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# Building brotherhood: An examination of race, violence, sexuality and black fraternity membership

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Building Brotherhood:  
An Examination of Race, Violence, Sexuality and Black Fraternity Membership

A Thesis  
Presented in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
December 2011

BY  
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Ashley Y. Stone

## FREQUENTLY USED TERMINOLOGY

Throughout the text, acronyms and vernacular appear that may be unfamiliar to the reader. A listing of these acronyms and terms appears below:

<b>Assistant Dean</b>	A designated member of a fraternity who supports a Dean, both of whom are responsible for incoming pledge classes.
<b>BGF</b>	An acronym for <i>Black Greek Fraternity</i> .
<b>BGO</b>	An acronym for <i>Black Greek Organization</i> .
<b>Crossed</b>	Short for “crossed the burning sands”, indicating the exact time one was initiated into a BGO.
<b>Dean</b>	A designated member of a fraternity responsible for incoming pledge classes, with the support of an Assistant Dean.
<b>Death March</b>	A tradition in which the new members of a BGO carry a fake casket and then break it, symbolizing the death of their old identity.
<b>Drop/ Drop Line</b>	To cease being a member of a pledge class, voluntarily or involuntarily.
<b>HBCU</b>	An acronym for <i>Historically Black College/University</i> .
<b>Initiated</b>	A ritual ceremony inducting a pledge as an official member of an organization.
<b>“In the Cut”</b>	For BGF pledges, getting into the position to be paddled on the posterior during sessions or sets.
<b>Line</b>	Aspirants of an organization who are selected as members of a new pledge class.
<b>Line Brothers</b>	A term to refer to fellow members of one’s pledge class.
<b>LB’s</b>	Shortened version of “Line Brothers”.
<b>Made</b>	A member of an organization who was hazed and/or initiated.
<b>Neophyte/ Neo</b>	A term used for new members who have crossed into an organization. These members remain neophytes until a new line crosses, at which point they become <i>prophytes</i> .
<b>Paper</b>	A member of an organization who was not hazed nor initiated into an organization.
<b>Pledge</b>	A prospective member of a Greek-Letter organization who has been selected for a new pledge class.

<b>Polemarch</b>	A term used within certain BGOs, reserved for the President of a chapter of the organization. <i>Grand Polemarch</i> is a title reserved for the President of the national organization.
<b>Probate Show</b>	The announcement to the public that a line has crossed into the organization, usually done at a large, public event. This is similar to a <i>Deathmarch</i> , which is specific to certain organizations.
<b>Prophyte</b>	The existing members of a chapter of an organization that help initiate new members.
<b>Ship</b>	Another term for “Line Brother”.
<b>Skating</b>	The term attributed to those members that did not pledge in order to join the organization.
<b>Set/Session</b>	Any meeting in which organizational information, such as history, is given to a line. Additionally, this is usually where hazing occurs.
<b>Stroking</b>	To strike a pledge with a wooden paddle, usually on their posterior.
<b>Stroll</b>	A line dance performed by members of an organization.
<b>Went Over</b>	To officially “cross” into an organization.
<b>Wood/ Taking Wood</b>	For BGF pledges, being struck with a wooden paddle on the posterior.

## INTRODUCTION

*I am an invisible man. No, I am not a  
spook like those who haunted  
Edgar Allen Poe, nor am I one of your  
Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am  
a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and  
liquids-and I might even be said  
to possess a mind.*

-Ralph Ellison, Prologue to *Invisible Man*  
(1980)

In 2009, the administration of Morehouse College, an all-male HBCU, initiated an “appropriate attire policy” banning students from wearing specific items of clothing, including sagging pants and caps. Additionally, the list of “banned clothing” included dresses, tops, tunics, purses and pumps (King 2010:95). Dr. William Bynum, Jr., Vice President of Student Services, explained that this new policy was created in response to the fashion trends of a small group of students, known on campus as the *Plastics*: “We are talking about five students who are living a gay lifestyle that is leading them to dress in a way we do not expect in Morehouse men” (Ibid.). Addressing the new policy further, Bynum stated that the “Morehouse leadership development model sets a certain standard of how we expect young men to dress, and this attire does not fit within the model. Our proper attire policy expresses that standard” (Ibid.).

The implementation of this new policy by one of the most well-known HBCUs in the United States was arguably put into place to maintain “traditional” parameters around a masculine identity. The “appropriate attire policy” -and the five students who inspired it- have unearthed conversations that have remained underground in the black community regarding the definition and maintenance of manhood. Some question where black men can find and secure a space to develop their masculine identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One institution that continues in the pursuit of developing black men is Black Greek Fraternities (BGFs). The origin of Black Greek Organizations (BGOs) dates back to the early 1900s (McClure 2006). Created in response to racial segregation, BGOs have played a crucial role not only in higher education, but also in the black community (Ibid.). Recognizing the unquestionable social and historical contributions of these organizations, author and black fraternity member Ricky L. Jones (2004) states: “We must acknowledge that black Greeks have built a great historical legacy of placing powerful black men and women at the forefront of the black freedom struggle” (p. 9). While some black fraternities and sororities are perceived as negating political and social consciousness today (Jones, p. 26), they continue to intrigue the general population and attract prospective



members. BGOs are also noted for having an impact on individual members, imparting life skills and serving as a basis for racial uplift for blacks since their inception (McClure 2006). Further, BGFs have been known for providing a space for young black college men to develop their masculine identity (Ibid.).

### *Purpose and Significance of the Research*

The purpose of this research project is to explore how black men who join black fraternities develop and perform their masculine identity as members of said organizations, focusing specifically on racial identity; violence and bodily performance; and sexuality. The study is significant, as BGFs were developed to combat racial oppression on college campuses in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet they continue to grow with memberships in the thousands, both in the United States and abroad (Jones 2004). The continued growth of these organizations is a testament to the fact that they still appeal to and serve a purpose for young black men.

The proposed research is also significant because the findings of this study may reveal more about hazing practices, and provide insight into less aggressive practices. This research will also provide an opportunity for black men to voice their perspectives on beliefs and practices surrounding masculinity within BGFs. Lastly, this study will contribute to existing research on black fraternities and masculinity development by examining attitudes about sexuality among BGF members.

### *Research Question*

The purpose of this study is to understand how masculinity is constructed and achieved in black fraternities, using the following research question: How is the black masculine identity developed and negotiated within the black fraternity structure?

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BLACK GREEK ORGANIZATIONS

*We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile*

-Paul Laurence Dunbar, *We Wear the Mask*  
(Chapman 1968)

At the start of the twentieth century, blacks in United States faced racial discrimination in private and public venues (Ross 2000). Black students on college campuses were in no way exempt from experiences of discrimination. Jones (2004) notes:

African Americans apparently made considerable efforts initially to participate in the larger campus community of predominantly white institutions through athletic teams, literary societies, musical groups and fraternities and sororities. But, like many things in the United States at the same time, participation in these groups on most campuses was continually restricted according to race. The politics of exclusion in WGFs [White Greek Fraternities] have long been incorporated into the inner workings of the groups (P. 31).

Racial discrimination in higher education generated feelings of isolation among black students on college campuses (Ross 2000). In reply, black co-eds took action to create their own safe spaces.

Determined to ‘strengthen the negro voice’ at Indiana University, a group of black undergrads founded Alpha Kappa Nu in 1903-the first Black Greek-Letter Organization (BGLO)-at Indiana University (Hughey, p. 445). However, the organization lasted only a few years due to fledgling membership. The following year, Sigma Pi Phi emerged in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Ibid.). While not a collegiate organization, Sigma Pi Phi functioned in a social capacity for upper class black men (Ibid.). Additionally, it is the oldest surviving black fraternity in existence today with membership in the United States and abroad (Ibid.). Although this organization remains in existence and is considered the most elite Black Greek Fraternity, it was not founded as, nor did it ever become, a collegiate fraternity (Jones, p. 34).

In *Black Greek 101*, Walter Kimbrough (2003) sheds light on potpourri of black fraternal organizations that were founded throughout the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other fraternal organizations were formed out of disinterest in the existing organizations, claiming that they had deviated from their original purpose and mission (Kimbrough, p. 104). Some of these organizations defied the mainstream fraternal structure and turned strictly to African culture for inspiration (Kimbrough, p. 106). While the aforementioned organizations will not be focused on extensively for the purposes of this study, it is important to note their existence.

In 1929, the National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC) was founded as an umbrella organization to serve and address the needs of BGOs when they were excluded from the then all-white National Interfraternity Council (Torbenon, p. 57). For the purposes of this research study, BGOs governed by the NPHC will be focused on exclusively.

*Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.*

A group of black male students at Cornell University decided to take action toward change on their campus (Ross 2000). Founded on December 4, 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. began as a study group for black students at Cornell, but later developed into a fraternal organization. The mission of the fraternity is to develop leaders, promote brotherhood and academic excellence, while providing service and advocacy to the community (<http://www.alpha-phi-alpha.com/Page.php?id=53>). With an emphasis on manly deeds, scholarship and love for all mankind, Alpha Phi Alpha quickly spread to other universities, satisfying the need for solidarity among black students in higher education nationally (Ross 2000). By the 1980s, Alpha Phi Alpha had grown to a membership of over 175,000 with over 600 chapters around the globe (Ross 2000; Anderson 2011). Since its founding, the fraternity has embarked on many initiatives, including the Alpha Phi Alpha Education Foundation, Inc. and the Alpha Phi Alpha Business and Economic Development Foundation (<http://www.alpha-phi-alpha.com/Page.php?id=51>). The organization is noted for being at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement (Ross 2000), and today is continuing its legacy to eradicate the injustices experienced by black Americans (<http://www.alpha-phi-alpha.com/Page.php?id=53>). Known today as not only being an exclusively black organization, Alpha Phi Alpha has been interracial since the mid-1940s (<http://www.alpha-phi-alpha.com/Page.php?id=54>), their span reaching not only blacks in the diasporas, but *across* racial lines as well.

*Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.*

Like Alpha Kappa Nu (1903), Kappa Alpha Psi started at Indiana University (Ross 2000). Elder Watson Diggs and Byron Kenneth Armstrong recognized the hypocrisy of being a black

student at Indiana University-being admitted into an institution of higher education, yet being denied access to campus resources (<http://www.kappaalphapsi1911.com/fraternity/index.asp>). Diggs and Armstrong, along with eight other men, founded Alpha Omega, the forerunner to Kappa Alpha Psi (Ibid.). The ten founders finalized the new organization, renaming it Kappa Alpha Nu, on January 5, 1911 (Ibid.). The organization was renamed a final time to Kappa Alpha Psi, in response to a racist reference, “Kappa Alpha Nig”, coined by white students (Ibid.). The fraternity developed into a major support system for black students at the university and throughout the entire state of Indiana (Ibid.). Stating achievement as their fundamental purpose (<http://www.kappaalphapsi1911.com/fraternity/index.asp>), Kappa Alpha Psi was the first black fraternity to support World War I efforts in 1917. The fraternity has experienced continued growth into new chapters, including those for alumni (Ross 2000). Like the members of Alpha Phi Alpha, the members of Kappa Alpha Psi were also active in the Civil Rights Movement (Ibid.). Kappa Alpha Psi currently has members in over 700 chapters (Walker 2011).

#### *Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.*

Unlike the founders of other BGFs before them, Edgar Love, Frank Coleman, Oscar Cooper and Ernest Just were the first students to start a black fraternity *at* an HBCU. Founded at Howard University in November of 1911, Omega Psi Phi, Inc. is grounded in four principles: Scholarship, Manhood, Perseverance and Uplift (Ross 2000). While Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi experienced resistance from their white peers, the founders of Omega Psi Phi experienced resistance from the administration of Howard University (Ibid.). During the early stages of the formation of Omega Psi Phi, many campuses were discouraged from forming new fraternities and sororities, and Howard University was no exception (Ibid.). However, after much publicity and persistent dialogue with the university’s President, Omega Psi Phi received recognition as an official organization and, later, as a national organization, expanding membership to Lincoln University in 1914 (Ibid.). Like other Black Greek Organizations, Omega Psi Phi has consistently engaged in community outreach,

and like Kappa Alpha Psi, supported WWI during the early 1900s (Ibid.). Omega Psi Phi also initiated the College Endowment Fund, a philanthropic effort to support HBCUs ([http://www.oppf.org/mandated\\_programs.asp](http://www.oppf.org/mandated_programs.asp)). This fund is one of ten programs that each of the organization's more than 700 chapters is required to coordinate annually ([http://www.oppf.org/mandated\\_programs.asp](http://www.oppf.org/mandated_programs.asp)). Today, the organization claims to have a membership of 60-80,000 members and has seen an increase in membership over the past five years (Smith 2011).

#### *Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.*

Observing the initiatives of Black Greek Organizations, A. Langston Taylor was inspired to create a fraternity at Howard University, just as the founders of Omega Psi Phi had done (Ross 2000). However, his vision of a fraternity was somewhat different from the founders of other BGOs. Taylor felt that a black fraternity should be "a part of" the general community rather than "apart from" it (<http://www.pbs1914.org/history>). Enlisting the aide of two friends, Leonard Morse and Charles I. Brown, he began Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. in November 1913, receiving recognition as an official organization the following year (Ross 2000). Members of Phi Beta Sigma were in the forefront of advocating for anti-lynching laws (Ibid.). As the organization grew, it maintained a unique focus on business in the aftermath of the Great Depression in order to provide financial empowerment to the black community (Ibid.). In 1995, Phi Beta Sigma was the only BGO to support the Million Man March (Ibid.) and has led a diverse number of initiatives, including Sigma Wellness and Project VOTE. The fraternity also supports established initiatives, including the American Cancer Society and March of Dimes (<http://www.pbs1914.org/initiatives/>). With over 700 chapters and nearly 40,000 members (Blue 2011), Phi Beta Sigma has been known to that reject the *bourgeois* tendencies it's predecessors Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi and Omega Psi Phi. To this end, the fraternity has established an honorary chapter, the Distinguished Service Chapter, to which

members are elected based upon their achievements either scholastically or through community and national service (Jones, p. 39).

*Iota Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.*

1963 marked a significant year in the movement for human rights in America, with youth taking ownership of their freedom by organizing around their own social and political interests (Ross 2000). It was in the same year that Iota Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. came into existence (Ibid.). With many fraternal organizations pooling membership from the undergraduate population, Iota Phi Alpha focused on recruiting the nontraditional student (Ibid.). While contributing to the community at large, Iota Phi Alpha was not officially a member of the National Pan-Hellenic Council until 1996-more than 30 years after its founding (Ibid.). While still considered “younger” than other BGOs, Iota Phi Alpha continues to be innovative, in line with their motto “Building a Tradition, Not Resting on One” (Ibid.). Among their initiatives is the Developing Better Fatherhood Project, which attempts to “address the pattern of father-less-ness in the black community” (<http://www.iotaphitheta.org/page4.html>). Today, Iota Phi Alpha has 180 chapters and a membership in the tens of thousands (Jones, p.40).

The legacies and contributions of each of these organizations are undeniable. Their founders organized with a great vision “for the sake of the race” (Dickinson 2005), advancing not only fellow members, but also the black community. The effort of these fraternities dismantles notions of apathy that are often associated with young black men. Observing these organizations from a historical vantage point, their reputations speak for themselves. From a contemporary perspective, however, different impression prevails about the nature of these organizations and the impact they have on their members.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*We real cool. We  
Left school. We*

*Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We*

*Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We*

*Jazz June. We  
Die soon.*

-Gwendolyn Brooks, *We Real Cool*  
(Chapman 1968)



In his examination of black fraternities, Ricky L. Jones (2004) comments on the nature of exclusion of white fraternities today stating, “Even today, although a rhetoric of humanism and inclusion comes from the white Greek-letter community, practices remain somewhat constant” (p. 32). For black students in a college environment, exclusionary practices based upon race can exacerbate an already frustrating experience. Understanding the role that BGOs play in the lives of young black men first involves understanding the impact that these organizations have on black students overall.

### *Black Greek Organization Research*

For many black high school students, college becomes their first opportunity to think about themselves in various ways. Stewart (2008) found that applying to college becomes a time where black students begin to think about themselves in terms of race:

For several of the students, going through the college admissions process provided the first opportunity to intentionally think about and...to intentionally shape their racial identity beyond high school and their home neighborhoods. These students’ stories indicate that checking boxes on application and scholarship forms were not cursory or automated processes. ...Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the responses...and other comments made by the students, the social meaning of their racial and gender classifications took on substance and formed the foundation of their current critiques of...society at large (P. 198).

The founders of Black Greek Organizations established their respective fraternities and sororities in hopes of creating solidarity amongst themselves and more opportunities for future generations of black students (McClure 2006). However, while black students today seemingly have more educational opportunities, black students on predominantly white campuses continue to report feelings of isolation from other students, with black males reporting these feelings more often than black females (Ibid.). Moreover, racial discrimination on college campuses can cause a great amount of psychological distress particularly for black male students (Smith, Allen and Danley 2007). McClure (2006) found that BGOs play a significant role for both members and non-members on campus, as these organizations attempt to integrate *all* black students on campus, and thus, combating the reported feelings of isolation. This is significant, as research shows that undergraduate

students who are both academically and socially integrated are more likely to succeed in college (Ibid.).

According to McClure's study on voluntary association membership (2006), BGOs not only connect black students socially, but also connect their members to black history. Respondents to McClure's study discussed the legacies of their chosen organizations, and how their membership made them feel more connected to the founders of their fraternities, imparting them with a sense of pride (Ibid.). This connection to the founders was not taken lightly, but viewed as a serious responsibility to uphold the vision of their organization's founders (Ibid.). McClure also found that membership to a BGO can also provide opportunities for individual success, affording them a network within various job markets after college (Ibid.).

McClure's study was limited in that it did not attempt to investigate is the impact of BGO membership on black college students who attend HBCU's, and further, focused on only a single chapter of one BGF. However, based upon McClure's study, we find that BGOs serve a specific function in providing support to members and non-members, providing both with a sense of belonging to their larger campus community. More specifically, members can develop a deeper and more positive racial identity.

Despite the limitations of her study, there is additional research that supports McClure's work on BGOs. In his study on leadership and BGO membership, Kimbrough (1995) found that black students who joined BGOs felt that their leadership skills had improved since becoming members of their respective organizations. Moreover, Harper (2006) found that BGFs provide social and academic support, and therefore, and stressed that these organizations should be sustained out of necessity for black male students. The value of BGFs both collectively and on individuals have been proven through these studies.

### *The Development of Masculinity in BGOs*

R.W. Connell (2005) conceptualizes masculinity as "...simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (p. 71). Masculinity is, therefore, created and reinforced through personal interactions. Connell (Ibid.) also asserts, however, that masculinity cannot be defined solely by one's gender, stating that "Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender 'intersects' -better interacts-with race and class" (p. 75).

Negotiating the "interaction" of race and gender has been a challenge for black men in the United States historically. In *The Slave Community*, Blassingame (1972) states:

After marriage, the slave faced almost insurmountable odds in his efforts to build a strong stable family. First, and most important of all, his authority was restricted by his master. ... When the slave lived on the same plantation with his mate, he could rarely escape frequent demonstrations of his powerlessness (P. 172).

Kimmel (2006) also asserts that "...black slaves were 'boys'" and that "...a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control" (p. 14). He continues:

...there was a noteworthy confusion ... a confusion that has remained to this day. Black men...were seen simultaneously as less manly than native-born whites and as *more* manly, especially as more sexually, voracious and potent (P. 64).

Patricia Hill Collins (2004) expounds on this point, commenting on the implications of the black male physique and how this dictates the lives of black men:

Historically, African American men were depicted primarily as bodies ruled by brute strength and natural instincts, characteristics that allegedly fostered deviant behaviors of promiscuity and violence. The buck, brute, the rapist, and similar controlling images routinely applied to African American men all worked to deny Black men the work of the mind that routinely translates into wealth and power. Instead, relegating Black men to the work of the body was designed to keep them poor and powerless. Once embodied, Black men were seen as being limited by their racialized bodies (P. 152).

