may be linked to the participant which included the collegial institution's name, the participants' names, and the names of the Greek organizations. Collegial sites of study were given pseudonyms and described only by such things as region, student body size, Greek population size, and Carnegie Classification. This portion of the study will provide a detailed description of the characteristics of each sites selected.

*Site Profile I: City University (CU).* CU is four-year public research university. Located in an urban metropolis, CU has an enrollment of approximately 12,000 students, 9000 of which are undergraduate degree seeking. Founded in the late 1950's, the campus sits on about 200 acres. Students enjoy an 18:1 student to faculty ratio and a healthy student life outside of the classroom as the institution is home to over 100 student organizations which includes 20 Greek letter organizations. Of the 20 Greek organizations, four are associated with the Panhellenic Council (historically White female sororities), five are Inter-Fraternal Council affiliates (historically White male fraternities), and eight are members of the Pan-Hellenic Council (historically Black Greek letter fraternities and sororities).

*Site Profile II: State.* State is nestled in a suburban community less 50 miles from several major cities. The institution is categorized as a four-year public master's degree granting institution. The universities enrollment continually tops 15,000 with a diverse student body which includes students from nearly 100 states and foreign countries. Since its conception in the early 1900's as a junior college, the institution has advanced to offer over 60 undergraduate degree programs, NCAA Division I athletic programs, and a host of extracurricular pursuits. State is also home to five Panhellenic Greek organizations, seven Inter-Fraternal Council Greek organizations, and seven Pan-Hellenic groups.

*Site Profile III: Deep South University (DSU).* A true gem of the South, DSU was founded in the early 1900's to train teachers in a small charming city. DSU is considered a four-year public research institution with more 15,000 students enrolled. At DSU, students choose from over 90 undergraduate and graduate degree options and enjoy a 20:1 student to faculty ratio. The institution has a healthy array of student activities for the students living in over 30 residence halls which includes 26 Greek letter organizations. Of the 26 organizations, seven are Panhellenic Greek organizations, 10 are Inter-Fraternal Council Greek organizations, and are nine Pan-Hellenic groups.

*Site Profile IV: American South University (ASU).* ASU is a four-year public research university positioned in a metropolis rich with old South heritage. One of the largest institutions in its state, the University enrollment surpasses 16,000 students. Founded before the 1900's to meet the demands of industry, the campus has grown from just over 20 acres in its conception to controlling over 1000 acres today. ASU has over 100 undergraduate and graduate programs costing just over \$2000.00 for a State resident to enroll. The institution houses 21 social Greek letter organizations (five Panhellenic Greek organizations, eight Inter-Fraternal Council Greek organizations, and eight Pan-Hellenic groups). Table I illustrates the institutional profiles.

**Table 1 - Demographical Characteristics of the Sites of Study**

Institution	Type	Enrollment Fall 2009	# Greek Organization
City University	4-yr. pub./Research	12,000	20
State	4-yr. pub./Liberal Arts	15,000	19
Deep South Univ.	4-yr. pub./Research	15,000	26
American South	4-yr. pub./Research	16,000	21

*Information obtained from the website of each University.*

### *Gaining Access*

I solicited the support of the Greek Life Directors as gatekeepers at each university. I mailed a letter indicating the nature of my study and indicated the profile for the participants that

would qualify for participation in the study. Gatekeepers were made aware of the purpose of the research, instructed of his/her role, explained the risk to participants, and made aware of measure to ensure privacy. A copy of the gatekeeper letter is included within this proposal as Appendix A. I only selected students that had been members of the organization as undergraduates for a least one semester. It is my belief that students will need a least one semester as a member to truly develop an understanding of the Greek experience. Further, the graduate and undergraduate experience could differ. Therefore, I only considered those that had an undergraduate Greek affiliation. This is not to say, graduates did not participate; however, graduate participants were selected based on their membership within a particular Greek organization as an undergraduate. Still, currently enrolled undergraduate Greek organizational members were the primary targets for participation in the study.

One gatekeeper expressed concern regarding students' anonymity. She insisted that she would be able to decipher which of her students made what statements based on the demographical information given, regardless of pseudonyms being assigned to each individual, the organization, and the institution. Thus, counter measures were placed to identify statements by using "participant" instead of a pseudonym. For example, using pseudonyms, statements would read, "John disclosed that he was asked if his mother and father lived together. Fred said that although he has a high grade point average his brothers turn down his offers to assist them when they struggle academically". Instead, I included the following statements: "One participant disclosed that he was asked if his mother and father lived together. Another participant said that although he has a high grade point average his brothers turn down his offers to assist them when they struggle academically".



### *The Participants*

The participants for this study were chosen based on their attendance at a four-year institution of higher learning. Ethnic minorities beyond African Americans were not included as participants in this study as the problem, purpose, and questions relate only to African Americans. In addition, only fraternity members were included in the study as the available literature and field test suggest that the experiences may differ between fraternities and sorority members. The four criteria necessary for inclusion as a participant in this study included: a) African American male (Black, non-Hispanic descent), b) member of a Historically White social Greek fraternity, c) participant of a Greek letter organization for one full semester, and d) 18 to 28 years of age.

Only one participant was identified at City University. The established gatekeeper at State identified two individuals. However, a colleague at State was made aware of my study and recommended a recent graduate of State. Because this individual had only been a year removed from campus and joined his organization as an undergraduate, he was included as a participant. Deep South University had two individuals that met the criteria for participation; however, only one expressed interest and agreed to participate. Initially, American South University identified three individuals; however, all were first semester members of Greek letter organizations and did not meet the minimum qualifications for participation. ASU's gatekeeper later recommended a recent graduate that had received his degree the semester prior; and, had joined a group as an undergraduate. That individual was contacted and agreed to participate. Table 2 breaks down the institutional recommendations.

Table 2 – Overview of Participants by Institution

Institution	# of Recommendations	Number selected	Classification
City	1	1	1, 2 Semester Member
State	3	3	1, 3 semester member; 1, 8 semester member; 1, alum*
DSU	2	1	1, 4 semester member
ASU	4	1	1 alum

\*Alumnus was not referred by officials at State.

### *Contacting Participants*

Initial student contact came by way of established gatekeepers. Gatekeepers distributed information to students that met the research criteria to generate interest which resulted in the selection of six individuals to participate in the study. Once gatekeepers identified participants, the contact information of those interested individuals was forwarded to the researcher. Emails were sent to each potential participant informing them about the study and requesting their participation. A copy of that initial email contact with each student is included with this application as Appendix B. No coercion was utilized in soliciting participation. All study participants self-selected upon being made aware of the study, showing interest to established gatekeepers. Once interest was shown, only then were they contacted via email by the researcher.

### Pre-Interview Phase.

The email sent to interested participants included information on the topic being explored, means for maintaining confidentiality, and a request for their participation in the study. A “Participant Profile Form” (Appendix C) was included with the email to collect personal information from each participant. The Participant Profile Form provided the participant the ability to volunteer for the study or decline participation. Potential participants were asked to return the form by US mail or by email, whichever was more convenient.

Once the participation of individual participants was confirmed by the receipt of the Participant Profile Form, phone contact was made. A copy of the initial phone contact script is provided as Appendix D. The purpose of the call was to answer any questions regarding the study and establish a meeting time if the individual decided to continue with participation. Once interview times were confirmed, a letter was sent including the date, time, and meeting place for the interview (Appendix E). In addition, a Consent Form (Appendix F) was included with the confirmation letter for participants to review prior to the interview. In order to reassure all participants of their safety, the consent form disclosed risk, informed what measures would be taken to maintain confidentiality, and described means for participation termination. At each point of contact I provided my contact information (Phone(s), email, US mail address) as well as the address of supervising faculty to maintain effective lines of communication.

### Interview Protocol

Unlike experimental quantitative methods, in qualitative studies the researcher is the main research instrument (Glesne, 2006). For this study I utilized individual interviews to collect data. The interview protocol was established before the process commenced and consisted of open-ended questions to facilitate dialogue. A list of the interview questions is included as Appendix G.

My role in this study was serving as the research instrument as defined by Glesne (2006), asking questions, observing, and looking for patterns. The interview protocol was centered around the concept of mattering as well as key questioning to generate information on race relations within the organizations. Questions for the interview were designed to capture the Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering as described by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989 as: Attention, Dependence, Importance, and Exo-extension. The

matterng questioning was modified for qualitative inquiry based on Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec's (1990) Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Postsecondary Education. The scales produced by Schlossberg et al. include a five point Likert Scale which produces quantitative results. The scales were adapted to be utilized for interviews. For example, questions on the Schlossberg scales include: 1. I get support from my classmates when I need it; 2. I sometimes feel alone and isolated a the university; and, 3. The administrative rules and regulations are clear to me? Customizing these questions to a qualitative inquiry will include open-ended questions such as: 1. Describe instances where you felt supported/not supported by your fraternity; 2. Explain your relationship with individuals within your fraternity; 3. In what ways does the fraternity make rituals, rules, and expectations understood to you?

The questions for the interview were created to minimize the possibility of steering a participant toward a particular response. Interview questions had the dual purpose of influencing participant reflection and providing enough descriptive information for answering the research questions. The next section will describe the interview process in detail.

### Interview Phase

The purpose of research interviews is to collect description of an experience from the perspective of the participant in that participant's "own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 94). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Interviews were arranged at mutually agreed upon locations, convenient to the needs of the participants. Prior to asking the research related questions, I asked questions aimed at building rapport since the topic of study could have made the participants uncomfortable. My intent was to make each participant feel at

ease. During the interview I made sure to not only capture the stories of the participants but also to give attention to such things as non-verbal communication.

*Consent.* Prior to the questioning, written consent was obtained with each student completing a disclosure form they were asked to review prior to the interview. Extra copies were on hand for those that forgot to bring their mailed copy of the form. Each participant was asked if they have questions, received an explanation that the interview would be tape recorded, and read a statement detailing the purpose of the study. Participants were also told that they could forgo participation at any point during the study.

*Closing.* Once I had asked questions, both established questions and follow-up, I closed by asking each participant if they wanted to add anything about their experience or had any questions regarding the study. I read the following closing to each participant:

Thank you for participating in this study. Your contribution will contribute to the literature related to Greek life and mattering. All documents with identifiable information will be kept separate from the research study material in a locked file; and, research material, publications, and presentations will not carry identifiable information which may be linked to you, the collegial institution, or your organization. All the data collected for this research study will be destroyed when its intended educational interest no longer exist; or, no later than three years beyond the study's conclusion. All written documents will be shredded by the researcher, digital recordings will be deleted from computer hard drives, and magnetic erasing devices will be utilized as needed to discard downloaded recordings. You may be contacted via phone or email in the coming weeks to provide clarification to the meaning of your statements. In some cases, a face-to-face meeting may be necessary. Again, thank you for your support.

Once all questions were answered and I was sure the necessary information was collected, I stopped the recording and collected the information for storage.

### Post Interview Phase.

The data collection process continued beyond the one-on-one interviews. I facilitated member-checking, a process of making sure that the themes identified match the participants' meaning (Creswell, 2003). Member-checking assisted in collecting follow-up information, clarifying my understanding, ensuring my themes matched participants' experiences, and spearheading the analysis process (Creswell, 2003). The data analysis procedure shall be explained in detail in the next section.

### Data Analysis

The process of analyzing data is a continuous procedure involving reflection on data, asking analytic questions, and writing notes throughout the study for review (Creswell, 2003). Analytic and reflective thoughts were documented throughout by memoing to facilitate the data analysis process (Glesne, 2006). Notes taken by the researcher during the interviews were reviewed and the taped interviews were dissected in search of themes and patterns in the participant's interviews using the coding process (assigning units of meaning) to generate descriptive categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2003). I searched for thematic patterns throughout the codes in order to find meaning within the transcriptions.

Step I - Field Notes. At the outset and throughout the research process the data analysis continued. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) the research can glean descriptive data and reflective data from field notes. As such, detailed accounts of the interview were recorded in a journal. Throughout, I captured field notes to collect my observations. The field notes described in detail the individuals interviewed and their behavior, the setting, points of interest/events, and

parts of the conversation and my thoughts about each (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I also utilized the notes to capture my assumptions, record problems, note follow-up questions, and detail impressions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Step II – Transcriptions. The transcription of the information involved listening to the recorded conversations and converting what was heard to actual text (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Taped interviews were transcribed accurately (verbatim) in their entirety after each interview.

Step III – Coding. Once the recordings were converted to text, codes were assigned to the text transcriptions. Codes are units of meaning that generate descriptive categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2003). Codes were written within the margins of the transcriptions along with notes taken at the interviews. The codes were derived from the conceptual framework and refined continually based on related literature. The collection of codes were added to data matrices in order to view the individual informational pieces in blocks of organized understanding (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Step IV – Analytic Tool. Miles and Huberman's (1994) matrix approach was utilized to analyze the data. Matrices provides a means of reducing the data, a "process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data" into a data display (p. 10). Displaying reduced data in a systematic way increases the researchers understanding, requiring attention to detail and organization, reflection on the research questions, and a focus on analysis (Miles & Huberman). According to Miles and Huberman matrices partition data in several ways: Descriptive versus explanatory intent, partially ordered versus well-ordered, time-oriented versus not, and categories of variables. For my analysis, I chose a display which clustered data in "rows and columns that bring items together that belong together" (p. 127). Miles and Huberman coined this type of display a Conceptually Ordered Matrix. I also condensed a

portion of the data to a poem transcription. Miles and Huberman writes the following about poems:

It brings the reader very close to a condensed set of data, has a compelling flow, and forbids superficial attention by the analyst. You have to treat the data set, and the person it came from, seriously because a poem is something you engage with at a deep level. It is not just a figurative transposition, but an emotional statement as well (p. 110).