What is more, the stereotype of black women as exceedingly strong, personified as the *Matriarch*, has further intensified the identity crisis of black men and their attempt to achieve white patriarchal power (Collins 2000).

Stewart (2008) discusses the negotiation of both racialized and gendered identities together: “This symbiotic relationship means that each different social or cultural identity facet is identifiable and salient in all areas of the individual’s life” (p. 184). With both their race and skin color (Keith and Herring 1991) playing significant roles in their life outcomes, Mahalik, Pierre and Wan (2006) posit that black men’s “experiences with racism make it more difficult to live up to U.S. masculine ideals of success and power” (p. 95).

In an assessment of the correlation between self esteem and psychological distress in young black men, Mahalik, et al. (2006) found that as respondents chose white people as their preferred racial reference group, they were more likely to conform to the norms of masculinity implemented by the dominant culture in the United States, consistent with previous research on racial identity's relationship to self-esteem and psychological distress (p. 99). Further, as respondents devalued their own racial group and valued the dominant culture, their psychological distress increased (Ibid., p. 101). Psychological distress also increased as respondents placed greater value on their own racial group and denigrated the standards of the dominant culture (Ibid.). On the contrary, as black male respondents experienced inner security with their Blackness and declined in anti-White feelings, they reported greater self-esteem (Ibid.). In either case, black men construct their identity based upon influences from both their own racial group reference, as well as the influence of the dominant culture (Ibid.). The quest, then, is for black men to seek, find and engage in spaces where they can develop a masculine identity befitting their experience.

In her study on the impact of BGF membership on black men who attend predominantly white universities, Stephanie McClure (2006) found that membership to BGFs assisted the respondents in creating a new model of masculinity. McClure asserts that the hegemonic model of

masculine identity-with a focus on whiteness, heterosexuality, financial success and competition- does not capture the varied experiences of black men in America (p. 59). The Afrocentric model of masculinity- emphasizing community collectivity among men and also *with* women-was found to benefit the experiences of the study's respondents (Ibid.). While the Afrocentric model of masculinity can vary based upon economic class differences among black men, McClure found that a combination of elements from both the hegemonic and Afrocentric models of masculinity create an "amalgamation" masculinity that is more conducive to the experiences of black men (Ibid.).

Through interviews with members from the southeastern chapter of one black fraternity, McClure found that membership in a BGF was a mechanism to counter the negative images of black men in the media (2006:62). Following the dominant model of masculinity, the respondents also expressed the desire to graduate from college, pursue professional careers and become successful (Ibid., p. 64). While respondents sought success on an individual level, they also expressed their desire to be successful collectively for the sake of the fraternity and their community, accomplishing more as a group than they could alone (Ibid., p. 66). Respondents also expressed the satisfaction of being in an environment where they can express their emotions openly without ridicule. All of these components align with the Afrocentric model of masculinity. Based upon the findings of this study, it is clear that the black fraternity serves as a space for black men to further develop their unique identity and gain a network of other black men to support to reinforce it.

#### *Violence and Pain: The Impact of Gender Performance in BGOs*

According to Connell (2005) "...many members of the privileged group use violence to sustain their dominance" (p. 83). While branding one's skin is a method often used to initiate new members into BGFs (Posey 2005), hazing is a common practice of many organizations, including fraternities, sororities and even marching bands (Harris, p. 93). By definition, hazing refers to "any activity expected of someone joining a group (or to maintain full status in a group) that humiliates,

degrades or risks emotional and/or physical harm, regardless of the person's willingness to participate” (<http://www.stophazing.org/definition.html>).

With the intention to instill a “pecking order” among new initiates to a group, hazing in modern day has proven harmful, and in some cases fatal. Recently, it was reported that the Rutgers University chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho was suspended and six members were arrested after one pledge reported a hazing incident (Williams 2010). The 2003 drowning deaths of two Alpha Kappa Alpha pledges in California shocked the black community, affecting both BGO members and non-members alike (Austin 2002).

Hazing practices have specific implications for men. Connell (2005) states, “...the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained” (p. 54). He continues, saying that “violence becomes important in gender politics among men. Most episodes of major violence...are transactions among men” (p. 83). Violence serves an added purpose for black men. Jackson Katz (1999) explains that “Men of color need to adopt a hyper masculine posture in order to get the respect they have been stripped of.”

While it is known that pledging and hazing are synonymous with many Greek-Letter organizations, Ricky Jones (2004) explains the contrary:

...the modern pledge process is an operation of historical social import as well as a powerful aspect of black fraternity legend and lore. We must understand that, contrary to the beliefs of many BGF members, at its heart, this process is a sacrificial rite that BGFs did not create. Therefore, the BGF pledge process is not unique in and of itself (P. 47).

Pledging and hazing have histories in Europe that date as far back as the fourth century, both practices being traced back to the academe (Parks and Brown, p. 438). These practices were common, as students felt the need to perform acts of kindness that had been done to them, as well as return the bad done to them (Ibid.). Additionally, students were taught the hierarchy of their institution through said practices (Ibid.).

Ricky L. Jones (2004) provides additional insight into the history of sacrificial practices:

Some scholars, directly or indirectly, posit that what we today regard as fraternity ritual has its roots in Freemasonry, which can be traced back to ancient Africa. Various Afrocentrists assert that ancient Egyptians specifically developed a complex religious system called the Mysteries which was the first religious system whose structure was geared toward achieving salvation. ...The Orphic Mysteries were performed by ancient Dionysian cults. ...These cults continually sought to affirm that true individuation could not be achieved without interaction between the individual and the collective...The Dionysian Mysteries aimed to restructure the individual so that he was no longer tied to the minimal 'I,' but to a larger community (P. 51).

Jones also asserts that the rituals performed by groups such as the Mysteries were adopted by other institutions in modernity, including the military, and were then introduced into Greek-Letter organizations at institutions of higher education (2004:5). Jones expounds on the relationship between ancient rituals, such as the Mysteries, and modern initiation practices, highlighting the similarities in their functions:

Despite their different geographic locations, all of these rituals display commonalities that have been passed to today's fraternal world in one way or another. These include: (1) purification of the neophyte; (2) some type of symbolic journey, which includes symbols, objects, or other means of identifying initiates (these may include a crown, tattoo or scar, jewelry, and so forth); (3) inspiration by lecture on the expectations of future behavior based on values presented in the initiation; and (4) degrees or multiple levels of initiation, which usually call for some waiting period. Consideration of these ancient and modern rituals illustrate that the themes of death, rebirth and perfection are quite common (P. 52).

Aside from the symbolism involved, what functions do these rituals serve? Jones (2004) lists two specific reasons for the use of such rituals. First, he elaborates on the significance of the ritual for the individual who experiences it:

Completing this ordeal symbolically represents the replacing of a life of hopelessness, selfishness, and solitude with one full of hope, light and fraternal love. All of these aspects, along with the desire to attain and affirm manhood, serve as the carrots of secret orders dangle to attract men. ...These rituals established not only a fraternal identity, but also forged a vision of a complete Self to help men take their place in society (P. 54).

Additionally, having a symbolic journey serves a purpose for the larger organization:

If successful, this common experience gives the organization continuity and structure. Because of this uniformity, a fraternity brother from one part of the world should be able to meet a member from anywhere else and instantly have a connection. This is central to fraternities' notion of brotherhood. Consequently, rituals that achieve such an attachment are strongly functional. Fraternity initiation rituals (of which the pledge process is only a part) are meant to bring about solid, concrete results (P. 49).

Modern Greek fraternity pledging and hazing practices serve as great a purpose as the ancient rituals from which they are borrowed-to provide stability for the organizations, as well as an opportunity for initiates to obtain a new identity (Jones, p. 60). Further, some BGO members feel that the pledge

process is pivotal to being a part of the organization and are not viewed as being vastly different as other ceremonies:

Most supporters of the ritualized pledge process defend it as central to fraternities' purposes. Whether this is a truism does not invalidate the fact that, in one sense, fraternity rituals have the same purposes as rituals found in everyday life. These include religious ceremonies ranging from marriage, baptism and weekly worship to modern rites of passage such as graduations. Rituals, while often containing some emotive messages, exist to define the traditions of an organization. When paired with ceremonies unique to particular groups of people, a standard formula for the organization's activities and teachings is forged. Taken together, ritual and tradition form almost impenetrable barriers that determine whether a person is accepted into the bond or denied access. Bonding rests on the supposition that every member participates in the same ceremony, hears the same words, and lives the same experience (Jones, P. 49).

If these practices are akin to other rituals found in society and history, why are the hazing practices of BGFs seemingly controversial? Jones (2004) warns, "If the functional nature of this operation is not realized, the moorings of this historic phenomenon will remain misunderstood and the particular type of violence that has become part of it will never be resolved (Jones, p. 49).

In a study examining violence and aggression in fraternities, Black, Belknap and Ginsburg (2005) found that violence was prevalent in both white and black fraternities. Where black and white fraternities differ is upon *whom* they perform violence. Black, et al. found that while members of white fraternities tend to perform gender through their sexual violence toward women, members of black fraternities perform gender through their violence toward other men. The researchers also found that black fraternities performed violence on pledges through hazing practices, including, but not limited to, physical assault, the use of degrading nicknames and auctions (Black, et al. 2005). This study confirms Jones' (2004) point that "Modern hazing... is the phenomenon of members taking tests out of the realm of symbolism and catapulting them into reality. Instead of the initiate being threatened with torture to prove his fraternal worth and manliness, he is actually tortured" (p.57). This violence is further exacerbated by the fact that some Greeks view pledging (a vow of membership) and hazing (physical and/or mental assault) as identical (Jones, p. 57). Further, hazing is justified because obtaining membership itself is not as important as *how* one is initiated. Jones (2004) states "Just as accepted avenues to achievement in the larger society exist-attending the 'right'



schools, obtaining the ‘right’ degrees, and living in the ‘right’ neighborhood-avenues of entrance into BGFs that are considered more legitimate and respectable than others exist” (p.60).

If modern hazing is so brutal, why has there been no official cessation of it by BGO leaders? Speaking to the maintenance and continuity of hazing practices, Parks and Brown (2005) state that “Intuitively, another likely explanation is that a significant number of BGLOs condone the practice, either actively or passively, and that group officials have yet to propose a suitable alternative” (p. 447). However, an alternative process has been proposed and attempts to institute this process have been made. Jones also describes the steps involved in the Membership Intake Process (MIP), which has been instituted by BGOs in an effort to replace the old pledge process, as well as diminish and (eventually) eliminate incidences of hazing. During MIP, potential initiates:

- (1) attend an “interest meeting”;
- (2) submit an application and interview;
- (3) accept the invitation to join;
- (4) are initiated; and
- (5) participate in educational sessions (Jones, p. 74).

Ideally, MIP would become an educational session for prospective members to learn more about the organization from which they sought membership (Kimbrough, p. 65).

While MIP would be seemingly easy to institute, it is not only the responsibility BGO officials to ensure that it is. Kimbrough (2003) cites a study conducted by John A. Williams examining BGO members’ attitudes toward MIP. 76 percent of the respondents of Williams’ study felt that MIP would dilute bonds that occur naturally through the pledge process and that 22 percent felt that the MIP movement would eradicate hazing (Kimbrough, p. 66). Williams also concluded that respondents felt that pledging is a necessary component to joining any BGO as a matter of gaining respect among other members and remaining committed to the organization for the remainder of one’s life (Ibid.). Thus, cooperation to successfully employ MIP must come from both BGO members and leaders.

Unfortunately, the findings of Williams' study have proven their merit. In 2010, the General President of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. declared that new membership would cease across the nation (Watkins 2010). This announcement came after a new member of Alpha Phi Alpha pressed charges against another member for aggravated battery (Ibid.). Likewise, the website for Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. includes a Disciplinary Action List citing the various infractions of individual members or chapters within the organization. Of the 10 infringements listed on the website, six are MIP violations ([http://www.pbs1914.org/site/disciplinary\\_action\\_list/](http://www.pbs1914.org/site/disciplinary_action_list/)).

The responsibility of monitoring hazing practices also rests on those who decide to be initiated. The website of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. states that:

Aspirants to the organization should participate only in the sanctioned membership process of the Fraternity. Aspirants must not agree to submit to hazing in order to obtain Fraternity membership. Aspirants must not submit themselves, or agree to submit themselves, to any membership activities that are prohibited by the Fraternity (<http://www.alpha-phi-alpha.com/Page.php?id=157>).

Policies such as this place responsibility on *pledges* to ensure that they are not engaged in hazing activities. Why do young black men continue to engage in hazing? Jones

(2004) considers:

BGFs have historically been concerned with the construction of a particular black American male identity that affirms and continuously reaffirms black manhood. ...The dependence on the physical often occurs because many black men feel (rightfully or wrongfully) that they are not privy to the same opportunities to define themselves as their white counterparts in U.S. society. ...that social and political marginalization helps to promote the black man's search for alternate arenas in which he can be regarded as a man. One way to define manhood that has emerged, particularly in black interracial interactions, is to be physically dominant or able to withstand physical abuse. In this manner, physical toughness eventually can be equated with manliness and this phenomenon carries over into BGFs. This reality helps to explain why many individuals continue to submit to hazing-they feel that it affirms their toughness and manhood (P.7).

Parks and Brown (2005) add that "Because of the emphasis on pledging among some BGLO members, in many circles, members who pledge but are not initiated (ghost members) are often more respected than members who are initiated but do not pledge" (p. 452). It would appear that black men are bartering their social standing to gain a masculine identity by engaging in traditional methods of gender performance, or what Chen calls the *hegemonic bargain* (Johnson, p. 183).

Traditions, bonding and the search for identity aside, some argue that what needs to be taken into consideration are the risks involved in hazing:

In addition to civil action, criminal litigation is the new front on which hazing is fought. Hazers can be charged with simple assault, battery, kidnapping, false imprisonment, manslaughter, or murder. Criminal liability can even be extended to individuals who assist or encourage hazing or who aid and abet or assist in the crime” (Parks and Brown, P. 446).

Contrarily, some might consider these legal risks irrelevant in light of the fact that only six of the 50 states in the US have anti-hazing laws-Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Wyoming (Ibid.). Hazing in BGFs has recently become a point of conversation and contention for Greeks and non-Greeks alike. While these practices are seemingly contradictory to the mission and values of BGFs (Cohen 2011), Parks and Brown (2005) pose that “Because there is such a strong need for this rite of passage-providing a transition from adolescence to adulthood and from prospective membership to full-fledged membership-banning pledging outright is likely counterproductive” (p. 451).

### *Sexuality*

Like race, other aspects of a man’s identity construct their masculinity. Kimmel (2006) states that “What it means to be a man in America depends heavily on one’s class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and region of the country” (p. 4). Understanding the nature of sexuality in the black community from a historical context is necessary for examining how race and sexuality are negotiated among black men.

#### *Slavery, Sexuality and the Beginnings of the black Church*

Collins (2004) states, “For African Americans, exploring how sexuality has been manipulated in defense of racism is not new. Scholars have long examined the ways in which ‘white fear of black sexuality’ has been a basic ingredient of racism” (p. 87). Collins continues, stating that “American historians point to the significance of sexuality to chattel slavery. In the United States, for example, slave owners relied upon an ideology of Black sexual deviance to regulate and exploit

enslaved Africans” (Ibid.). Sexual exploitation and stereotypes affected female and male slaves alike. While slave women were often forced into sexual interactions with plantation masters, slave men were considered sexually threatening, personified in the image of *Nat*, a rebel male slave who white slave masters feared and attempted to subdue (Blassingame 1972).

In the midst of sexual exploitation and the other harsh realities of plantation life, slaves created a space that served as a means of support. Through religious services, slaves were able to release the frustrations and sorrows of their lives (Ibid.). However, as slaves became increasingly influenced by Christianity, their African traditions and beliefs became diluted, and nearly eliminated (Ibid.). Specifically related to sexuality, some slaves encouraged premarital sexual intercourse as part of the courtship process, per their traditional beliefs. With the influence of Christianity, however, premarital sex became equated with sin (Ibid.). Thus, newfound beliefs on sex, among other topics, stemmed from religious influence of slave masters. The Christianization of slaves transformed how slaves viewed life and society. The black church, meanwhile, solidified its reputation as a safe space within the slave community.

#### *The black Church*

While the black church has historically played a significant role in attempting to achieve racial equality and social justice for the black community (Ward 2005), gay blacks are not likely to find support within this institution. In discussing the homosexuality and the black church, Laumann, Ellingson, Mahay, Paik and Youm (2004) state, “The black church is one of the few institutions respected by whites, and anything that could mar its integrity and bring disgrace to the community must be avoided” (p. 331). Coupled with the uncomfortable history of sexual exploitation experienced by blacks, it appears that any stigmas, including those based upon sexual preference, can put the black church at risk of losing any credibility that it has gained.

In his report “Homophobia, hypermasculinity and the US black church”, Elijah G. Ward (2005) credits the black church for having positive impacts on political, cultural and personal levels.

On the contrary, Ward also acknowledges the culture of homophobia that exists in within it.

Ward (2005) sites three explanations that, he claims, account for homophobia in US black churches. First, he discusses religious beliefs, as homophobia can be found and validated in theologian scholarship. Blacks have historically lacked trust in a Euro-centered model of biblical scholarship. Thus, within the black church, Bible scriptures are often literally interpreted-a practice dating back to slavery (p. 495). Second, Ward claims that as a result of the sexual exploitation that blacks have endured, they fear sexuality in general, and further, any deviation from what is considered “normal” sexual behavior. From this, he claims, homophobia prevails in the black community (Ibid.). In addition, the stereotypes that prevail in the media-the jezebel, the buck, and the welfare queen-deter blacks from discussing sexuality in any form, as these images have the power to maintain negative stereotypes about blacks and hypersexuality (Ibid.). Finally, Ward posits that homophobia in the black community prevails as race survival consciousness, with black masculinity being perceived as hypermasculinity, and that whiteness and homosexuality both equated with a lack of strength (p. 496). Finally, Ward states that homophobia is also perpetuated in the black church by ministers and heads of the church community (Ibid.). What impact, then do these messages from church representatives have on members of the black community?

#### *Sexuality and the black Community*

A recent study by the Pew Research Center found that blacks were more likely view homosexuality as morally wrong than whites or Latinos (Shepard 2009). If the black church and its leaders have the ability to influence congregations as Ward claims, we must look at how the messages of homophobia perpetuated by the black church shape the attitudes of church members and their attitudes toward homosexuality.

As previously stated, masculinity is partially determined by a man’s sexuality. Connell (2005) outlines homosexual masculinity as follows:

Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious home decoration to receptive anal pleasure. Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. And hence-in the view of some gay theorists-the ferocity of homophobic attacks (P. 78).

Thus, homosexual masculinity as defined by Connell differs vastly from the hypermasculine form of masculinity perpetuated by the black church. In the *Sexual Organization of the City*, Laumann et al. (2004) state, "Some African Americans believe that homosexuality is a white cultural phenomenon and that the gay community is white" (p. 102). The authors continue, stating that, "...while the black community is highly homophobic, it does tolerate homosexuality as long as individuals do not present themselves publicly as being gay" (p. 112).

In his study on hypermasculinity and the black church, Ward (2005) claims that homophobia is necessary in constructing masculinity, as homosexuality needs to be condemned in order for hegemonic masculinity to be upheld. Ward states that for heterosexual black men, those who would not otherwise express homophobic ideas "may feel pressure to do so as a result of repeated, impassioned church-inspired homophobic messages" and that "the attitudes of black men are likely to be shaped by these communications" amongst themselves (p. 498). Further, Ward asserts:

...expressing hypermasculinity is socially popular in many black male circles. It seizes upon opportunities for projecting male dominance, possibly functioning as a means to vent the extra frustrations that black men experience in a racist society, while also shoring up a sense of identity in an uncertain social world. Expressing hypermasculinity also serves as the added purpose of precluding questioning about one's sexual orientation, through a generous and decisive clarification of any potential ambiguity about the matter (P. 499).