Both reduction tools assisted in data description as well as data explanation. The displays made lucid the themes that were not apparent prior to data reduction.

### *Trustworthiness*

As researcher, I member-checked, included scholarly literature, peer debriefed, disclosed and bracketed assumptions, and maintained the highest standards of confidentiality and ethics to ensure a credible report: In order to ensure that the data presented was interpreted in a reliable fashion I checked with each participant to ensure that I made proper analyses through member checking. The most important credibility check is member checking; thus, I checked with participants during the investigation as well as at the conclusion of the investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). I also turned to theory to support my interpretations, providing linkages between findings and accepted scholarly beliefs. Further, I worked with an individual unrelated to my study to review my research throughout the analysis phase through a process Glesne (2006) calls peer debriefing. Finally, I checked my aforementioned personal biases through bracketing throughout the study in order to monitor my subjectivity.

### Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2003) indicates that when collecting data, researchers must consider their ethical responsibility which includes such things as receiving informed consent, privacy and



identity protection. I obtained the proper Institutional Review Board permissions before conducting the study. Further, each participant was provided a consent form (Appendix C) outlining the purpose of the study with a disclaimer indicating that the participant can withdraw from the study at any time. Because information supplied during the study could be potentially damaging to the participants' reputation special care was given to remove personal information. Most of the participants were concerned about security of their identity and one gatekeeper suggested extra measures of security should be taken to safeguard identity. Thus, I utilized numbers to identify each participant, and, only noted direct quotations included in the findings with the word "participant" so that statements could not be tied to one particular individual. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic I also assigned pseudonyms/aliases to each participant's collegial institution and organization. No personally identifiable information was included in this final report that could identify the individual participant or the universities for which the study took place. A separate data bank with participant personal information was kept and only the researcher and supervising university authorities had access to the information.

#### Delimitations

There are several aspects of this study that could have been controlled by the researcher. This study only includes the African American point of view related to race and does not include perceptions for individuals outside of the Greek community or White Greek members. Because research and a pilot initiative suggest that experiences may differ along gender lines, only male fraternity members were included in this study. Further, this study is qualitative; and, the results of this study cannot be and are not intended to be generalized across the larger population but can provide insight into the lived experiences of African Americans that join historically White Greek letter organizations. However, a quantitative study is possible although the phenomena

being studied will yield a very small population to draw participants. Lastly, the sites for study were selected based on convenience and the ability to establish gatekeepers for the study.

### Limitations

This study is limited due to several factors: The possibility of untruthful responses from population of study, participant selection process, and the use of one perspective for the study.

This study involves an under-explained phenomenon which may include participants' recollection of sensitive or painful experiences. The participants' reluctance to be candid could be a limitation. The students may not have been forthcoming about their organization in fear of criticism from the researcher or that what they say may not actually be maintained confidential.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, gatekeepers were utilized to recruit participants for this research and it is possible that students having positive experiences were favored by those gatekeepers. In such a case, information could be skewed toward positive experiences. Another possible limitation to this study is the exploration of mattering within one Greek population.

This research only examines the African American male point of view and it is not known if mattering experiences are similar or dissimilar to other sub-groups, especially White Greek members.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation in historically White fraternities. It is not known if African Americans that join predominately White fraternities are marginalized or feel they matter. Thus, this study was designed to explore the following research questions:

1. How do African Americans perceive the influence of race upon acceptance within historically White fraternities?
2. What are the experiences of African American males as they interact within historically White fraternities?
3. Do African Americans feel a sense of mattering within historically White fraternities?
4. Are African Americans males incorporated into the community of a White fraternity, experiencing inclusive participation as members?

Emergent themes reveal that African American males that cross-enroll into historically White fraternities have no immediate family members that are Greek. These individuals report that they enter college knowing very little about Greek life and rely on stereotypical portrayals to guide their assumptions. Although they are recruited to be a part of a particular brotherhood, they initially describe marginal experiences as they adjust to fraternal life and their new brothers adjust to their membership. Yet, over time, they indicate the fraternal bonds become strengthened with an outpouring of caring, concern, and true brotherhood; and, they rise to varying levels of leadership within the group.

In fulfilling the research purpose, I saturated this chapter with lengthy quotes to give vivid descriptions of the participants' experiences. I took the liberty to correct minor articulation

misusage for the sake of reader clarity but was mindful to avoid changing participant meaning. Additionally, I added words enclosed in parentheses to replace personally identifiable information and to connect dialogue in order to improve reader apprehension while maintaining the context of the information.

This chapter is sub-divided into four sections providing participant perceptions of their inter-racial Greek experience at four historically White universities. The first section profiles each participant with descriptive information regarding the participant's age, classification, organization, et cetera.

The second section will provide extensive narrative beyond the basic participant demographics, presenting descriptive findings related to the literature. Themes presented in the second section will cover the areas of family background, perception of Greek life prior to joining, and influences which impacted the decision to join.

The third section will present common themes related to the research questions. The section will present topical findings that explore the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation in historically White fraternities.

The fourth section will identify other themes unrelated to the research questions but provide an understanding into the inter-racial Greek experience and a homogenous fraternal culture. For example, the section will include participant perceptions of their interactions with African Americans that are outside of their organizational network.

### Student Profiles

Participant perspectives were obtained through six interviews arranged at four collegial institutions with comparable student body and Greek system profiles. The interviews took place during the 2009 – 2010 academic year. Only male participants were included in this study as the

problem, purpose, and research questions relate only to African American male participation within historically White fraternities. All of the participants held membership in their perspective organizations for a least one semester. The group of participants included four undergraduates and two individuals that had recently graduated from their institutions. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic and the possible risk of damage to participants' reputation, each individual that participated in this study will only be identified as "participant" throughout this analysis. As such, I deem it appropriate to include Table 3 to provide a brief demographical sketch of each participant.

Table 3  
Participant Demographic Overview

Participant	Organization	University	Age	Classification	# of Sem.	# AA/group
I	Gamma	State	19	Soph.	3	2/37
II	Chi Mu	City	19	Soph.	2	1/55
III	Sigma	State	22	Sr.	8	2/43
IV	Delta Pi	State	24	Alum	9	1/59
V	Alpha Nu	DSU	21	Jr.	4	1/72
VI	Beta	ASU	22	Alum	8	1/61

*# of Sem. = Semesters in group; AA/group = African Americans members versus White members*

The average age of each participant is 21 years. Participation within their perspective Greek organizations ranged from 2 semesters to 9 semesters. Summer terms were not included in determining length of the individuals' participation. I wanted to collect background information about each individual's predisposition to extra-curricular pursuits prior to their enrollment in college so I inquired about their high school involvement. This question was also utilized as an icebreaker as I believed it may be easier for the individuals to speak of themselves in a context unrelated to the subject matter. Four out of six participants indicated that they had some type of extra-curricular involvement prior to college. These findings will be detailed in the next portion of this chapter, providing a character sketch of each individual that participated in

the study. My overall observation of each participant was that by and large they were well-spoken, groomed, and dressed.

Participant I. My first interview was with a 19 year old sophomore at State. The day of our interview, I waited very nervously for him because he was late for our appointment. As I waited, I reviewed his Participant Profile Form. Participant I has been a member of Gamma fraternity for three semesters. His fraternity has one other African American member out of a brotherhood of 37 individuals. Participant I is a Human Resource Major. After 15 minutes, he walked into the meeting and said, “Sorry I am late” with a deep commanding voice. Participant I was not what I expected in that he wore a stripped collared pullover shirt, neatly tucked into blue slacks. My assumption of White fraternities got the best of me as I expected to see dingy jeans and a t-shirt with Greek letters.

After a few icebreaking greetings and questions, the interview continued with him talking about his high school leadership experience:

I was kind of lame in high school...I basically did my homework. I didn't go out. My idea of fun was going to the movies and staying out till 12:00 (midnight). But I mean, my parents didn't keep me on a tight leash, I just wasn't a problem child...I just had no interest in misbehaving. So, I really just played it safe.

Participant II. My second interview was with a 19 year old business major and member of Chi Mu fraternity. Participant II was in his sophomore year at City U and was a second semester member of a fraternity of 55 brothers. He is the only African American member. When I arrived to City U, I sent him a text message in order to let him know that I had arrived at the library, our mutually agreed upon meeting location. He replied back that he was wearing a red coat over an athletic team jersey and in route. When he slowly strolled into the lobby, I

walked up to him and shook his hand, noticing that it was trembling. After salutations, he asked if we could go to the third floor for privacy and I said, “Sure, whatever works best for you”.

As we walked he asked, “Are you in a fraternity”? I said “no”, and sensing his uneasiness, I told him about my undergraduate experience and how it has guided my interest in this research in order to ease the tension. As we reached the third floor, found a table that allowed for privacy, and reviewed the consent form, I noticed his continued anxiety and began the interview by discussing the team jersey he wore and the teams’ success this season. Then, I asked him to tell me about his high school experiences and he expressed, “I didn’t really get involved...no sports or anything but I did become more academically involved. I became very interested in maintaining academics rather than having fun”.

Participant III. At 10:15 am on a cool Tuesday morning, I arrived back at State for two back to back interviews, scheduled two hours apart. Participant III asked to meet in the Union and upon arriving asked if we could get something to eat. Although I had refreshments for the participants, I felt obligated to buy brunch in order to make him feel comfortable. We conversed as we ate in a reclusive corner of a restaurant and I noticed he had a fresh hair cut, was well dressed, and spoke articulately.

Participant III is a veteran within Sigma fraternity, holding membership for eight semesters. His fraternity has two African Americans out of a total of 43 members. He is a senior, expecting to graduate with a degree in finance. Very talkative, he explains of his high school experience, “I did clubs and we didn’t have football so I did intramurals. My biggest activity was the violin. A lot of my friends and I played in the orchestra”.

Participant IV. My second interview at State was to take place at 12:30 pm at Participant IV’s job. However, he called my cell phone and asked if we could move the meeting to 2:00 pm

due to unexpected job-related deadlines he had to meet. I apprehensively agreed and we met later that day. He started by apologizing, indicating that he had last minute meeting during our scheduled meeting time.

Based on his tailored suit, Participant IV is very successful although he is only 24 years old. He explained that he worked throughout most of his college career because of his family's dire financial situation; while being an active member of Delta Pi for nine semesters. During that time, he was the only African American in an organization of 59 members. He tells of his high school leadership experiences, "I was in the band and I was also in the gospel choir".

Participant V. My fifth interview was with a member of Alpha Nu fraternity. Participant V was a 21 year old junior, majoring in education at Deep South University. He was a fourth semester member of Alpha Nu fraternity, a large brotherhood of 72 members. He was the only African American member of Alpha Nu. He and I met in a cold meeting room with opaque walls, arranged by the gatekeeper. He was a short, slender guy wearing a plaid shirt with khaki pants. He too, was clean-cut and well-spoken.

We laughed together as he disclosed that he was worried that I was a "White dude". He continued by asking, "Nobody is going to find out what I said, right"? I gave him assurance and disclosed risk as he reviewed and signed the Consent Form. According to Participant V, "I was on the track team (in high school) but that's it...I sucked at football so (I) quit after a day. My coach thought that I could play (football) because I could run fast".

Participant VI. My final interview took place at ASU on a cold Friday during the lunch hour. Participant VI asked that I meet him at a restaurant while he was on his lunch break. Although not an ideal surrounding, I agreed to the location as it worked best for his schedule and personal situation. I arrived before Participant VI and was relieved to see a meager lunch crowd



on a Friday at noon. As the waitress arrived to take my drink order, I asked her to inform the greeter that I was expecting another gentleman and indicated what he would be wearing based on the information I had received from him. Just seconds later, Participant VI arrived, wearing a wrinkled white shirt with a red and blue tie.

As an undergraduate, Participant VI was the only African American in a large fraternity of 61 brothers. The 22 year old, had only graduated in the spring of 2009 and before that held membership into the fraternity for eight semesters. When asked to remember his high school experience, he indicates, “I joined band...the drum choir but I quit. I dropped out my senior year to focus on school and get a scholarship...I wanted to focus on academics”.

### Descriptive Findings

#### *Family Background*

Participants explained that their parents had limited college education. Only one participant had both a mother and a father that held a four-year college degree or higher. One participant affirmed, “My mom went to college. She graduated with a general business degree; and, my dad went to some type of technical school to get a certification but I forgot what it was and he is a certified truck driver. Another participant divulged, “My mom attended college but never graduated...my father never attended college”. “I am from a family where none of them had bachelor degrees”, another participant pointed out.