In a study on attitudes toward homosexuals in the black community, Lemelle and Battle (2004) found that like black women, as black men's church attendance increased, their attitudes toward gay men became less favorable (p. 46). However, unlike female respondents, for male respondents, the relationship between church attendance and attitudes toward gay men was statistically significant (p. 45). Likewise, among the larger black male population, the variables of age, income, geographic residence, or education had no impact on attitudes toward gay men (p. 48).

In addition to discourse condemning homosexuality, the act of sex itself becomes a pivotal

to defining black masculinity. In her book *Black Sexual Politics*, Collins (2004) states,

“...sexual prowess grows in importance as a marker of Black masculinity. For far too many Black men, all that seems to be left to them is access to the booty [uncivilized sexual activity], and they can become depressed or dangerous if that is denied...Black men defining masculinity in terms of their prowess in conquering the booty” (p. 151).

What, then, is the impact of homophobic messages on homosexual black men in the black community where their identity is not always accepted? Laumann, et al. (2004) state,

The internal culture of same-sex markets is composed of alternative sets of scripts for behavior and identity... At the same time, individuals who participate in same-sex markets must attend to external sexual cultures. These include the broad cultural scenario of heterosexual monogamy and particular group sexual cultures such as...the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ position on homosexuality common among African American groups (P. 100).

Thus, black homosexuals must navigate participating in two realities, being gay in same sex markets, and projecting heterosexual interests in other places. While navigating the internal culture of the gay community, gay blacks must also negotiate their racial identity. Laumann, et al. (2004) state that “...race/ethnicity serves as an alternative—often the primordial—identity for persons of color who engage in homosexual behavior. ...In brief, one can hide being gay, but one cannot hide being African American, and, in a community that reports strong negative attitudes toward homosexuality, keeping one’s homosexuality hidden may be the preferred option” (p. 102). Finally, the authors assert that gay persons of color are faced with

...a situation that reinforces negative attitudes about homosexuality among the larger heterosexual communities in which these gays and lesbians find themselves and helps keep same-sex sexual behavior, relationships and organizations private (P. 102).

So, like heterosexual black men who, according to Collins (2004), engage in sexual activity in order to define their masculinity, Ward (2005) posits that for gay and bisexual black men, there is pressure to live with internalized homophobia.

In a study on homophobic attitudes within fraternities, Hall and LaFrance (2007) found that the social adjustment function was directly related to attitudes about homosexual fraternity members.

According to Hall and LaFrance (2007):

...the social adjustment function predicts that members of any given group will adopt attitudes that are in accordance with the identity and goals of the entire group. In doing so, the group member obtains social reinforcement for adopting these attitudes and further aligns his/her identity with that of the organization. By taking on the organizational identity, the individual is likely to evaluate the group as a whole more positively (P. 41).

Hall and LaFrance also posit that as men denounce any gay identity through their communication and maintain relationships with other heterosexual men (their fraternity brothers), gaining acceptance from hypermasculine individuals makes *them* appear to be heterosexual.

In their study, Hall and LaFrance found that the social adjustment function was directly related to attitudes about gay fraternity members. Further, respondents felt that the presence of a gay fraternity member would lessen the trust within the fraternity, as well as negatively affect recruitment and relationships with sororities (p. 53). In addition, as homophobia increased among respondents, their concerns about being perceived as homosexual increased as well (p. 54). Finally, the researchers found that hetero-identity concern was not one-dimensional, but rather based upon the respondent's communication *and* the perception of the communication of others (Ibid.). Thus, respondents made more homophobic comments as their concerns about being perceived as gay increased (Ibid.).

What relevance does understanding the black church and sexuality have for the black fraternity and its members? Collins (2004) states that "The Black Church remains the linchpin of African American communal life, and its effects can be seen in Black music, fraternal organizations, neighborhood associations, and politics" (p. 107). Thus, the black church has a significant impact on other black institutions. Black Greek Organizations maintain values, principles and guidelines grounded in Christianity, which is further proof of the influence of the church, impacting the values and attitudes of members of these organizations as well.



## **METHODS**

### *Respondents*

Respondents were sought through snowball sampling via a recruitment script that was e-mailed to the members of the principal investigator's social network, who then forwarded the message to BGO members. Members of BGFs who were interested in participating in the study then contacted the principal investigator directly.

Data yielded from this study was collected from interviews conducted with nine members from three black fraternities governed by the National Pan-Hellenic Council. At the time of the interviews, respondents to this study were between the ages of 25 and 35. Seven of the respondents were single and had never been married; one had a marriage that was annulled; and one was engaged. None of the respondents had children at the time of the interview. Collectively, the estimated annual income of the interviewees ranged between \$20,000 and \$150,000 per year. All respondents had at least earned a Bachelor's degree, with three having also earned at least one Master's degree. Five of the interviewees had at least one relative who is a member of a BGO. Current membership status (active and financial) had no bearing on whether BGF members could participate in the study.

Of the nine respondents interviewed for this study, six of them became members of BGFs during their undergraduate tenure. The other three joined after they completed undergrad. Seven interviewees attended undergraduate institutions located in the Midwest; of the other two, one attended an institution on the East coast; the other, an institution in the Southeast. With the exception of one respondent, who completed his undergraduate education at an HBCU, the others attended institutions that, by their claims, had predominantly white and/or Asian populations.

### *Instruments*

The guiding questions for the interview focused on six main topics: early life, life before fraternity membership, pledging a fraternity, life after fraternity membership, sexuality and their lives today. While an interview schedule was used, respondents were allowed to deviate into other topics.

Respondents were asked to provide demographic information, including their age, marital status, income, the number of children they have and the highest level of education they completed at the time of the interview for the purposes of creating an aggregate profile of all respondents. The complete list of guiding questions used for this study appears in Appendix A. Transcriptions of the interviews appear in a separate document (Appendix B).

### *Procedures*

When possible, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the principal investigator. Phone interviews were conducted if geographic distance prevented the principal investigator and the respondent from meeting in person. Respondents were not compensated for their participation in this research.

As the information shared by respondents during interviews could potentially mar their personal reputation, but also the reputations of their fraternity's national organization and chapter, verbal consent to participate in the study was obtained from all respondents in lieu of signatures in order to protect their identities. Additionally, respondents' names were not used in any materials for this study, including but not limited to interview notes, recordings and transcriptions. In compliance with Illinois State law [Illinois Eavesdropping Act 720 ILCS 5/14], respondents were asked for permission to record their interviews and, further, were informed that they could request recording cease at any point and for any duration of time during the interview. Moreover, respondents were informed that they could also refuse to answer specific questions. Seven of the nine interviews were conducted face-to-face; the other two were conducted by phone due to geographic distance. The interviews varied in duration with the shortest lasting 30 minutes and the longest lasting over three hours. All audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim by the principal investigator. The transcriptions were then analyzed for common themes pertaining to the research question.

## FINDINGS

*We are responsible for  
developing a man.  
These are your fathers and  
your brothers.*

-Interview Respondent

*Negotiating Identity:  
Early Understandings of Gender and Race*

Of the nine respondents, only one grew up without both parents actively involved in his life. The others had involvement from both parents, irrespective of their parents' marital status or living arrangements. In discussing the values of the homes they grew up in, respondents recalled experiences that shaped their early understanding of what it is to be a man:

One thing that...I distinctively remember was my grandfather would get paid, he put his check on the table and he had to ask for allowance from his own money. I was raised seeing that.

...being that it was 3 boys and no girls, it was like, we wasn't the most emotional type of family. My mom being the only woman, so it was kind of hard core. We wasn't really touchy feely, and huggy kissy, "I love yous" and stuff like that.

The interplay between male and female dynamics in their families informed respondents' views of gender as well:

So I come from a very patriarchal Catholic family on both sides. So, the values were...it was a very male-driven but strong female environment, which basically meant that the women in our family, if they opted to stay home, it was still *their* choice and they were strong and they were allowing themselves to be in a patriarchal situation as opposed to it being something they had no choice in.

...my father and I always talk about this and joke about this-I was never taught right from wrong, I was just taught that every choice you make has consequences and as a man you have to deal with those consequences, so whether the choice is wrong, if you're able to deal with those consequences and accept them as a man, then that's a choice that you can make for yourself. But on my mother's side, that's where I got a strong moral code and moral fiber and treat people with respect and caring and follow the golden rule, things of that nature.

In addition to understanding manhood, respondents also began to understand the concept of race from as early as age four. While many respondents became aware of race and racism through television, other began to understand race through their familial relationships:

My father made me aware of race probably at age eight. I used to call him a racist all the time, because he used to say everything was black and white, and *the white man this; the white man doesn't do this; the black man won't give you this*. But, when I got older I realized that he was really speaking out of some truth and not out of some bitterness. He was speaking a truth on a level that my mind was not ready to grasp. I used to call my dad a racist all the time. You get older and you come to understand what he's saying.

My mother more so than anybody was very adamant on us understanding where people would try to place us in society, not necessarily who we were in society, but the boxes people tried to put us in. Very Angela Davis-ish, my mother taught us a lot about society and how her experience being

bussed to all white affluent schools when she was elementary school and living in that era and what that meant... She was the person who taught me about race...

I can't remember a time when I wasn't aware of race because, and its particularly from my father, he always made sure to identify himself, and made sure that I identified myself as a black man and made sure that I knew that that would follow me for the rest of my life and that that was something to be proud of, to carry with you, that it carried great responsibility, and often times was going to be a great burden. But it was not one that you should run from. I can remember as a young child, though, because I grew up around both my neighbors... were white, a lot of my friends growing up were white, I remember when I was seven years old I told my mother... that I wanted to be white and she was shocked and didn't understand why. And she asked me why and I said I liked a girl in school who was white. And from our upbringing as many times in our households especially when you have a larger female influence, as a black man you are told *that* is not the way you're supposed to go. So I think that if I wanted to date a white girl I had to be white otherwise it could not happen, so that event always sticks out in my mind in terms of the racial dynamic that I grew up with.

Respondents also learned about race and racism through their interactions with others. While many respondents lived near or went to school with peers of other races and learned about race in that way, one young man recalled a specific incident with racism:

I went to a predominantly white high school and I just kind of got the picture. They weren't overt racists. It was just the little things that they did. Or the little questions that they would ask and you would have to just step back and say, "If you weren't my friend, I'd kill you." Like one of my friends, he used to crack jokes... and he used to call me a nigger. But looking back, if I had as much sense as I do now, I would hurt him. But still, it's just the fact that you became aware of stuff like that.

Respondents learned to conceptualize manhood through not only their observations of the men in their lives, but also, through the interactions between the men and women in their environment (Connell 2005). Early on, they became aware of how to engage in gendered kinships (Lorber 1994). However, that many received their "moral codes" of conduct from women and understandings of control (over one's self) and financial responsibility from men displays elements of the models of hegemonic masculinity. The fact that respondents were not taught to be dominant *over* women, but rather, work in *with* them, displays an element of Afrocentric masculinity. (McClure 2006). It is also evident that respondents became aware of race and racism, and the relationship between this and their gendered identities, being members of both dominant and oppressed groups (Stewart 2008).

*Negotiating Identity:  
Race, Gender and Higher Education*

If applicable, respondents were asked about their decision to attend institutions that were predominantly white:

I wanted to go to a predominantly white institution because it was more realistic of what the real world is. Nothing against Historically Black Colleges, but I didn't feel like it was a good representation of what you were going to come across when you graduated and [were] in corporate America. From grammar school to high school, my schools were predominantly black...so I wanted a different experience...as well as I was going into [a particular field], and at the time this school ranked like number 3 in the US.

It wasn't bad. I appreciate the high school I went to, being a predominantly white high school. It really prepares you because people tend to live in a world that's all black when they go to [public high school]...or just hang around people from their neighborhood. I took advantage of going to a predominantly white high school, so fitting into a white environment wasn't a far transition for me.

One attendee of a Midwestern university spoke positively about a social experience he had with a white male:

...one of my good friends was white and I was the first black dude he had ever met...we hung out...I really didn't notice [racial difference] that much. ...there was white people, I would hang out with them, like obviously, it's gonna be different conversations and stuff like that but I didn't really notice it. Maybe that's why I'm one of the few people that went to [the school that I went to] and didn't mind going and actually enjoyed the experience.

One respondent discussed his varied experiences with white students on his campus:

...It was definitely...I can honestly say that true racism did not set in for me until I got to college. And the reason that it didn't...is because I always knew that there were ignorant people in the world and there were going to be people who don't like you for whatever reason-that's their loss. But this was the first time where I believed, naïve enough, that I was in a situation of educated people who had the mind set that you are who you are and either you accept it or not...so surprise, surprise, I get into this environment where a lot of people don't like you because of what they don't have or who you are or what they look like and then you also have people who were very warm to the fact-people who had never engaged with a black person before because of their upbringing who are like, *Look, I want to understand this, I want to have a diverse experience, I want to ask questions*...it was very eye-opening all together. People's personalities were sometimes dictated by their upbringing or far from it because they didn't want to be like their parents.

Further, he discussed his experiences in the classroom:

Well, to understand my personality, I'm a very confident person, but some people may consider it to be overconfident, but its actually me being comfortable, because I tell people a lot, I got a lot of hugs when I was little, and I came from a loving environment. You knew what you knew, and if you need to share what you knew, you did, and if you don't know, you ask questions until you find out the appropriate answer. So, I walked in with the same sense of entitlement that a lot of

people, specifically non-black people, have and don't realize that they do. And since mine is pronounced as theirs is, it's actually perceived as me being over confident or arrogant. So when it came to the classroom, it was a "you're a know-it-all" situation. I learned a lot from them and the experiences that they brought to the table, but it was a situation where I walked in wanting to learn from everybody around the table and got the feeling that some people believed that I didn't have anything to share. Or that I should just be happy to have actually even be in that environment.

Other respondents discussed the impact of race on their academic experiences:

I thought we had to prove ourselves against the racism on campus, because we were such a small minority there particularly in [our academic field], we had a bad retention rate for blacks, really bad. It was always a matter of wanting to prove yourself and not wanting to fail. The way you feel, somebody else can give 80 percent, you feel like you have to give 130 percent.

It wasn't many black people in there, so, considering my background, I still wasn't comfortable associating with whites all that well. It would probably be me and maybe one or two more black people in the classes, so we kind of connected, which probably wasn't the smartest thing because we didn't do that well [laughter]. We need [whites and Asians] on our team too.

The relationship with other black men...that basically became strong because there were so few of us and there wasn't that many of us, especially in the departments we decided to major in...there weren't a lot of black representation in those areas, so naturally, when we saw each other in the building or saw each other in different classrooms, we would naturally migrate toward each other instead of push each other away because it was very few of us in class, so when it came to studying, we would meet up in the library together and even with men of different races, but when it came to us it was more so very important for us to meet and get know each other and work together to get through the percentage of failure rates that they had on everybody-especially black folks. We couldn't...we weren't expected to get as high as we got.

Irrespective of their experiences with white students, respondents who attended

predominantly white institutions expressed their need to seek out other black students on campus:

Socially, outside of class it was great. ...When I first got to [college], in my mind I said, how am I gon' meet other black people? How am I going to interact with whoever out here? So I started playing basketball everyday. I figured if I'm gonna meet some black folks, they gotta be on the court (laughter). ... [One guy] introduced me to everybody else. We were cool. We were tight. Outside of school, they came to my neighborhood from time to time and I went to theirs. We were instant family. It was great.

...What happens is, you go into a survival you didn't even know you had, and that is meeting with folks that you normally wouldn't might even attempt to-I didn't go to college to...only hang out with black people. That never was my intent, but based upon everything that happens around you...I felt like I didn't have a choice. ...people going through similar social issues as I was and that I could relate to...regardless of class or where we came from in the country or any other type of segregation that you would look at.

One respondent discussed being grounded in his racial identity while being making conscious efforts to engage with students who were not black:

Being a black man on campus, I actually felt very secure and very strong because I knew my worth, and I grew in worth throughout my college years. I was a bit more "militant" in terms of my worth and the places that I was involved in and was active. But my position was to never be a



black student on campus; I wanted to be a student on campus who was black. And that means to be involved with as many different people as possible. I regularly went to Asian American Association meetings and the organization for Latino American students. I went to different programs and salsa lessons and hip hop lessons, I wanted to be as involved as possible, but as a black man I felt very secure in who I was and wanted to be sure that everyone knew that being black was in any way not a hindrance or in any way an advantage, it's a part of who I am. Arguably the largest part because...I feel black first.

Respondents discussed their efforts to create a diverse experience for themselves:

Social experiences were normal I would say. I met new friends-a lot of new friends that I'm responsible for establishing long term relationships for today. I'd say my friendship experience up there was very diverse. I had a lot of white friends, black friends, friends of every race basically. So that the social make up was very normal as far as meeting new people. You had some people who kind of shielded themselves or blocked themselves out due to racial barriers naturally in the classroom setting but, still it was a pretty normal college experience.

I felt that I was one of few. It wasn't a discouraging feeling. At first it was initially coming up there my freshman year, it was discouraging, but I remember things that my high school teachers told me as far as how diverse the area of college would be as a whole, so I took that into consideration and I kind of applied it to what I needed to do and fuel my determination to actually do good and keep up with the majority that was different from myself. Basically it just...it was more so exciting because as young black males we're already classified to not even get through college and most of the guys I came up there with, who I met up there my freshman year winded up disappearing anyway. I took that as an indicator to get on my business.

Negotiating racial identity among students of other races on campus was not the only challenge faced by respondents. They also spoke of the challenge of negotiating race among other black students:

...it was rough at first because other black men didn't see me as black enough. That happened a lot. ...I just wasn't black enough, particularly when it came down to music. I listened to everything and as a performer I am classically trained, so my voice...at that time was much more classically oriented. A lot more "legit"...like opera. So, I had to...make my voice more R&B, more soulful...and because of that...it was difficult to connect to other black men.

The one respondent who attended an HBCU discussed how skin color and class became a source of contention among black students on his campus:

At first...it was kind of strange. Being from [a major city], and growing up...going to diverse schools, I was used to being around different types of people and when you go away to a school like that, where [people from my home town] are in the minority, you know, you have very few people that can relate to you. I was kind of lucky because one guy, I went to elementary school with went [to school with me] so I kind of stayed in touch with him. ...I knew the stereotype of the school I went to about [bourgeois], upper crust black people and stuff like that and a lot of that was prevalent like light-skinned versus dark-skinned and they would butt heads on where they were from or people would make assumptions about someone by how someone was dressed.

Isolation based upon race in institutions of higher education was reported by the majority of respondents to this study (McClure 2006). Additionally, there was some psychological distress (Smith, et al. 2007). Despite the varied experiences with students of numerous racial backgrounds, respondents sought fulfilling relationships with other black students to create an environment of inclusion (Ibid.). In some cases, relationships with other black students became tense, based upon the “legitimacy” of one’s blackness, issues of skin color or class.

*Being “In the Cut”*

As told by one respondent, hazing is essential to developing men: “As you become a man, when you think about it, what really disciplines you? ...There’s only one way to do that and that’s through physical pain.” To outsiders who have not participated in hazing (mental or physical), the logic behind inflicting and receiving pain may not exist. However, through the interviews conducted for this study, respondents provided insight on the rationale behind hazing in BGFs and further, developing a black male identity. One respondent in particular eloquently expressed the historical and cultural nature of hazing in BGFs:

[The older brothers who were going to pledge us] sat us down and said *Look, what is going to come up next is going to be very difficult, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, it’s going to be very difficult. You have primary responsibilities in this order: God, family, school, [the organization]. Those are your priorities in that order. The reason you will be going through this is we have a strong adherence and desire to enforce a historical knowledge and identity within our members. A large part, if not the largest part of African American historical identity comes from slavery, so you will, of course, not be a slave, but some of the things you will endure will have a slave-esque or be in the realm of slave life, physically, mentally, so its very easy for one to lose one’s identity, which slaves did. They did not have much of an identity except among themselves.* [The brothers] also made it a point to point out to us that our well-being was of top priority. We had to submit medical reports before any of this took place, so they take the greatest precaution if we had any type of medical concern or condition that would prevent us from doing any activity, we would not do that activity. But that really sat with me well, because I’ve always in my mind...like we have no concept of what slaves had to go through, none whatsoever. Imagine if our life was like that now. So if you can get any idea, any concept of that loss of identity, that loss of concept of time, that loss of otherworldly possessions and things that they just did not have access or opportunity to, that’s something that I was interested in, and that’s something that peaked my interest a great deal.