Individuals participating in this study did not have any members of their immediate family that were members of social Greek fraternal organizations. Only one participant indicated that his father was a part of a band fraternity but it was not a social Greek letter organization. Another participant states, “I had a cousin that talked about them and it was nothing I wanted to be apart of”.

### *Assumptions of Fraternal Experience*

All six participants reported that they knew little about fraternities before entering college and believed primarily what they saw in movies. “When I thought of White fraternities I thought about *Animal House*”, one participant admits. Another participant says, “I just (knew) what I saw on *School Daze*”. A participant summed the by and large perception of fraternities and the overall impression of future involvement:

The only thing that I knew (about fraternities) was the stereotype that everyone has. They are not involved. I mean you see the movies *Old School* and *Animal House*...you hear stories about hazing and that you have to earn it in order to be a part of it. They were groups that set themselves above everyone else on campus and had a level of prestige about them. I thought there was a lot of money thrown into them and if you are accepted into one you will reach a lot of benefits, especially monetary benefits...that’s what I thought. People in high school said I seemed like that type and I said that no way will I join a fraternity. I figured I would find other paths.

In general, the prevailing thought of each participant was that he would never join a fraternity based on the negative portrayal of fraternities. One participant adds, “From T. V. it seemed like you stay drunk as hell”. Another impression is, “They (fraternities) party (and) get drunk. They get in a lot of trouble and their rich parents get them out of it...nothing I wanted to be a part of”. One participant states that it was an experience that he did not see as valuable:

Actually I was opposed (to fraternities). I just viewed it as paying for friends; a follower mentality. My outlook was I don’t really need them...I can be a loner and do just as fine and excel. I felt like the fraternity experience was young, and, I saw it as a bunch of young guys that wanna drink and party.

### *Fraternal Interest*

Half of the participants emphasized that they never considered joining an African American group. All six individuals said they were recruited; and, four of six said they had friendships within their fraternity prior to their joining. A participant indicated that members of his fraternity helped him with registration and finding the best instructors' courses to enroll. Another participant stated that he was a member of other organizations that his fraternity brothers were members as well. One participant describes his recruitment:

I worked with a guy that was in a fraternity and he wanted me to learn more about it because they were in the colony stage...they had just got to campus. They had to go through a certain process before obtaining a charter and I thought no that's not something I wanna do. But, he invited me to a dinner and I still wasn't interested but my image of them started to change. They were down to earth but I was worried about hazing (but) at the same time they were putting their best foot forward trying to sell the fraternity to me. After continuing to talk with the guys I realized that they were a good group, working to do something no other guys were doing; building a fraternity, becoming a founding father of a nationally recognized fraternity here on campus. They were all smart...they all got along well together. So, I accepted the guys and started thinking about what I could get out of it. I got to know this group really well and they reach out to me and didn't put on a front...everything just work with this group.

Another participant indicates he chose the first group that recruited him without much research:

It (selection process) was a first come first serve basis...when I came (to college), I was new, didn't know anything. And, I met this guy...he became my big brother. And, I was

really impressed with him and he kept saying “man you need to join my fraternity”. So, I felt them out for about two weeks and they seemed like a pretty cool group of guys...so he convinced me to sign up for formal recruitment. So, I went through formal recruitment my first month of college. I (did) like them but I met some guys from another fraternity and I wondered which way to go, but, I am a realistic person and I met them first and (was) already friends with them, the relationship is there...so, that’s what I ended up choosing.

Some of the participants indicated that they wanted to join African American groups but the recruiting by friends or people of influence changed their minds. An individual mentioned that initially “White groups were not on my radar”. Three participants reported that they researched African American groups but the intake process discouraged them. Criticizing the African American Greek system, participants stated that they “didn’t agree with what they saw”, insisted African American groups were “unfriendly”; and, disapproved of the secrecy involved in recruiting as a participant states, “you can’t tell them you want to be a member”. After having negative experiences with the African American system, two individuals were recruited by university officials.

Although four out of six individuals insisted that they had no contact with the campus Greek life office or Greek advisors, recruitment by Greek officials made a difference two participants stated. One participant indicates:

I wanted to join an African American organization and I would visit their events but they never were friendly or showed an interest in me. The Greek life director approached me and I told her about my experience (and) she talked with me about a group that was going to be new at the school. I went to their interest meeting and I liked the fact that you had

to be involved in at least one other organization and I was involved in five or six already. About 150 people showed up for the interest meeting but they only chose seven of us to charter the organization. I was really confused because all of my friends were in African American organizations. One of my friends told me to follow my heart and I did.

Another participant's account of his recruitment experience indicates the influence of campus administrators upon his decision process:

I was on the phone with the Dean and she asked if I ever thought about joining a fraternity and she said there is a fraternity that is starting on campus and they have sent out recruiters from their national headquarters. She said, 'now keep an open mind...it's predominately White and they came to my office and asked for recommendation and they want only outstanding students. They were open to all students so I recommended you'. I was the only name she gave them. We had a meeting behind closed doors and they asked questions and I asked them questions...I left with reading material and then I went back the next day. I asked more questions. It was very informal and the guy told me 'we want you and we want you bad'. He said 'I think this organization can only help you based on the goals you have given me...I think you will make the organization look good and the organization will also be a benefit to you'. He asked 'what we need to do to get you'. I was taken aback because they were seeking me out and it wasn't like I had to show how bad I wanted it or prove myself...it was the other way around. I was floored! He said 'I'm not going to waste any time' and he passed an official bid to me and all I had to do was sign. I told him I needed some time and he said we will be waiting. The next day, I said I am ready.

### *Recruitment factors*

Participants emphasized that White fraternities' recruitment of African American members is driven by the need for membership; and, the physical appearance of the African American prospect. A participant discloses, "When I was recruited, my fraternity needed people so they were just about letting anybody in". A disclosure from another participant indicated that, "They needed numbers". Three of the six individuals interviewed described situations that involved new groups that were chartering to be a fraternal colony on a particular campus for the first time. Five out of six referred to "the need for numbers" when talking about their fraternity recruiting them.

However, one participant also noted that despite numbers, there is only room for one African American:

They had this token Black guy mentality – they thought they reached their quota; which I thought was stupid... It's [token Black guy mentality] like an Uncle Tom thing, it's the one Black guy that has all White friends that is a part of a White organization; and to them, they don't have many Black friends so this is that one friend that you know...he is the token and there is no need for more than one.

Based on all participants' accounts, historically White fraternities recruit African Americans based on preexisting associations, social status, and countertype assumption. A participant reports, "I have a 3.9 and I think they are going to pursue you when you have things they want. I mean I was friends with the entire fraternity before I joined so constantly hearing about it and being asked to join is probably the reason I agreed to join". Another individual says, "I had a reputation and was respected...they wouldn't want just any Black person". One

participant indicated that he was recruited because he was far from what the members of the group knew as the norm:

I mean, I am sure that if I had pants below my butt, an oversized jacket, and wore a white t-shirt like a dress then, no, they would not have come after me. That is their stereotype of us and I am guilty of it too. You know, we think of ourselves in certain ways. But, I think I opened their eyes because how I dressed, I had a haircut, and I am of average intelligence. I hate to say it but I was beyond the ordinary of what they knew and I carried myself in a certain way.

A separate participant shares a similar point of view:

I guess they had this stereotype of Black people and I don't fit most of the stereotypes because the number of my Caucasian friends out numbers my Black friends, and, I don't have a problem with that. I came in and I wore my pants above my hips, I didn't use slang, I speak very articulately, I annunciate, and listen to White music...but, they believe all Black people are ghetto and wild and talk loud.

As indicated in the last two passages above, participants perceived that stereotypical assumptions held by Whites of African Americans were countered which allow for the recruitment process to open. They indicated that one must be well dressed, articulate, and have a conservative hairstyle. According to perspectives, these characteristics are viewed as socially acceptable by White fraternity members for potential inter-racial members.

### Topical Findings

In the previous sections of this chapter I provided an overview of demographical information for individuals that agreed to participate in this study. I also provided descriptive findings that detail the African American male inter-racial Greek experience that related to the

current literature. The next segment of the chapter will cover thematic findings related to the research topic.

### *Covert Intolerance*

Covert issues of race or “Micro-aggressions” carried throughout the participants’ reports. Micro-aggressions can be unconscious verbal, non-verbal, or visual elements of racism directed toward a person of color (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2001). Some were described by one participant as “under”- “because only if you have a certain awareness you’ll catch it”. These subtle insults can be hard to uncover and confront, making it challenging for most participants to identify them as racial intolerance.

One example of the micro-aggressions is a fraternity member account of having dinner with the family of one of his brothers and being offered Kool-Aid when others had tea. Another participant expressed dissatisfaction when his fraternal brothers turn to rap radio stations when he rides in their vehicles. Five out of the six participants discussed subtle insults. One participant disclosed that he was asked if his mother and father lived together. Another participant said that although he has a high grade point average his brothers turn down his offers to assist them when they struggle academically; but, they always call him for basketball despite his limited athletic ability. He believed they like beating him at basketball; yet, he alleged White members would go to other White fraternity brothers for tutoring despite his higher grade point.

Each participant that spoke of these micro-aggressions, indicated that, although they are at times insulting, they feel the incidents are simple misunderstandings. In fact, all of the participants made statements such as “I was raised not to see color”, “race is not an issue” and “race is irrelevant” after disclosing such incidents. As I asked probing follow up questions regarding issues of race within their experiences, I could see the angst on the faces of each



participant. Each inquisition would be followed up with long pauses, stuttering, and banter before they began to reflect deeply; most avoiding eye contact. Four of the six participants would continue the dialogue with openings such as “initially”, “we got off to a rocky start”, “used to always” and “before”. They continued by detailing shocking accounts of surface racial aggression quite different from the micro-aggressions.

### *Overt Intolerance*

Overt intolerances were explicit as a participant states that things became “ugly” after a recent election:

One of my frat said ‘they taking over’. They’ve said things like ‘there goes the neighborhood’. Of course, I am not supposed to understand what they mean. At times they may not expect me to pick up on it. So, I try to avoid talking about politics in order to save my opinion of them. Political conversations always turn to race...especially when the topic of socialism came up as it did during the election. I debated that capitalism is why the economy is in such a shame and socialism does not sound all that bad. One of my frat brothers said ‘you must have grown up on welfare’.

One participant recalls racial joking saying, “They may say, don’t think you’re my real brother because you don’t know who your daddy is”. When sharing ideas at a meeting, another participant says he was once told “don’t bring the Black ideas into this”. More extreme, a participant stated, “they used to always say nigger and say ya’ll say it all the time”. Most of the participants described these insults as jokes, as one says:

Initially, they thought that I could be the butt of their jokes. I remember the first time we had a retreat and we all left the union for lunch at this little Chinese hole in the wall up the street. I went back to the buffet and got some watermelon and I could see it on their

faces when I came back. They thought it was so funny and (one guy) said we wondered how long you would fight it. It's stuff like that...I never eat chicken at the fraternity house because they will always turn that to comic relief.

An additional participant response was:

We were doing (community) service at the prestigious event...it was a huge fundraiser and all of our alumni were there. The mayor was there and a lot of the important people (in town). We were serving food and what not while they were auctioning off stuff for charity. I catch a glimpse of my fraternity brother behind me holding up some money and pointing at me...like he was going to buy me.

Input from one participant describes the behavior of one of his brothers:

There is this one guy that makes me feel like the only Black guy. If I shake his hand he'll say don't hit a White man...that's 30 years - as in 30 years in prison for a Black man hitting a White man. Or, he'll say, remember Rodney King!

Only two out of the six participants utilized the word racism when describing their fraternity brothers' racial intolerance. Three out of six said that it was their counterparts' upbringing and lack of exposure to African Americans that caused their behaviors. One participant actually praised his fraternity brothers for maintaining open dialogue saying, "We talked about real things, race, interracial marriages...nothing was off guards". Although no question was raised regarding hazing, one individual attributed his negative racial experiences as mental hazing. Three of the six individuals inquired about their anonymity with one saying, I just don't want them to think I'm holding a grudge. When I asked one participant how these situations made him feel he admitted, "I wanted to crawl under a rock". Another said, I'm over it but at the time, I kept my guard up and this is my first time talking about it".

Another participant includes:

One thing that vexes me is the opinions and views of White fraternities of Black fraternities...especially toward stomping. I was watching a probate with my fraternity brothers and their attitude towards it was smug...they were like what's that and this is stupid... I thought they are a lot more talented than most of you...you won't even try it. I mean the attitudes they have toward Black Greek life I don't like very much. I heard one guy say 'hay hay we're the monkeys'! That kind of hurt because that could have been me out there.

Table 4 provides a glimpse of the racial micro-aggressions versus these more extreme racial aggressions.