Another respondent also discussed the parallel between the oppression faced by the founders of BGFs and modern forms of hazing in developing a strong morale:

R: ...it's about being mentally strengthened. ...as that process goes along, you growin' up. You developin' yourself mentally. Physically, you're still battered. You gotta keep in mind, when these fraternities were created, they *were* being physically battered, so they had to keep a strong mind. So mentally you had to stay strong no matter what. You get beat on. You can imagine what they were going through in 1913. Hazing didn't start until after WWII, but still, they didn't need hazing [prior to that]. They were getting hazed. The process was stronger than it is now, without getting hit on.

AS: You said they were stronger without getting hit on.

R: I do, just because of what they faced outside of the process. In that physical and even mental humiliation, far trumps getting hit with a wooden paddle. You're trying to mimic what they really did, what they went through. But the difference is today we need mental strengthening, just like they did.

Another respondent spoke to the difficulties of pledging, but also the long-term, positive impact that the practice has:

R: It aint easy. (Laughter.) But what people gotta realize is that its not...I'm not gon' lie, you get hit. They say "non-hazing". "Non-hazing" now is probably not "non-hazing", but when I was coming in, you getting' it. And it's not just you getting beat 'cause you getting beat. A lot of brothers wouldn't be in it if that was the case. I said myself I before I joined that I wouldn't get beat on, so when I realized what it was for and the symbolism in it, the symbolism is a strong part in any fraternity. But I realized [what] that symbolism represented. And it does work. It works. No doubt about it, it works. It works for the rest of your life (laughter) from being humble to respecting your elders, valuing your time, perseverance, to being an example. Everything stems from that. It's like being made [hazed] means that you're really being born again, you're broken down. You shave your head and all of that because you're like a new born baby. Really, what happens when you're made right, you're born again. You brought down to your most humble state like a boy, and then you develop from that into a better man.

Additionally, respondents spoke about developing male identity as also being central to hazing:

AS: You said that the process teaches you your responsibilities as a black man and the characteristics a man should have. Like what?

R: Just from very basic things to some more elaborate ones. The way you walk, you need to walk with confidence, people should be able to look at you and say *He's proud, He's a man*, you know, shoulders back, chest out, head up, as well as more elaborate things like the family dynamic, definitely are proponents that the man should be the head of the household within a partnership with his wife, but should...be able to take care of and provide for his family. There is not a large emphasis on any type of vulnerability or sensitivity of any sort. As far as what the man archetype should be. I will say that there was never any chastising or punishment for showing vulnerability or crying. A lot of times, it was encouraged to promote strong emotional health, but those were in emotional situations. If it was in a physical, if it was a reaction to a physical situation...it was definitely shot down immediately.

Another respondent echoed these sentiments about hazing:

...this is the most valuable reason...for instance, someone says "What color is the sky?" and I say blue, somebody else says "Naw, its green" and they keep sayin' "Naw its green" for hours, and I say "Naw its green", well I'ma get hit while I'm sayin blue and *especially* because I said green, because I changed my answer. In a man, it teaches you that you have to be stable, and that's one thing that men, especially black men, do not have in our families today. There is no stability. So

when I look back on that, I value that. If you're wrong in the beginning, you gotta stay wrong. If you're right, stay right, whatever, you need to be consistent in your answer. That's the bottom line. All three of those points I just said, all put together, you basically are gonna get hit everyday. But it's all, it's the same reason. Everybody's made pretty much the same. It depends upon the person. The principals are the same.

Additionally, respondents suggested that physical hazing facilitates a process that allows pledges to effectively learn about the history of the organization that they are going to join:

... [You get hit] for a lot of reasons, one I say the org is an oral tradition. Nothing is written down. When you have that kind of pressure on you to memorize something that's not written down, exactly word for word, you develop a pride in it, so you don't want anybody messing it up.

Along with having a sense of black history and black male identity, some respondents mentioned hazing as a means to facilitate a bond with other members of their pledge line:

...basically the reason for hazing and a lot of people ask...well, I never got it myself at first, but [people] ask *Why do you have somebody abuse you or hit on you* and stuff like that. Basically, the whole entire process of hazing is to get you to the point...because you don't know those people you're pledging with, the hazing process is supposed to get you to where you'll lay your life on the line for those people that you initially don't know. So the closer you become with your comrades who you're pledging with and the more you guys look out for each other, the closer you'll get to understanding what hazing is, and that's when the process is sped up, but that's when the process gets more understood and then you're brought into the org because you know what it means to show what we call altruism....A lot of people come in and think you just get paddled...and then you're in. No, it's to get you to the point where you have to develop a bond with these...individuals to the point you have a tight knit with them as you would with your regular friends.

How specific hazing tactics were utilized to generate brotherhood was discussed:

This is the thing, they wouldn't hit you. This is another thing that would develop the brotherhood aspect for the rest of your life. If you got [something] wrong, they would hit your brother and they would tell your brother "Get in the cut" if you're wrong. So what that makes you do is learn or be more efficient for the sake of your brother. So we didn't want to walk in session getting something wrong, because you didn't want anybody else to get hit on. And another thing that developed brotherhood is usually when men get into fights, a lot of times, that kind of bonds you a little bit because, if my line brother got hit on for me, something I did, of course after sessions you're riding on each other because you messed up and somehow in that, you develop a really close bond, just like real brothers. Somehow in that there's a bond. You can't describe it. So that's another reason why it happened.

One respondent stressed the necessity of hazing in order to create a universal experience for all members that crossed after him:

Honestly, I don't [haze pledges] any more. But I did. Like, after I [became a member]...when you went over, you feel like you have an understanding of what you went through and why, and you wanna make sure someone else is gonna go through the same thing, but at the same time, its kind of a bonding moment, like I went through this, so you need to go through this and connect on that level. When you come across a brother that didn't go through that, or didn't go through anything, they're still [a member] at the end of the day, but you don't connect on the same type of level

because you don't have the same commonalities about what you did to get your letters versus what he had to do. ...I look at it as part of the process.

While hazing is used as a method to facilitate fraternal relationships and construct manhood, these practices cannot simply remain romanticized. Respondents spoke to the physical and mental impact of hazing that created challenges for them:

The physical aspect was the most difficult. Pledging is not a fun experience, to say the least. You go through a lot of physical strain, whether that be standing up, standing for long periods of time, paddling or just certain physical trials and tribulations that you have to go through and can be very hectic and can run a very large strain on your mental capacity too, because its not just the physical portion, its very difficult in that it can wear on you too, to where your morale and your spirit gets drained, not to mention you also have to be a student and I find that's where most people who pledge where they take the largest brunt of their burden is on their academics, which is unfortunate.

Yeah. It affected my grades, not as drastically as it might have others. The reason why it did for me and my line is because we were made by guys that were not in college. The chapter was inactive for a while, so we were made by guys who were not knowledgeable about having classes. They didn't care, they had to work, but they didn't have no homework. But they were sympathetic to it at times, we had sessions where we did homework. Every night we weren't getting beat on. My grades slipped, just because my mind was focused on...and it wasn't because they were not in school. The protocol was God, family school, work, then [the fraternity]...so that comes before [the fraternity].

I think I dropped a class just 'cause I don't think [the brothers] did a very good job at managing that, 'cause you get some people in there who just like hazing people, so you get some folks who just like that. I don't know what the problem is, but I think I dropped a class and then that was the biggest thing, I'm like, okay, I'm gonna drop this class.

Mentally, you can't think about anything but that. It's like everything becomes secondary. ...You're in class, you'll listen, but you're not listening, and it really didn't get that intense until...the hazing started because before then I could concentrate. I was fine because it wasn't that bad. But when it gets to the point where it gets physical, you're going to class, you're trying to keep a job, trying to be a good family member.... So did it screw with me mentally? Absolutely. Did it screw me emotionally? Yeah. Every day is the same day till life becomes so monotonous. You know what, it gets to a point when it's like, shower-do I really want to? Shower, do I care? Brush my teeth? Who gives a shit? ...I lost weight. I was sleep deprived. I got addicted to pain killers. ...I was in so much pain I didn't sleep. I could not lay anywhere but my stomach. Even getting into bed was a task. Then I had a job that I had to be up for. So I'm getting home at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes I wouldn't go to bed until 6 in the morning because I was in so much pain. Then I had to be at work...and I got fired from the job.

In discussing BGF membership, respondents spoke about how they attempted to take the emphasis away from aspects of the fraternity that only encouraged hegemonic masculinity. A respondent discussed how his leadership responsibilities in his chapter steered his decision to neither engage in nor condone hazing:

I wasn't a big hazer 'cause one...I was the president [of my chapter], so I have to think if [an extreme case of hazing] happened... the chapter gets snatched ...I wasn't punchin' people, but more like neck, the wood is like, you know, that thing is...[when using wooden paddles] people would get the crowhop, some people got running starts, I mean crazy, like my thing was like when...if something happens, my name is going to be on the front page of the newspaper, not yours. So I gotta make sure this stuff isn't going crazy. And then after I graduated, I was like, I'm not touching anybody, I've got stuff to lose now, so. You all can do whatever you want to do, I'm not touching anybody.

Many of the respondents also spoke of about taking responsibility for not only deemphasizing hazing activities in their chapter, but also the importance of their studies, as they observed the impact hazing has on one's academics:

You get geeked up to be in the organization, you have to get geeked up to do things to keep the organization in good standing...you have to get excited about every aspect of the organization...the process is probably the strongest focal point. Afterwards...me and my LBs we made sure we were in an academic good standing, but it wasn't the same type of process to make sure we were good at surviving a session. We checked on each other as far as grades and we did library stuff together, but it wasn't as strongly [emphasized] in the process because we had to finish that process [to become members of the organization]. ...Academics were important...there's a sense of urgency there....we don't want to get the organization [ 's chapter] suspended...