Table 4 – Covert versus Overt Racial Intolerance

<b>Covert Intolerance</b> <i>"Subtle insults"</i>	<b>Overt Intolerance</b> <i>"Obvious insults"</i>
...they always turned to the rap stations when I would get in their car...I don't even listen to rap.	...hay hay we're the monkeys!
...they once asked me if my parents lived together.	... don't think you're my real brother because you don't know who your daddy is!
...asked me if I wanted some Kool Aid... I noticed they were drinking tea.	...they always say nigger and say ya'll say it all the time.
I offered to read over a frat brother's paper after another frat brother refused to after he was asked...he kind of smirked and said, don't worry about it I can get somebody else. I felt like he didn't feel like I was smart enough to read his paper. And, they never called me for study hall... I did well in school but they always call me for basketball. I wondered about those things but I look back and I don't think it has anything to do with race because I'm a horrible basketball player.	...they were auctioning off stuff for charity. I catch a glimpse of my fraternity brother behind me holding up some money and pointing at me...like he was going to buy me
...there goes the neighborhood	...when I walked in, I heard somebody say the room just got darker!

### *Perception of Intolerances*

I wanted to know how the participants coped with racial intolerance so I asked how they felt when the incidents occurred. One participant said he managed to live through it:

I have not been treated differently...color has never been an issue for me because of my upbringing. People may look at me as the organizational president and say negative things but I don't let that influence me. The guys and alumni have all been supportive of me. But, sometimes, people come out and say things about Black people, but, they'll say oh, not you...you are not like them. It has not had a negative effect on me...I've lived through it.

Another participant indicated that the insults are simple jokes as he states, "I'm sure that I can joke with them". Another account details a regional outlook with a "that is just the way it is" tone:

I come to realize that in the South there is still a lot of racism...guys may come from other chapters to help initiate and say, wait, 'I didn't know ya'll had one of them'. I went to a national conference before and you can tell the different chapters by region. In the West, you see Asians and up North you see African American; but in the South you never see African Americans. I know people were not happy with me joining but I don't lose sleep over it...that's their problem.

A participant indicates that he feels lonely and a great deal of discomfort when singled out because of his race:

I don't know...at moments when I think I am the only one it's lonely or like when a joke is cast...maybe not with malicious intent but you know one that would not have been made if the Black guy was not in the room...those moments like that create discomfort

because...color is relevant...to make someone feel...I don't know, it's just times like that when I feel discomfort...when I am singled out, even when not in a bad way, I would just like to be looked at as one of them and just you know, have it to never come up...have it to never even be joked about.

This participant continued by disclosing the inner battles he feels, whether to stay silent, leave the room, or speak up. He believes that he is not being true to himself and wonders why he battles with staying silent when his brothers do not:

I feel like I have made concessions. I have had to hold my tongue...like the disrespect at the show or like other things that I deemed inappropriate, I have held back but they say whatever comes off the top of their head. I feel it may not be appropriate to address things that may need addressing. I just feel like they should hold off saying certain things when I am in the room...or, maybe they are, maybe they are holding back and certain things just come out or they just feel like saying it.

One participant coped by giving his brothers the silent treatment, stating, "I stopped talking to a few of them and they started saying you're moody. But, I learned that if you don't talk to White people they'll wanna know what's wrong and they eventually come around".

Another chose not to respond at all. He felt his brothers were trying to gauge his reaction and says he didn't respond because he did not "wanna be the angry Black man". A participant said he laughed off the insults and had doubt about his participation.

### *Fraternal Bonds*

Early Experiences. When describing experiences that made them feel "alone", "uncomfortable" "singled out", and "doubt" four out of six participants opened their statements with words that signaled racial insensitivities could possibly be limited to early experiences such

as “initially”, “we got off to a rocky start”, “used to always” and “before”. In following up with the participants, one participant continued to insist that he only had one bad experience. Another individual said the incidents have continued without ceasing; however, it must be noted that this individual was only in his second semester of participation in his group. Four of the six participants affirmed that their experiences with racial insensitivities within the group was confined to their early participation and improved as their fraternal brother got to know them better and as new members were initiated.

Change. I expected to find racial intolerance based on previous research such as that by Chang (1996) which found that Greek letter organizations are exclusive social clubs for White students and racial issues increased the likelihood that a White student would join a Greek organization to find shelter from the racial tension or to perpetuate that tension. Further, field test revealed racial tension within the inter-racial Greek experience. Five out of six participants perceived their interaction within the group as the key to change, promoting acceptance. Three individuals claimed responsibility for changing the perceptions of their brothers and paving the way for future African American members:

They were not ready for me; I broke a lot of stereotypes...I guess I broke the mold. They are from areas that are not color friendly and some say you are my only Black friend...you don't act like the rest of them...Depending on the mood I may ask how am I suppose to act? I mean the guy that recruited me is from a Catholic conservative family...dad's a doctor and not known for associating with too many Blacks. I guess there are not many Black people in their social circle that is of the same social standing that they are. Sometimes I would get offended and other times I would be glad that I was

changing their impressions...their interpretation of a whole social group they perceived to be something that they are not.

Another individual reported, “We accepted another African American after me and an Asian...part of that was because of me...they saw I was president”. One participant believes he is a forerunner, making way for a flood of individuals of color to participate in his organization once he graduated:

I was (the only African American) at that time. Now, it’s the most diverse fraternity on campus and I believe I had something to do with that. They experienced something with Black people, meaning me, that they didn’t experience before. They became familiar with Black people and many of them didn’t have Black friends before. I mean, we are talking about (the South) here come on. So, some of them had no or few experiences with other cultures...I made them ready to accept other cultures because I was a founding father. I am the only Black founding father and I am less than one percent the national organization that can say that they hold that title.

By all accounts, the participants eventually were incorporated into the community. To assess these feelings of significance, the second half of the interview included 12 questions to capture the participants’ feelings that they mattered within their perspective organization. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) defined mattering as “feelings that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as a extension” (p. 65). Questions for this portion of the interview were designed to capture four elements for mattering: Attention, Dependence, Importance, and Exo-extension (Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989). The mattering questioning was modified for qualitative inquiry based on Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec’s (1990) Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Postsecondary Education. The next four

sections will detail thematic findings related to mattering. The passages utilized to describe participants' experiences are listed in the next portion of this report under specific elements of mattering; yet, they overlapped between multiple dimensions of the framework. Table 5 presents the statements made that meet the four categories of mattering.

Attention. According to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) "attention" is an individual's feeling that others notice or are interested in them. Throughout the experiences, the participants described relationships that moved beyond organizational business. Each participant not only attended meetings and participated in community service activities; they also participated in random social activities. For the most part, these activities comprised the majority of all six participants' spare time. One participant states, "there are nights when there is nothing to do and we hang out as the fellas...as brothers...away from Greek events". Another participant describes the group as family:

These are the guys I would call on if I ever got in a bad situation or if something good happened...I would call my dad but after that I would call my fraternity brothers no matter what. There have been times when they called on me as well. One time one of them had driven his car off the road at midnight...he was stuck and he called me and at the same time there have been times when I needed help and I called them and they came to my rescue so, I have really good relationships.

He continues, speaking of one of his fraternity brothers that he has become close with and decided to share an apartment with:

We got to know each other really well...I had never lived with fraternity guys and we realized that we had a lot in common. We enjoy sports; never go home...we do a lot of the same things. I have always been supportive him and him with me...we have



chemistry; a special relationship. I think that we will be as close ten to twenty years from now.

A participant says that there was not much that he did not do with his fraternity brothers: We did crazy things together...we went to homecoming events, parades, canoeing and tubing...I would be the only Black guy doing water sports which was funny and the only one with a life vest too. We would go to church together...we would drink a lot too.

After a rocky start, one participant states that the relationship flourished and much attention was given to get to know him as an individual:

People came up to talk to me and we started to get to know each other. Some went out of their way to talk to me and as time went on we started hanging out and the relationship exploded...I'm closer to some of these guys than I am with my family. Some of them, the relationship is intense and closer than a brother.

Another participant also details of a relationship that is closer than true siblinghood in a literal sense:

We are close. There are ups and downs but my little brother is here (at the college), my real brother and I have ups and downs with him. I'll tell you this, I am with them more than I am with my real brother. We do everything together...eat, date, we party, and all of that. I can really say that these guys care about me.

Dependence. When one feels that his/her contributions are valued and needed, that individual feels a sense of "Dependence" from others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Five out of six participants described instances in which their fraternity brothers listening to their suggestions and seeking them out for input. The other participant said that ideas are voted upon on a level playing field and no idea is given more weight than another. Yet, he could not

describe an idea he suggested that was incorporated but says, “I have not been in the group long so I am feeling things out”. Most of the participants describe how they make contributions to their organizations that were appreciated and desired, one participant states:

Right now, I am the pledge educator. I teach history and oversee the pledge process. I was president of the colony before the chartering. I oversaw everything and delegated as well as interacting with alumni and administration. I was also treasurer (at) one period of time...that's where the leadership skills kicked in because I had to be aware that I represented the organization at all times. They selected me to be president because they said I had the ability to carry the group in order to get the charter...they believed in me. There were three other guys they could have given it to but they wanted to give it the right person...it was really about trust.

Another participant says his leadership ability and opinions are respected:

I held numerous positions...they wanted me to be president or vice president but I was in too many organizations. They listened to me as much as listened to them. They always called me for advice.

Because of a busy schedule, one participant could not accept a high level position within his fraternity when nominated:

I was chairman of alumni relations...I was offered Vice President but I was too busy. After that, I don't remember all of the committee names, but I chaired a few. It was too much time to be in the executive council.

Throughout the inter-racial Greek experience the majority of the participants (five of six) expressed the ability to obtain positions of influence based on the respect they earned within the

group. The group depended on them for their leadership and listened to them as they gained positions of importance.

Importance. According to Schlossberg et al. (1989) “Importance” indicates one’s sense that people cares about what they think and listen to them. Participants believed that the leadership they obtained gave way to respect within the group. Participants also described how their influence on new members and implementation of ideas left a legacy for future fraternal brothers. One participant describes how his roster number (based on his intake date) gives him rank:

The younger guys take your spot and you become a regular member and watch them run the fraternity...and, when my pledge class came in it was a big pledge class and we were thrown into leadership roles automatically. Now, I say its guys here to take my spot so I kind of stepped down and became a regular member. So, I was a leader and still am because the young kids need guidance...they get power hungry but they listen to the older guys because we have been there and done that; and, are older. And, I have one of the highest roster numbers in my fraternity...when you come in you are given a number and it means I am older and more experienced.

After describing being too busy to take on an executive role, a participant insisted:

I didn’t have to be in a leadership position for them to come to me for advice...they listen to what I had to say and they took it to account. To this day, if I give a suggestion, they would take it and run with it. They knew when I spoke, I wasn’t wasting words...they knew I had something to say. After I graduated, the new guys said to me you are a legend...one of the guys called me and said that they tell their new members that they should be like (me).

Another participant describes an instance when his brothers adopted his idea, saying he demanded that his brothers look for quality over quantity when recruiting:

Recruitment is the lifeblood of the fraternity and we don't wanna be the stereotype. So, at first our recruitment was very open but we didn't want people that didn't fit in. We don't wanna cut people that can be great because it is our job to bring it out in them but people thought we would take anybody to get numbers. We had to address the issue...we didn't want to accept anybody but others thought we should in order to grow. The issue could have ripped us in half. I said, we need consistency but we don't wanna be known as a group that will take anybody...we need to ask ourselves when recruiting, do I want to be this person's big brother. If yes, invite him into the fraternity. That changed the way we recruited – looking for quality over quantity. We realize that our fraternity is not for everyone and we accepted that fact...and even if somebody shows a lot of interest, we still look for his quality.

Ego-Extension. An individual experiences an “Ego-Extension when that individual feels that others are concern for their well being (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). This portion of the chapter will describe individuals' feelings that their fraternal brothers care for them. Some participants' accounts actually involved White fraternity brothers standing up for them in situations involving race while others detailed a fraternal presence during times of need.

A participant recalls an incident wherein his brothers recognized that he did not go home during holidays and “welcomed me into their home at thanksgiving and Christmas”. Another says, “these are the guys that call me on my birthday...even the ones that have graduated”. Another included:

Every time I had something going on (they were there)...like I was in a few plays and they always came. I performed the Star Spangled Banner at a baseball game and they all came.

Another individual says the group has been very concerned with exposing him to new experiences:

Some people don't understand the closeness. I would spend more time with them than my family. These guys were there whenever I needed anything...anything I needed, I would have it. I could go on but it's a real brotherhood. I can trust these guys. They asked me if I had ever been skiing and you know I have never been skiing before but within two weeks we were on the road. We went to New York...but, most of the times just hang out. We talked about future plans and I don't think that I would have this experience if I joined another fraternity.

That same participant tells of a time when his brothers stood up for him:

We were having a party and we were outside talking. A drunk girl had come...she was rich. She was talking and pointed at me and said 'nigger!' I went into the house and one of my friends went off on her...he said 'what is wrong with you? Get out!' They put her out. He came to house and asked 'are you okay?' I told him that I just came in here to think...I'm okay, but, before the night was over every single one of them came to me and that proved to me that they were my brothers. If you know anything about fraternities, they don't just kick girls out.

A second participant said that a big brother got into an altercation with another brother for saying nigger. Going out presented a problem for one participant but he was relieved his brothers recognized prejudice, stating:

Some of my friends wanted to go to this bar and I don't know why but one guy said maybe we should go somewhere else...and, I guess I didn't get it. They were whispering and I wondered what they were whispering about...so one of them just came out and said this is not somewhere you can go; because I mean, there have been situations where they have not been too kind to Black people.

Another participant details several situations where his brothers have showed caring and concern:

One guy recommended me for my current job to his boss. I'm dating a White girl, I mean that is no secret, and my big brother hooked us up. When my grandmother died, I got a card from the fraternity and after the funeral they went out of their way to check on me. My alumni advisor called my parents to say he was sorry...I mean they are just like that. I could go on forever about the things they do for me...they actually are there for me more than I am there for them.

**Table 5 - Elements of Mattering**

Attention	Importance	Dependence	Ego-extension
-We hang out...	-I am the pledge educator...	-They listen to what I had to say...	-They welcomed me into their home...
-When I needed help and I called them...	- They always called me for advice...	- I said, we need consistency; that changed the way we recruited...	-I performed... they all came...
-We would go to church together...	- I was offered Vice President...		- I can trust these guys...
- These guys care			

This segment identified topical findings. The next section of this chapter will describe participants' experiences that were not part of the research questions.

## Other Emergent Themes

### *Perception of Access*

All six participants believe the White fraternal system was open to minority membership, at least on their particular campus. One participant said that for a while his group felt that he was the only African American they needed but their views have changed. Another participant insisted that because the system is numbers driven, anybody can join: “It’s really a matter of signing your name on the line...they want just recruit anybody but anybody that wants to join can join, regardless of color”. Three out of six participants said that African American groups required more academic standing to join but make it more difficult to join because they rarely recruit prospective members.

### *Group Rankings*

All participants described their organizations as amongst the elite historically White fraternities on their campus. When describing other elite organizations, four out of six participants indicated that those organizations had at least one African American member are among the elite groups. Elite groups were defined by the participants in terms of popularity according to sorority perception, academic standing, campus activities and community service, and university standing (related to discipline and other organizational/committee participation beyond Greek life). In contrast fraternities that were associated with partying, poor grades, hazing, alcoholism, low university standing, and womanizing had no African American members according to four participants. However, participants described the groups with no African American members as large in terms of membership which can be utilized as a measure of prestige.

### *BGLO's Traditions Respected*

I wanted to know why the participants did not join a historically Black Greek letter organization (BGLO's) and each participant said that it came down to recruitment. Although three participants considered joining a BGLO, recruitment by White fraternity members and university officials made the difference. However, each indicated a deep respect for BGLO's. Many of the participants stated that they wish the White groups had more of the characteristics of the historically Black Greek letter organizations (BGLO's). Despite saying that they spend most of their free time with their fraternity brothers, four out of six participants stated that the members of Black Greek groups seem closer and can be seen together often, wearing their fraternities letters. A participant stated that BGLO's are "cool and alumni oriented...strong alumni base. They are very devoted to their organization". One other participant made a reference to BGLO's association with their college group beyond graduation in some type of alumni group. Participants are also impressed with the community service initiatives of BGLO's. Four out of six participants believe BGLO's conduct more community service than White groups with one participant stating that his organization is "strictly social". BGLO's traditional Afro-centric rhythmic dance called stepping also intrigued the participants. Five out of six participants indicated they had no regrets in their decision to join their fraternities, but, three participants said they wish they could step. Despite the respect for BGLO's traditions, participants report that the respect is not reciprocated by BGLO members and many African Americans. The next section will detail findings when participants were asked about the reaction of others to their inter-racial membership.



### *Discord with African Americans*

All six participants indicated that some African Americans approached them with curious inquisitions about their membership. However, all six participants report that other African Americans react to their inter-racial membership into a historically White Greek letter organization with resistance, insults, and excommunication. All six participants responded with a great deal of dejection, fury, and disdain as they describe their experiences. One participant angrily included:

You know who I had the most problem with? Black people! This is my own belief, Black people, we are very closed minded with a lot of things and don't think things through. We are so used to doing things the way they have always been done. And, I understand why they regard their fraternities as great because of the way it ways but these groups didn't come to me. Who sought out (whom) and who was arrogant here? They would ask offensive questions but after a while I just didn't give a damn! Because I was so respected on campus and well known it mattered; they didn't understand and they were closed minded. They'd ask why would you join a fraternity that wouldn't take Black members...I would say why are attending a White school that once would not allow Blacks to enter. I didn't bite my tongue and I challenged them to consider the full context of history and lay down ignorance.

A participant indicates that he believes, "Black's want you to choose to be Black or be White" while another says:

I've been accused of being an Uncle Tom before (by African Americans)...I guess I do hang around a lot of White people but I have Black friends too...and, the ones that I have we are like click tight...and, would I put some friends above others...no!

One participant says a particular fraternity was jealous and decided not to speak to him once he joined a White fraternity:

I ran across them (African American Fraternity members) a few times and they (were) mugging me hard...they won't look at me and they even poisoned the girls so now they turn their nose up at me and I cannot get a dance in the club. They feel like they have to be loyal to the frat...but, they are not happy.

I could see the hurt on the face of another participant as his eyes glossed, near tears in describing how his African American friends reacted to his membership:

You have some people (African Americans) that would ask crazy questions and say I can't believe you would join a White fraternity. I get that today...people say you don't act like you are in fraternity and when I tell them I am in a White fraternity they say oh, that explains it. It's not all the time (but) one time a person asked me why I joined a White group and my friend said 'he's a little different'. That kind of hurt my feelings.

He continued to describe numerous accounts of other African Americans treating him unfairly based on his inter-racial membership:

The Black groups hated me after I joined a White group. I attended a retreat each year and one guy asked me 'how many Black guys go to that retreat'...before I could answer, he said 'you'. Other people would say, 'there he goes, trying to be White'. They had a Greek dance and co-worker asked me to come because Greeks would get a discount.

When I got to the door they gave me a hard time because they didn't see me as Greek.

Overall, the African American participants felt that their choice, damaged their relationship with most other African Americans and they were no longer viewed as fully Black, instead African Americans viewed them as wanting to be White. Observation of body language

during interviews and accounts of the experiences indicate that beyond any other negative inter-racial Greek experience, the reaction of other African Americans toward the participants' seemed to hurt deepest.

### Chapter Summary

This study explored race and mattering in the African American inter-racial fraternity experience. In fulfilling the purpose, I interviewed six participants from four collegial institutions with comparable student body and Greek system profiles. The participant pool included both college graduates and undergraduate members, all participating in their perspective organization for two or more semesters. On average, the participants were 21 years of age. Most of the participants were involved in extra-curricular activities as high school students, and, were well spoken, groomed, and dressed. Participants had no members of their immediate family that had joined Greek letter organizations; and, most had one parent that did not attend a four year collegial institution. Participants knew very little about fraternities before entering college and underlined that their impressions of fraternity life was guided by images as stereotyped in popular culture. All participants described being recruited and acknowledged that the recruitment was driven by preexisting relationships, while also suggesting an individual's social standing (grades, involvement, etc...), image, and a need for membership factored into the recruitment process.

Despite being sought out to participate in their perspective groups, issues of race carried throughout five out six participants' reports. Some of the reported racial situations were subtle acts of racial intolerance, written off as simple misunderstandings. However, participants described the isolation resulting from more overt acts. Nonetheless, the participants explain that acts of intolerance are confined to their early experiences and go on to describe inclusive

interaction with their White brothers. They indicate that their opinions are accepted and sought out, and, they say they even rise to levels of leadership within the group. The participants view the historically White system as open overall while holding a deep respect for historically Black Greek letter organizations. Conversely, most participants describe discord with other African Americans that disapprove of their inter-racial memberships.

Below, I present a poem entitled “Greek Contradictions” which summarizes the overall experiences of the participants utilizing a portion of the passages presenting during interviews.

*Greek Contradictions*

I thought about *Animal House*...  
I was opposed...  
I just (knew) what I saw on *School Daze*...  
I figured I would find other paths...  
I mean you see the movies *Old School*...  
It was nothing I wanted to be apart of...

They were seeking me out...  
My fraternity needed people...  
They wouldn't want just any Black person...  
They were putting their best foot forward trying to sell the fraternity to me...  
They were just about letting anybody in...  
I opened their eyes because how I dressed...  
He convinced me to sign up for formal recruitment...  
They needed numbers...  
They are going to pursue you when you have things they want...

They used to always say nigger...  
Race is irrelevant...  
Hay hay we're the monkeys...  
It has not had a negative effect on me...  
Don't bring the Black ideas into this...  
I'm sure that I can joke with them...  
You must have grown up on welfare...  
I don't wanna be the angry Black man...  
Race is not an issue...  
They taking over...  
I was raised not to see color...  
I didn't know ya'll had one of them...  
I don't lose sleep over it...

*Greek Contradictions Continued:*

The room just got darker...  
I've lived through it...

They are from areas that are not color friendly...  
I broke a lot of stereotypes...  
They saw I was president...  
They became familiar with Black people...  
I made them ready to accept other cultures...

The relationship exploded...  
We hang out...  
These are the guys I would call on if I ever got in a bad situation...  
(These are the guys I would call on) if something good happened...  
We went to homecoming events, parades, canoeing and tubing...  
I'm closer to some of these guys than I am with my family...

I am the pledge educator...  
These are the guys that call me on my birthday  
I was president...  
If I give a suggestion, they would take it and run with it...  
I would spend more time with them than my family  
They wanted me to be president or vice president...  
They always called me for advice...  
They welcomed me into their home...

You know who I had the most problems with? Black people!  
The Black groups hated me after I joined a White group  
Black's want you to choose to be Black or be White  
I've been accused of being an Uncle Tom before

This chapter was descriptive in nature to provide an understanding of the inter-racial Greek experiences of African American fraternity members. The poem above provides a segment of the findings that provide a foundation for the discussion which will commence in the next chapter. In the next chapter I shall discuss findings related to knowledge and draw conclusions based on the research questions. I will also provide implications related to policy and practice and suggest topics for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### Study Overview

Numerous studies have explored the Greek Life experience at colleges and universities across America. Yet, very few have explored the entire African American Greek experience. As indicated by McClure (2006), the existing literature rarely distinguishes between Greek organizations at predominately White institutions with few minority members and Black Greek letter organizations. Yet, what is evident through review of the history and available literature is that the White Greek experience and the Black Greek experience are for the most part, different.

Although minority participation at predominantly White colleges and universities has grown significantly, the Greek life system has remained divided along racial lines (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Boschini & Thompson, 1998; and Reisberg, 2000a;). This research explores the Greek experience when the boundaries that hinder diversity are breached by African American males joining historically White fraternities. This study is particularly significant as there is little literature which details the minority experience within historically White Greek letter organizations, identifying the role of race surrounding membership. Further, no study has framed the minority experience within social Greek letter organizations utilizing the concept of mattering.

This research provides understanding into the lived-experiences of African American members of historically White social fraternities making the study phenomenological in nature. Creswell (2003) explains that phenomenological research captures the essence of human experience as described by the participant. Glesne (1999) indicates that in qualitative inquiries the researcher examines human experiences that are poorly understood. Very few studies

capture the African American Greek experience and even fewer explore inter-racial membership within historically White organizations. This study helps to fill the gap by providing understanding into the under studied concept of inter-racial Greek membership.

The purpose of this research is to explore the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation in historically White fraternal organizations. It is not known if African Americans that join historically White Greek organizations feel they matter or are marginalized. Thus, this study captures the African American male's inter-racial Greek experience answering how do they perceive the influence of race upon acceptance; what are their interaction experiences; do they feel a sense of mattering; and, are they incorporated into the community of a White fraternity, experiencing inclusive participation as members?

In fulfilling the research purpose, six participants from four Universities were interviewed in an effort to capture individual perspectives of mattering within a social system while providing understanding of the role of race in a homogeneous culture. Emergent themes reveal that African American males that cross-enroll into historically White fraternities have no immediate family members that are Greek. Therefore, these individuals enter college knowing very little about Greek life and rely on stereotypical portrayals to guide their assumptions. Although these individuals are recruited to be a part of a particular brotherhood, they initially experience marginalization as they adjust to fraternal life, and, their new brothers adjust to their membership. Yet, over time, continued interaction causes the fraternal bonds to be strengthened with an outpouring of caring, concern, and true brotherhood; and, inter-racial members rise to various levels of leadership within the group. Table 6 presents a summary of the findings.

Table 6 – Summary of Findings

No Predisposition	Recruitment	Marginality	Mattering	Discord
-No Greeks in Family	-Drives participation	-Covert racism exist	-Full incorporation realized	-Some groups are diversity holdouts
-One or no parent attend college	-Based on established associations	-Overt racism exist		-African American discord exist
	-Organization must have membership need	-Role of race dismissed		
	-Individual status & Image important			

This chapter will discuss these and other findings in relation to scholarly works. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will review major findings related to the research questions, and will draw conclusions on findings based on the research questions while incorporating available literature. The second section will discuss alterations to the framework guiding the study followed by a third section that will discuss implications to policy, practice, and future research.

### Major Findings

#### *No Predisposition for Going Greek*

Many students show up to college already knowing the Greek affiliation they would like to pursue (Gose, 1997). In contrast, students in this study had no inclination to join a Greek letter organization. Their lack of knowledge and interest in Greek activities was driven by two factors: 1. Lack of family exposure; and, 2. Stereotypical perceptions. Most of the participants had no, or just one, parent that attended a four year college. Only one participant had both a mother and a father that held a four-year college degree or higher. The findings are consistent with previous research that found that minorities that join historically White Greek letter organizations often have a parent that did not attend college (Thompson, 2000).

Only one participant had an immediate family member that was in a fraternity, yet, that fraternity was not a traditional social Greek letter organization. Because most of the



participants' parents did not attend college nor had Greek experience themselves, they could not provide parental influence and guidance into fraternal life. The lack of family guidance allowed for the participants' opinion of Greek organizations to be driven by popular culture as six out of six participants indicated they never thought of joining a fraternity. Following each stereotypical report of perception participants made statements linking fraternities to hazing, alcoholism, and partying. Because of the negative fraternal image displayed through popular culture, the prevailing thought of each participant was that he would never join a fraternity.

Thompson (2000) also found that minorities that explore membership into historically White organizations or ethnic fraternal groups, make a decision to join without exploring alternative groups. Essentially, no consideration is given to an ethnic organization if a student considers joining a historically White group first. In half the cases, the findings of Thompson held true for individuals in this study. However, three out of six participants in this study considered joining an African American group prior to joining a historically White organization. All three individuals were highly involved on campus prior to joining a historically White organization. For example, a participant made a statement indicating that he was in multiple organizations; and, another participant listed his organizations as, "pre-law society, ambassadors, and student government". Because these participants were familiar with involvement prior to joining a historically White fraternity, they were pre-disposed to the complete Greek organizational offering on their campuses. Only when they had negative experiences with historically Black fraternities did they consider inter-racial membership. The other three participants joined as freshmen with one participant stating "I went through formal recruitment my first month of college". Based on the participants' experience, freshmen exploring inter-

racial membership do so without exploring the alternative group, and, have no extra-curricular involvement experience at the time of exploration.

### *Recruitment Drives Participation*

The most influential factor driving the cross-Greek experience was recruitment. This is consistent with Thompson's finding that factors leading to consideration include recruitment by members and knowing members. Thompson also listed diversity of membership, peer interest, and a comfort with a particular organization and the membership as factors which guide inter-racial membership for minorities. This suggestion was not completely supported by this study. The organizations lacked diversity as each participant was the only African American when they joined. As far as peer interest, three participants stated they had friends in historically Black groups as one states, "I was really confused because all of my friends were in African American organizations". Seemingly, there was more peer influence to join a Black organization.

Once recruited, one participant stated, "everything just worked with this group". Another indicated about the individual recruiting him, "I was really impressed with him". This may support a Chang (1996) finding that minority participation within historically White groups occurs when those minority participants hold the same values, beliefs, and attitudes of the Greek organization. Four out of six individuals identified with current members of the fraternity which influenced their decision to join their perspective groups after being recruited.

### *Need, Status, and Image Drives Recruitment*

Park reports that uniform membership occurs within historically White Greek groups because there is not an effort to offset self-segregation. Chang and DeAngelo (2002) suggested that fraternities recruit the same type of members or members that share the group's common features. Based on participant perspectives of the recruiting process, their color did not matter;

however, their image and status did. Based on all participants' accounts, historically White fraternities recruit African Americans based on preexisting associations, social status, and counter assumption. Each individual described, high levels of involvement, high grade point averages, and being able to transcend what is expected of African Americans by Whites. For example, one participant asserts:

I am sure that if I had pants below my butt, an oversized jacket, and wore a white t-shirt like a dress then, no, they would not have come after me...I think I opened their eyes because how I dressed, I had a haircut, and I am of average intelligence. I hate to say it but I was beyond the ordinary of what they knew and I carried myself in a certain way.

Overall, the perception of participants was that it was their social status and image that drove the recruitment.

Further, perspectives indicate that each organization had a need for members. A participant discloses, "When I was recruited, my fraternity needed people so they were just about letting anybody in". A disclosure from another participant indicated that, "They needed numbers". Five out of six referred to "the need for numbers" when talking about their fraternity recruiting them. Three of the six individuals also interviewed described situations that involved new groups that were chartering to be a fraternal colony on a particular campus for the first time.

Findings suggest that in order for African Americans to be recruited by historically White fraternities, the organization must have a membership need; the prospect must have high academic and/or social standing; and, he must not fit the stereotypical perception held by White members. Essentially, organizational integration will likely occur when there is organizational membership need, social affiliations are already established, and individual image is suitable to the White membership.

### Marginality versus Mattering

This section will analyze perspectives to discern how participants moved from marginalization to mattering as members of historically White Greek organizations. Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) concept of mattering provides the framework for this study's lens to view African American perceptions of mattering within historically White Greek letter organizations. I utilized counter-stories to provide readers with "a challenging account of preconceived notions of race" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 11). I also incorporated the Critique of Liberalism" tenant of CRT, which questions such constructs as racial neutrality and objectivity, rejecting the idea of a colorblind society (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

#### *Latent and Explicit Racial Insensitivity Exist*

Some still perceive social fraternities as bastions of intolerance (Chang and DeAngelo, 2002). Consistent with CRT, racial issues were commonplace, evident throughout the narratives of the participants. Thematic findings reveal a fraternity culture of racial insensitivity that is intentional and pervasive throughout participants' early experiences. Most of the participants report some type of ridicule because of their race by their White fraternal counterparts.

The remarks ranged from covert acts to overt racial attacks. CRT scholars posit that racism have moved beyond oblivious acts and have been replaced with unambiguous acts of bias (Park, 2008). Five out of the six participants discussed subtle insults. For example, a participant provides an account of a covert insensitivity, indicating that he was offered Kool Aid when he noticed others at the dinner were having tea. Another individual states that his fraternity brothers turned to rap stations whenever he rides with them in their cars. The discovery of these hidden racial intolerances mirror findings in studies by Henfield, Moore, and Wood in 2008; and, a study in the year 2000 by Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso. Henfield et al. interviewed African

American students in gifted programs and found that the students face peer rejection and ridicule, discouraging treatment by teachers and few outlets for problem resolutions. Solorzano et al. (2000) uncovered that racial micro-aggressions are commonplace within the academic and social college experiences of African Americans.

Park (2008) also found evidence of micro-aggressions in the inter-racial Greek experiences of Asian sorority members in the form of insensitive comments made about other racial and ethnic groups; however, she did not find explicit acts of racism. In contrast, blatant acts were common amongst the participant narratives in this study. A participant gives an example of overt intolerances, indicating that his fraternity brothers often used the word nigger at one time during his membership. “I never eat chicken at the fraternity house because they will always turn that to comic relief”, states another participant.

Many scholars have described the typical fraternal organization as comprised of members that are normally White, conservative, and less sensitive to issues of race (Marlowe & Auvenshine, 1982; Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1986; Baier & Whipple, 1990; Burnett, Vaughan, and Moody, 1997). These findings describe the organizations that the participants cross-enrolled into; and, their early membership experiences consisted of horrendous insensitivities that were blatant and routine. These “macro” intolerances indicate deeply imbedded racism that lead to marginal experiences for the participants.

According to Rosenberg & McCullough (1981), a person feels marginalized when they feel they do not fit in or are not needed. These occurrences were no doubt marginal experiences as the participants report feeling alone, being dejected, and singled out. One participant states:

At moments when I think I am the only one it's lonely or like when a joke is cast...maybe not with malicious intent but you know one that would not have been made if the Black guy was not in the room...those moments like that create discomfort.

A participant indicated that his fraternity brothers turn down his academic assistance, despite his high academic standing. Another participant is told not to bring "Black ideas" into the fraternal brotherhood. Overall, the majority of participants in the study were made to feel unimportant, insignificant and isolated at some point during their inter-racial fraternity experience.

#### *Downplay of the influence of race upon acceptance*

In a contradictory fashion to the negative racial experiences, the participants described the fraternities on their campuses as open to minority membership, dismissed the significance of race, and insisted that they changed their fraternity brothers' perceptions of their race.

Although a social hierarchy based upon race existed within sororities, Park's participants argued that the system was open free of discriminatory practices. This study's findings mirror Park's findings. When asked if the fraternal system was receptive to inter-racial membership, all six participants responded that, at least on their campuses, historically White fraternities are open. One participant summed the prevailing belief by saying, "It's really a matter of signing your name on the line...they won't just recruit anybody but anybody that wants to join can join, regardless of color". Despite being the only African American, or one of a few members of color, and experiencing a range of racial insensitivities, the prevailing belief was that fraternities were open to inter-racial membership. Similarly, Asian members of historically White sororities that participated in Park's study made "race-neutral explanations that cast participation in sororities as ultimately an individual choice" (p. 118). This finding was also consistent with a

1994 study by Smith and Forbes which indicated that White sorority members described the White system as open to all, despite a nearly all White membership.

When asked to describe a situation where race was a problem within their organization, the majority of the participants had a great deal of difficulty disclosing racial encounters. After describing their experiences as “not that bad” and saying such things as “I have not been treated differently”, they would go on to describe both covert and overt racial aggressions. Participants responded to the racial issues when they occurred with denial, by laughing off the attack, or choosing not to confront - remaining silent. One participant said, “I don’t wanna be the angry Black man”. This is consistent with beliefs of CRT theorists that the preservation of whiteness and marginalization of people of color creates a power dominance that limits individuals of color the ability to identify their reality or speak out against racism (Pompper, 2005; Taylor, 1998).

When I asked the participants what they believe lead to their negative racial experiences they responded saying it was their counterparts’ upbringing, simple misunderstandings, and mental hazing. Only two out of the six participants utilized the word racism when describing their fraternity’s racial intolerance. One participant actually praised his fraternity brothers believing the racial statements lead to open dialogue. However, three of the six individuals inquired about their anonymity with one saying, “I just don’t want them to think I’m holding a grudge”.

When I asked one participant how these situations made him feel he admitted, “I wanted to crawl under a rock”. Another said, I’m over it but at the time, I kept my guard up and this is my first time talking about it”. Yet, overall, it was undeniable that the incidents of racial intolerance were hurtful to the participants. Still, most participants downplayed the impact the situations had on their acceptance and the effect on them personally. “I don’t let that influence

me”, one participant says. Another says, “I lived through it”. A separate participant includes, “I don’t lose sleep over it”. Initially, each participant downplayed the impact of race before expressing feelings of isolation, dejection, and doubt.

The participants also utilized “colorblind statements” which essentially downplays the impact of race and its role (Park, 2008). One participant says “race has never been an issue for me because of my upbringing”; and another says, “Color is irrelevant”. All of the findings are consistent with the findings in two previous works. Chen (1998) found that Asian American members of historically White sororities largely downplayed the significance of race in the fraternal system. Similarly, a study by Park in 2008 indicated that that Asian American who recognized racial injustices, deemphasized race in defense of their sisterhood.

Colorblindness is discounted by CRT scholars because reality from the standpoint of Whites is considered the accepted norm or standard for understanding the experiences of people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Colorblindness leads to the true experiences of African Americans going unaccounted. Lopez (2003) indicated that a counter story is an account often ignored or dismissed because they are not socially acceptable. By capturing counter-stories, this research was able to “cast doubt on the validity of the accepted premise” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27) of brotherhood as particular brothers were marginalized based on their race.

Nonetheless, when describing marginal experiences four out of six participants opened their statements with words that signaled racial insensitivities were limited to early experiences such as “initially”, “we got off to a rocky start”, “used to always” and “before”. Member-checking confirmed that marginal experiences were confined to early membership. The participants actually believed that they changed brothers’ perception of race. One participant spoke of a racial incident and the understanding that followed:



Sometimes I would get offended and other times I would be glad that I was changing their impressions...their interpretation of a whole social group they perceived to be something that they are not, you know.

Despite the initial insensitivity, interaction promoted inclusion and the participants went on to experience full incorporation into the fraternal community.

#### *Incorporation into the Community*

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, (2000) found that African Americans students coped with the micro-aggressions they endured on campus by finding counter-spaces which included organizations, offices, and social settings that welcomed Afro-centrism. Given Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso's findings, I expected to find that marginal experiences would lead to participants' inactivity within their Greek organization, or, social pursuits outside of the Greek organization. However, the participants remained engaged, continuing to interact with their fraternal brothers, in both organized and spare time activity, in spite of the racial insensitivities. Participants reported that the majority of their spare time was spent with their fraternity brothers. As a result, interaction became the catalyst for ending their marginality and promoted mattering. Essentially, the fraternal bonds replaced the politics of race.

Just as suggested by my conceptual framework, participants moved from marginalization to mattering within the organization. Participant perspectives that indicate mattering carried throughout all six interviews. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) defined mattering as "feelings that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an extension" (p. 65). Schlossberg et al. (1989) extracted four elements from Rosenberg and McCullough's concept: Attention, Importance, Dependence, and Ego-extension (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schollsberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1988; Amundson,

1993; Corbière, and Amundson, 2007). Despite the initial negative racial experience, the participants described relationships that included all four elements of mattering in that the interaction moved beyond organizational business, their opinions were valued and sought out, and, they experienced inclusive participation, rising to levels of leadership within the group.

Amundson (1993) reviewed mattering in a counseling setting indicating that attention giving can be a simple gesture such as a smile and acknowledging an individual's presence. Receiving attention within the Greek inter-racial experiences of the participants moved far beyond the Amundson's findings as participants spent the majority of their free time with their fraternity brothers. Further, respect was given by the fraternal brotherhood to participate in activities significant to, and valued by, their African American brothers. Not only were the participants activities valued, their opinions and ideas were also incorporated indicating the groups' dependence on their African American members. One participant stated, "The pledge that they say now is something that I wrote". He continues, "I created their recruiting policies".

Amundson (1993) states:

Counteracting negative feelings associated with always asking for assistance can be eased by placing people in a position where they are offering assistance to others as well as receiving help. The feeling that others are dependent on them for their ideas and services enhances self-esteem and reinforces a sense of mattering (148).

Participants' experiences support Amundson's findings. Participants' White brothers fixed their flats, transported them to the airport, attended their special events, and even stood up for them in racially charged incidents. In turn, the participants indicate they reciprocate the gestures as one states: "One time one of them had driven his car off the road at midnight...he was stuck and he called me". This exchange is explained by Rosenberg and McCullough's belief that when

individuals feel that they matter they are constrained by expectations of others; yet, they gladly take on the burdens. Mattering within the fraternity comes with an expectation of being there for a fellow brother. This experience was common throughout the narratives of the participants, also consistent with Schieman and Taylor's (2001) contention that "Strong social bonds are likely to be characterized by supportive exchanges, which in turn cultivates an individual's conviction that he or she is of concern to other people" (p. 478).

Most importantly, each participant reached some level of leadership which indicated their importance within the group. In addition, their status as a leader impacted the level of respect given to them by younger members. By all indications, the participants were fully accepted and incorporated within the group and experienced inclusive participation. In effect, they mattered. Participants went on to describe how they are as close to their fraternity brothers as they are with their family: "these are the guys that call me on my birthday", one participant includes. In summary, continued interaction secured the bonds of fraternalism by expunging marginal experiences and promoting inclusion.

#### *Stereotypical Greek Organizations are Racial Holdouts*

Chen (1998) found that sororities identified as being the elite had no members of color. In contrast, when describing the top historically White fraternities on their respective campuses, four out of six participants indicated that those organizations had at least one African American member. Elite fraternities were said to be measured by sorority perception, academic standing, campus activities, community service, and university standing. In contrast, fraternities that were associated with partying, poor grades, hazing, alcoholism, low university standing, and womanizing had no African American members according to four participants. Like Chen, Park (2008) found that Asian Women that cross-enrolled within historically White sororities were

assigned to less prestigious sorority houses. Smith and Forbes (1994) also indicated that sororities that were considered in high regard (most prestigious/popular) had fewer minorities. This research contradicts these studies' findings as fraternities carrying the widely believed negative stigmas associated with Greek groups had no members of color while prestigious groups had a member of color. However, participants described some of stereotypical groups as large in terms of membership which can be utilized as a measure of prestige.

#### *Dissonance with other African Americans*

Hughey (2007) explored the alternative membership from the perspective of the White members that joined historically Black Greek letter organizations. He reported that White members of historically Black Greek letter organizations felt a sense of siblinghood within the group. However, White members that participated in the study did report some resistance to their membership from African American Greeks, but mostly, from Whites who view Whites that associate with non-Whites as "second class citizens" (p. 66). Findings in this study were similar. All six participants indicated that some African Americans approached them with curious inquisitions about their membership; and, indicated a profound respect for African American Greek organizations and their traditions. However, all six participants reported that other African Americans react to their inter-racial membership into a historically White Greek letter organization with resistance, insults, and excommunication.

Henfield, Moore, Wood (2008) indicated that when African Americans in gifted programs were accused of "acting White" the students attempted to befriend other African Americans. Although this research did not reach a similar finding, like Henfield et al. discord was uncovered centered upon the concept of "acting White". No other question during the interview aroused the emotion that the inquiry into African Americans' reaction to the

participants' inter-racial membership provoked. For participants, there is no greater conflict within the inter-racial Greek experience - how to reach inclusion within a historically White fraternity while maintaining afro-centric relationships. Although themes reveal that African Americans mattered within their historically White Greek fraternities, their membership mattered to other African Americans in a negative fashion.

All of the participants discussed discord with other African Americans that disapproved of their participation within a historically White organization. In essence, by choosing to join a historically White Greek organization, participants unknowingly sacrificed some of their African American relationships, and, subjected themselves to ridicule from their African American peers while breaking barriers to fraternal segregation. This finding may lend credence to the attitude held by White sorority members in the Smith and Forbes (1994) study as they believed that African Americans continued to maintain the divide between the Greek systems. This and other findings will be discussed further in the implications portion of this study.

#### Conceptual Framework Revisited

Based on the findings, I revised the proposed conceptual framework presented as Figure I on page 48. The four elements of Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering's (1989) stages of mattering are presented below as: 1. "Attention" (from fraternity members); 2. "Importance" (Thoughts, ideas are respected); 3. "Dependence" (Contributions are valued and needed); and, 4. "Ego-Extension" (Fraternity members showed concern for the well-being). The categories are unchanged from the original framework, appearing inside of the smaller circle which represents mattering within the organization.

The opposite of mattering, marginalization, is still captured outside of the smaller circle of mattering (larger dotted section), within the larger circle. The same categories for

marginalization presented in the original frame also exist. However, the arrows, indicating that a participant can move between marginalization and mattering at any point during their membership, have been eliminated. Instead, arrows go one way toward mattering. Findings did not suggest that things such as membership intake of new fraternal members impact the mattering experience in a negative fashion. Instead, marginality ends when mattering occurs. Thus, mattering as indicated below in the smaller circle is enclosed with a solid line instead of the dotted lines presented in the proposed framework.

Figure II – Mattering – A Revised Conceptual Framework



## Implications

### *Policy*

At the outset, many participants in this study found it difficult to integrate socially within a homogenous Greek culture. Given this, collegial institutions should consider initiating guiding principles that define how all prospective members are recruited and integrated into Greek letter organizations. Mandated Greek mentoring and extended orientation programs can be designed for newly initiated Greek members to assist in social integration. In addition, Greek officials should evaluate their presence throughout the Greek experience. Most of the participants in the study had no interaction with Greek life prior to joining their fraternity. One participant states, "Once I got initiated, I had to go to new member orientation which was hazing prevention and all that. But, that's about all I knew about the office". Because Cuyjet (1998) suggests that advising may be the key to addressing a lack of mattering, colleges and universities should mandate that Greek life officials provide advising prior to a student joining a social Greek letter organization. Greek advising can assist prospective members with recognizing and confronting not only insensitivities, but also, issues such as hazing.

Participant perspectives mainly detailed a social system that provides few developmental activities; however, elite fraternal groups were said to be measured by sorority perception, academic standing, campus activities, community service, and university standing. When describing the top historically White fraternities on their respective campuses, four out of six participants indicated that the elite organizations had at least one African American member. In contrast, fraternities that were associated with partying, poor grades, hazing, alcoholism, low university standing, and womanizing had no African American members according to four participants. Ironically, less prestigious groups managed to recruit successfully. This finding may be supported by a Levine and Sussman (1960) finding which indicated that the fraternity

image of gregariousness and party-loving attracted like-minded individuals. If so, the stereotypical output will continually be perpetuated unless measures are placed to ensure holistic development for the organizations. Standards for fraternal organizations must be placed and upheld by the Greek life offices through assessment. Yearly assessments must provide incentives for service outreach, diversity initiatives, campus education and new member development, scholarship, and campus involvement. Organizations failing to meet minimum status should face additional training, loss of privileges, and probationary status. In the end, the prime focus of Greek involvement must move farther away from the social aspect that comes with fraternalism.

### *Practice*

As the African American participants advanced in leadership within the group beyond the first year, racial insults vanish. New members responded to their leadership with respect and no participant reported derogatory action from new members joining the group after them. This finding makes it obvious that fraternity members respond to their leadership. As a result, leadership training should be mandated for officers focusing on recognizing and confronting behavior that promotes cultural insensitivity. Also, group training exercises should be conducted focusing on cultural understanding, with emphasis on the culture of all individuals within the fraternity, not just African Americans. However, Goodman (2001) cautions that diversity training meets resistance when people feel it interferes with their goals and values. Diversity outreach must tie into the root of fraternal philosophy: brotherhood. Fundamentally, the focus must center on uplifting the entire brotherhood.

Because many African Americans that join these groups do not have an idea of what social Greek letter organizations are about prior to enrollment, community service projects



should be reexamined to focus on secondary educational outreach. Programs such as adopt-a-school, mentoring, and tutoring initiatives will not only provide outreach on the public school level, it will expose young adults to the positive side of fraternal life pre-college enrollment. Outreach in secondary educational settings may also serve as a means of improving the negative image of fraternity life. Negative perception of Greek life should not be allowed to shape realities. Participants reported that their opinions of fraternal life, prior to arriving to college, were shaped by negative media portrayals of Greek life which included such things as drinking, partying, and hazing. Attention should be given to reshaping the impressions of students prior to their enrollment in college.

#### *Future Research*

This research signals the need for further study into other minority populations in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. More exploration is also needed to understand racial micro-aggressions in sorority life. Future research may also explore the post-graduate cross-membership experience in order to determine if the fraternal bonds extend beyond the undergraduate level. Further research is also needed in understanding mattering within fraternal organizations in determining if the experience is similar or differs along racial lines.

CRT as a framework should be utilized to provide an extensive understanding into the role of race within Greek life. CRT was incorporated in this study to simply give voice to the marginalized, identify obscure racial meaning, and to uncover instances when racial meaning was assigned alternate meaning or dismissed. It was my hope that this research could provide Greek officials with an understanding of the role of race in fraternalism. However, the complete lens of CRT should be utilized in future studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of race in Greek life. It is clear from these findings that ultimately White members have

the ability to include or not fully include African American members, which amounts to “Whiteness as Property”. Also evident was African American’s struggle to find acceptance which may constitute “Permanence of Racism”. The perceptions of White members of historically White fraternities toward inter-racial membership should be explored incorporating the aforementioned tenets. Also, it is not known where White interest meets with African American interest in the inter-racial Greek experience. The “Interest Convergent” tenet should be utilized to determine how cross-enrolling minority members benefit historically White organizations. These explorations could provide the further knowledge to understand sub-group perception of race within a culture that lacks diversity.

Finally, Park (2008) found that participants believed sororities lacked diversity because the institution lacked diversity. Smith and Forbes’ (1994) found that White sorority members insisted that ethnic centered organizations are discriminatory, not White sororities; yet, acknowledged that their sorority would not vote for a non-White member (Smith & Forbes, 1994). Findings presented in this study indicate that African Americans responded negatively to the participants that chose to join a historically White fraternity. Because it is not known why deficiencies in diversity exist, more research is needed.

Reports show that minority college student numbers have risen; yet, the makeup of the traditional fraternity has remained White (Reisberg, 2000a; Boschini & Thompson, 1998; and Chang & DeAngelo, 2002). This study did not correlate diversity, or lack of, to declining Greek numbers. Reisberg (2000a) suggested that many students of color report that they are offended by the racist undertones of Greek activities. As such, the perceptions of non-Greek affiliated African Americans and those that are members of historically Black Greek letter organizations should be explored to determine their attitudes toward historically White Greek letter

organizations. Such a study could provide those charged with working with Greek activities insight into measures that can combat long standing racial divisions, which may identify possible negative assumptions and promote true Greek integration.

### Conclusion

Divisions are common in Greek life in terms of membership and the studies which explore the fraternal experience. Most studies explore fraternal organizations in terms of alcoholism and hazing, but, few broach the subject of race. This study qualitatively explored the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American participation within historically White fraternal organizations. The study answered how do African Americans males perceive the influence of race upon acceptance; what are their interaction experiences; do they feel a sense of mattering; and, are they incorporated into the community of a White fraternity, experiencing inclusive participation as members?

Because this study provides understanding into the experience of African American males in their daily environment, the study is phenomenological in nature; seeking to capture the essence of the inter-racial Greek experience as described by the participant (Creswell, 2003). Six participants that attend four year colleges in the Southeast Region of the United States agreed to be interviewed for the study. Data analysis of the interviews continued throughout the research process (Creswell, 2003); interviews were transcribed, coded, and reduced into matrixes in search for themes. Member checking and peer debriefing ensued to ensure the trustworthiness of the report.

Thematic findings indicate that full acceptance is granted to African American members of historically White fraternities. Findings were measured utilizing the concept of mattering; which provided a comprehensive description of participants' feeling of significance within the

cross-membership Greek experience. Although participants described mattering, at the outset, they experienced racial intolerance from their White counter-parts. In reaching this conclusion, I “relied heavily on the participants' perspective in order to capture their truth through personal narrative, providing voice for the oppressed” (Moran, 2005; p. 906). Critical Race Theory provided such a means, framing the participant’s view of race within the inter-racial experience.

Findings also suggest individuals that chose inter-racial memberships have limited fraternal knowledge prior to entering college; established associations, image, status, and countertype assumption are vital to the recruitment process; and, stereotypical organizations are racial holdouts. Further, African American members of historically White fraternities experience negative interactions with other African Americans that disapprove of their inter-racial experience.

Beyond the findings presented in this study, members of social Greek letter organizations have higher retention and graduation rates, lower rates of sexually transmitted diseases, possess a high ability to function within groups and give more time and money to civic causes (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Gregory, 2003; Mauk 2006). It is for these reasons that the Greek system is worth improving with new standards and scholarly explorations. Guidelines and practices that promote interaction, provide advising, assess quality, influence cultural understanding, and allow opportunities for community outreach must be implemented. Future research should give attention to the cross-Greek experiences of other minority populations, understanding racial micro-aggressions, expanding the usage of CRT as a research frame. Reviewing the perceptions of White members of historically White fraternities as well as African American assumptions about historically White social Greek letter organizations also has further implications.

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APPENDIX A



UNIVERSITY of  
NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHP,  
COUNSELING AND FOUNDATIONS

[DATE]

[ADDRESS]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Eric Summers and I am conducting a doctoral dissertation on the African American experience within historically White Greek letter organizations. Specifically, I am investigating the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation in historically White fraternities. I have chosen your University as one of my research sites based on your student population and the size of your Greek community.

I am hoping to interview a minimum of four students at your institution in a one-on-one interview format. I would like to request your assistance in arranging the interviews with students that are African American male members of historically White social Greek organizations; and, have been members for at least one semester.

Each interview will be held on your campus at a mutually convenient location. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my research interests and the scope of the study with you. Please do not hesitate to contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ or my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry at \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for your consideration.

Eric J. Summers  
Doctoral Candidate,  
Higher Education Administration

348 Bicentennial Education Building Lakefront Campus 2000 Lakeshore Dr. New Orleans, Louisiana 70148 504.280-6661 504.280-6453 (fax)

*A Member of the Louisiana State University System Committed to Equal Opportunity*

## APPENDIX B

### *Invitation to Potential Study Candidates*

Dear <<Potential Participant's Name>>,

My name is Eric Summers. I am graduate student at the University of New Orleans and I am exploring the African American male experience within historically White Greek letter organizations as my dissertation topic. Specifically, I am investigating the issue of race and mattering in relation to African American participation in historically White fraternities. I was referred to you by <<Gatekeeper's name>>. <<Gatekeeper's name>> has been assisting me with identifying potential participants for this study that are African American male members of historically White fraternal groups and have held membership beyond one semester. <<She/he>> thought you were the perfect candidate to assist me in the research.

Information collected for this study will be used to fulfill the requirements of completing an original research project and for completion of my educational requirements for doctoral study. Currently, there is little information regarding this topic which is why your participation will be extremely helpful in the development of literature pertaining to inter-racial Greek membership. Additionally, this study may assist college administrators in enhancing the Greek experience.

I plan to conduct 45 to 60 minute individual in-person interviews with participants at mutually agreed upon locations. Each participant, as well as the collegiate institution serving as the site of study, will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their rights to privacy. Further, only the researcher and supervising faculty member will have access to participants' personal information and data relative to this study.

It is my hope that you would like to volunteer to share your experiences and are willing to participate in this important research study. <<Attached/Included>> is a Participant Profile Form. Please complete the form and <<mail/email>> back to <<address>> indicating your intentions to participate. I will contact you by phone within one week of the mailing of this letter to confirm receipt of this correspondence, respond to any questions you may have and/or to request your willingness to participate in this study. Should you have any question or concerns before my call or to learn more about the study please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ or email ejsummer@uno.edu. In addition, you may also contact my or my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry with any questions or concerns at \_\_\_\_\_ or aperry@uno.edu.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX C



UNIVERSITY of  
NEW ORLEANS

PARTICIPANT PROFILE FORM

**Cross Membership: The African American Experience in Historically White Greek Letter Organizations**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Phone 2 \_\_\_\_\_

College/University \_\_\_\_\_

Classification \_\_\_\_\_; Major \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Greek Organization \_\_\_\_\_

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_ (Must be 18 years of age to participate)
2. How long have you been a member of your Greek organization \_\_\_\_\_ (Must be a member for at least one full semester to participate)
3. Gender: Male; Female (Circle one)
4. Are you African American/Black: Yes; No (Circle one)
5. Are you willing to participate in a 45 to 60 minute interview and a follow-up discussion:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Yes; I agree to participate  
 \_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not wish to participate

*Note: This voluntary participation can be suspended at any time during the study by the participant.*

**Please return this form to:**

Email:  
ejsummer@uno.edu

US Mail:  
44137 Nicholas Cir  
Hammond LA, 70403

For Office Use Only	
Date Received	_____
Code 1.	_____
Code 2.	_____
Code 3.	_____

## APPENDIX D

### Follow-Up Telephone Call Script with Potential Study Candidates

Hello, this is Eric Summers, a doctoral candidate at the University of New Orleans.

I am calling as a follow-up to a correspondence mailed/emailed to you one week ago. I wanted to tell you a little about the study, answer any questions, but, first, thank you for agreeing to participate.

#### **Acknowledge receipt of Profile Form**

Please allow me to tell you a little bit about the study:

The purpose of this research is to explore the issues of race and mattering within the Greek experience, particularly the inter-racial membership experience of African Americans.

This research seeks to capture the daily experiences of six African American participants by utilizing interviews to collect perspectives.

Interviews will be arranged between November 1 – January 20, 2010 at mutually agreed upon locations. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Follow up contact will be made with participants to ensure proper analyses of interviews are made.

Your participation would be completely voluntary and you withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Do you have any questions about my study? [ANSWER QUESTIONS, IF ANY]

I hope that I have answered all of your questions and hope that you are still willing to participate in my research study?

#### **Participant Does Not Agree to Participate in Study**

Okay, thank you for your time. Have a good day!

#### **Participant Agrees to Participate in Study**

Thank you so much! I would like to schedule a time during [designated week] for the interview.

What day/time is good for you?

Is there a location you would prefer or should I work with <<Gatekeeper's name>> to secure a private location?

Again, thank you for your support.

Do you have any questions? Feel free to call me at <<Give Contact Information>> should you think of additional questions or have any concerns.

I look forward to seeing you on <<Date>>! Take care!



UNIVERSITY of  
NEW ORLEANS

## APPENDIX E

### *Reminder Confirmation of Individual Interview Appointment*

Dear <<Participant Name>>,

Thank you again for your participation in this study. Your involvement in this study will provide valuable information into understanding cross-Greek membership.

The purpose for this email is to remind you of our mutually agreed upon interview schedule as listed below:

Interview Date: <<Date of Interview>>

Location: <<Location of interview>>

Time: <<Time of Interview, starting and ending>>

Should you have any questions, concerns, or need to reschedule the interview for a more convenient time, please contact me at:

Home Phone:

Mobile Phone:

Email: [ejsummer@uno.edu](mailto:ejsummer@uno.edu)

You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry with any questions or concerns at \_\_\_\_\_ or [aperry@uno.edu](mailto:aperry@uno.edu).

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Eric J. Summers  
Doctoral Candidate,  
Higher Education Administration



## APPENDIX F



UNIVERSITY of  
NEW ORLEANS

### Research Consent Form The University of New Orleans

#### RESEARCH BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research project titled, *Mattering: The African American Experience within Historically White Fraternities*. This study is being conducted at the University of New Orleans as part of a doctoral dissertation by Eric J. Summers under the supervision of Dr. Andre Perry. You have been invited to participate in this project because of your affiliation with a historically White Greek letter organization as an African American male for at least one semester as a member. Your participation in this study is voluntary and should you decide to participate, you may forgo your participation at any point during the research project. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

#### PURPOSE & PROCEEDURE

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore the issues of race and mattering in relation to African American male participation within historically White fraternal organizations. Your participation in this research project will be for a period of one semester. The procedure for this project involves one tape recorded interview which will last approximately one (1) hour. Follow-up sessions to assist in interpreting the interview may continue through the interview analysis phase which could go beyond one semester. Specifically, this research involves questioning regarding your participation within your social Greek organization and your perception of mattering within the organization and racial issues within the group. A minimum of six (6) participants are expected to participate in this project. The duration of the study is approximately one year from the first interview to reporting of the findings.

#### RISK DISCLOSURE

The possible risks and discomforts associated with your participation in this research project include possible damage to reputation if information provided is linked to you. Other unforeseen risks may occur or be revealed as the research progresses. In the event that the investigator(s) in this study find in the future that there is a potential risk to you unknown at the time of your participation in the study, and such risk might have some bearing on your well-being, you will be informed.

#### RESEARCH BENEFIT & USE

The research may or may not help you personally but the results may help the investigator learn about inter-racial Greek membership. In all publications and presentations resulting from this research project, your anonymity will be protected to the maximum extent possible; although, authorized University of New Orleans personnel may have access to your research file in order to verify that your rights as a subject in this study have been safeguarded.

**PRIVACY PROTECTION**

Any information we obtain about you during this study will be treated as strictly confidential. To ensure confidentiality, a pseudo name will be assigned to you and any of your potentially identifying information (i.e. Greek organization).

**TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION**

The investigator may terminate your participation in this project information provided is untruthful, if you are found not to meet the minimum qualifications for participation, or other unforeseen reasons in the best interest of the participant and the integrity of the research. You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason. Any new significant findings, either good or bad, developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate further will be explained to you.

**CONSENT**

Please check the appropriate box beside each statement:

- 1)  YES, I agree to participate in this study and understand the statements provided above in relation to my participation.
- 2)  NO, I do not agree to participate.

**PARTICIPANT**

Signature	Date
-----------	------

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

**RESEARCHER**

Signature	Date
-----------	------

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

By signing this form you do not waive any of your legal rights. Signing this consent form means that you have heard or read the information about this study and that you agree to participate. If you have any questions regarding this research project, you may contact Eric Summers at \_\_\_\_\_ or ejsummer@uno.edu or Dr. Andre Perry at \_\_\_\_\_ or aperry@uno.edu.

## APPENDIX G

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Background Information & Anticipatory Greek Affiliation**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your high school friends and your high school extra-curricular activities.
3. What did you know about fraternal organizations in high school?
4. Entering college, what was your impression of fraternities and sororities?
5. Did you know which organization you wanted to join? Describe your selection process?
  - What attracted you to your particular fraternal organization?
6. Before you join your fraternity what interactions did you have with members of fraternities both historically Black and White groups?
  - Were you recruited?
7. Did you have family members that joined a Greek organization...If so, what affiliation?
8. Tell me about your friends outside of the fraternity.

#### **Perception of Cross-Membership**

9. Are you the only African American member of your fraternity (at this institution)?
  - What has that experience been like?
10. How do others react to your membership...people in and out of group?
11. Can you describe a situation where your race was a problem in your organization?
  - When does race matter within Greek Life?
12. Do you feel other fraternal organizations are open to inter-racial membership?
  - Why or Why not?
13. Why did you not join a historically African American fraternal organization?

#### **Mattering – “Receive Attention, Contributions Valued, Respected, & Receive Concern”**

14. How would you describe your relationship with your brothers?
15. Do you interact with them outside of the fraternity (other activities: bowling, movies, etc...)?

16. Describe how you are made to feel comfortable?
  - Are there instances when you feel/felt uncomfortable?
17. Talk about your role within your fraternity (leadership...in meetings).
  - How do your brothers react to your involvement/leadership?
18. Describe instances where you felt supported/not supported by your fraternity.
19. Explain your relationship with individuals within your fraternity.
  - Is there someone that you often clash with and/or someone you mostly associate with?
20. In what ways does the fraternity make rituals, rules, and expectations understood to you?
  - Is this the same as for most members?
21. In what ways do your brothers show that they care/are concern for your well-being?
22. Can you describe instances when your ideas were taken into consideration or implemented by the fraternity?
23. How do you think other fraternity members would describe you?
24. Describe a situation when the fraternity helped you?
25. What type of opportunities are provided for you to get to know fellow members and for them to get to know you?

**APPENDIX H**  
**Human Subjects Certification**



**APPENDIX I**  
**IRB Approval**  
**(Email Approval from UNO IRB Chair)**

University Committee for the Protection  
of Human Subjects in Research  
University of New Orleans

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Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Andre Perry

Co-Investigator: Eric Summers

Date: November 3, 2009

Protocol Title: "Mattering: The African American Experience in  
Historically White Greek Letter Organizations"

IRB#: 02Nov09

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7)).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair  
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

## VITA

Eric J. Summers is a 1996 graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi where he received a Bachelors of Arts in Psychology. In May 1999 he received a Masters of Arts in Education from the University of Mississippi. He joined the administration at Southeastern Louisiana University in January 2000 serving as an Area Coordinator. He was promoted to Director for Multicultural and International Affairs in August 2001. In addition to heading the Office of Multicultural and International Affairs, in 2007 he accepted the position of Conduct Officer within the Office of Student Conduct; serving dual job responsibilities to this day.