I think I dropped a class just 'cause I don't think [the brothers that pledged me] did a very good job at managing that...when I crossed, I was the president for 2 years and I set up a study group 'cause like, study, I mean you not graduating doesn't really help me, it definitely doesn't help you. So, I don't know how helpful it was 'cause, you know, people still gon' do what they wanna do.

Almost as important as the fact that they were hazed, respondents discussed the impact of having participated in this practice, and specifically, how other men viewed them positively for enduring the process. One respondent, who is now openly gay, described how he was received by black men on his campus once he became a member of a black fraternity:

Black men all of a sudden became really friendly to me. I found myself being able to count how many guys engaged me in conversation that had never spoken to me before. ...people who were cool [with me before] were still cool with me. ...for the most part, black men's perceptions of me it was improved, which personally was upsetting for me. ...the only thing that changed is the jacket I'm wearing...Does [being a member of a BGF] make me more of a man somehow in your eyes?

Another respondent discussed his chapter's well-respected reputation for hazing:

R: Dudes just kind of showed me more respect once I crossed.

AS: Why do you think that was?

R: I think there's a large Greek presence in the school and the city where I went to school, so it was kind of known what Greeks did and how we got down and that we did not, as we call it, skate [when aspirants sign a piece of paper to gain membership to a Greek organization as opposed to

pledging], so dudes just kind of recognized that oh, he went through that, so-... You may get less respect, but you don't have to pledge.

AS: But you all were known for not skating?

R: Yeah.

AS: So there was a level of respect given to you because [you did not skate] by men outside of the organization?

R: By men outside of the organization and by other Greeks too because they knew how we got down, and we knew how they got down, so there's a mutual respect there. There's, of course, healthy rivalries, but there was never 'we do this, and y'all don't do that', because we're friends, we go to the same schools and have the same classes and know each other, so there's an acknowledgement of you got down and we got down.

Respondents also discussed how they were perceived differently by women upon being initiated into a BGF. One respondent described how women responded to him after he crossed by quoting rapper Mike Jones, stating simply, "Back then they didn't want me, now they all up on me".

Other respondents spoke to how they gained more attention from women upon completing the pledge process:

Women and men [showed me more respect]. I mean, not that men came at me like that, but the fact is all of sudden now you want to take time to learn my name, now you wanna hang out, now you wanna admit you might have had a crush or some crack ass thing like that. Man, get away from me. I mean, I enjoyed it, I'm not gonna lie, I did enjoy it, but the thing is...the fact that all these people are just enamored with you. All these people just want to be around you. And I ain't did nothing but pledge. ...I'm not gon' lie, it's like being on the football team. When you're on the football team, people want to screw you. People want to be around you because you represent something bigger. You represent...this, not a group of elitists, because I don't want to say that, but you represent this, being part of this group, just being part of something. People just stand out like that, you know. So you're part of all that. You represent all that.

One respondent illustrated why he believed that women were more responsive to him after he gained membership into a BGF:

People look at it as someone who's in a fraternity or sorority as a stepping stone. They know that...if somebody's with that type of person in some way, shape or form that person is not broke or locked up or uneducated or jobless or anything like that.

Respondents were also asked about their experiences hazing other men. Upon being asked about how active his hazing participation was, one respondent said, "I just did it enough to keep you honest because I know, for us, people who weren't hazin' wasn't get no respect". While all respondents admitted to participating in the mental and/or physical hazing of another pledge, one

respondent detailed his reasons for hazing as a form of controlling another individual:

AS: So as far as hazing someone else, what did you take away from those instances, if anything?

R: It can be fun.

AS: Why is it fun?

R: Because it's just so fun sometimes to me!

AS: Its fun to paddle somebody?

R: No not that part. I like the mental thing. That's the fun part, because honestly, the physical part-the physical part, you can deal with and even though I was on painkillers everyday, I can deal with it. The mental part was what was destroying me.

AS: So you found it fun to inflict the mental hazing on others?

R: Yeah, the mental part is what's going to get you.

AS: Why?

R: *Because*...those are scars you can't see. ...You can mess with someone's mind. Those are scars you can't see. So...you know what I might do, I might go one night and beat the hell out of you, just to let you know I was there. The mind games come when I say "I'm coming back" and I know I'm not gonna show up. To instill that fear in that young man, that's *so* fun.

AS: Why is that fun though?

R: Because he doesn't know when I'm going to come back, but it also makes him sharp, because me, I'm big on information. I need you to know everything...about the org that you're going to be running. So when you know I'm coming and you don't know your information...you're gonna get the information. When I call, you'd be amazed at how much more they know than the last time I saw them...at how much sharper they are.

AS: So what does that do for you on a personal level?

R: What does it do to me?

AS: Yes.

R: I learned this through domestic violence training. When you're the abuser, or really, when you're the hazer...you love the power of control. You fall in love with the power of control. And the fact that I can control you this much to do XY and Z, you fall in love with that type of control.

Another respondent expressed a vastly different opinion:

I mean...with people getting hurt, I'm not sure if you really need that. If you do it, it needs to be controlled, because you have people who are on different ends of the spectrum, you have people who just like to hurt other people. That's just a reality. I knew some people like that, they just really like hitting people-something's wrong with you. I don't know if there is a way to completely eliminate it...because that's what made [being in an organization] exclusive...*I'm exclusive because I was able to go through this rigorous process*. And now that we've gone through this process we're like brothers. I think if you take that completely out, I think the story kind of isn't as compelling for other people to join. But it probably should be a way to...because I



know if I had a son, I wouldn't want him to go on line personally. I don't know these people that's hazing him.

One respondent's view of hazing expressed the necessity of the practice, yet the caution needed when doing so:

R: I felt that it was necessary for him in this particular situation, because it didn't happen often, it was only with, if my memory serves me correctly, members of my chapter. I would never touch anyone else's boys. And that's because I felt it was my responsibility to play a role in the formulation of that identity, that African American historical, slavery-based knowledge identity. I definitely did less than [other members], because I was never comfortable stroking anyone.

AS: Why not?

R: I hated strokes when I was on-hated them-because I was little, I always got picked on because I was the smallest dude in our district...and when we would go to other places in the [region], I was always a little dude. I was the true ace...I was always number one. Dudes would always try to test me, so I would always get a lot of, I would bear a lot of that brunt. I hated strokes and I never wanted to do that to anybody because my idea was like, if I didn't like it, I know you don't like it, so why would I do that to you? But I think I've taken maybe 5 total on another dude that was younger than me, one because they really did something wrong and he needed some type of deterrent from doing it next time, like things from skipping class to lying about where they were or what they got on a test, things that were really detrimental to them, that's when I was like, okay, you need to not do this again, so I'll do something to make you not do this again.

In speaking of what he took away from hazing, respondents spoke to the implications of racial identity being paralleled with hardship, and further, with a masculine identity:

AS: Do you think there is something to this, for black men to have to physically show how strong they are?

R: I think it's the machismo in the black community...the masculinity taking over. For years, black men have had to overcompensate with being overly masculine whether it's sexually, or physically, or whatever. I think that just comes from years of oppression and dealing with stuff and that's one thing you can control...being physically imposing and stuff like that.

Another respondent discussed the negotiation of racial and gendered identities for black men as it pertains to hazing:

What I took away more than anything was that hazing happens because it happened to a generation before. I feel like we as black people have this ridiculous mentality that there is no progress without struggle, and yes, we know it's a very famous [saying] and there is truth and validity to it, but that doesn't mean you inflict struggle where there was none before, but you endure the struggle that exists. And we feel like if you're not enduring something it's not worth it or if you're not going through anything there can never be any real accomplishment and I think that's the dumbest shit I've ever heard in my life. It's like something that should be so celebrated and joyful becomes terrifying and stressful and frustrating and painful in multiple senses of the word simply because it happened to people before and we feel like we have to do it to other people because it happened to us. And that's...that's so, so stupid. Even saying the words makes me irritated because of the level of stupidity. Hazing someone doesn't make me stronger. Beating

somebody with a wooden plank doesn't make them more of a man and doesn't make you more of a man. Like it...it's so stupid. It's just so stupid.

He further discussed his perspective on the crisis of identity among black men in relation to hazing:

I think [hazing is out of hand now] because...black men really don't know what they're supposed to be doing any more. Yeah, we have a black president, but he is an extraordinarily unique individual-an exception to the rule. Black men are just...I feel like there's so much confusion about who we're supposed to be. The one thing we know is pain. We know that beyond a shadow of a doubt and how to inflict it and how to deal with it. Any time you can justify beating someone to the point where they are bloody and bruised and you have their blood on your body, you have to think about the mental aspect of that. And it used to be back in the day in the 60s and 70s there was still structure to the hazing, like it never reached disproportionate levels, but now we got into an era where men are trying to make men harder than they were made. And when I stop to think about how...it's now 'I went through this and they have to go through three times this much'.

The implementation and endurance of hazing are the archetype of male gender performance in BGFs. Hazing, in this instance, is not necessarily arbitrary, but used to facilitate learning and instill discipline in pledges as they balance all aspects of their lives. These practices obviously are used with the intention to provide a sense of identity in pledges, modeled after ancient rites and military practices (Jones 2004). While there is clear acknowledgement and comprehension of the history and purpose of hazing practices specific to BGFs, and the unified experience it creates for pledges to facilitate personal bonds (Jones 2004), it appears that without hazing in these organizations, masculine identity cannot be validated (Connell 2005) or that the expected gendered personality is not being fully realized (Lorber 1994). Further, in the extreme instances, hazing may be used to temporarily acquire an amount of dominance and control over another individual (Connell 2005). The ability to undergo such physical and mental extremes validates a man's gender not only to other men, but also, to women (Ibid.). This endurance is intricately tied not only to a man's gendered identity, but also to their racial identity, in an attempt to find stability amid social incapacity (Katz 1999; Johnson 2010). The symbolism in the practice exists, but to Collins' (2004) point the impact of hazing on academics illustrates denying black men the work of the mind, simply focused on the body and pulling pledges away from their academics.

## *Sexuality*

In the course of the interviews, respondents were asked about the subject of sexuality-how they felt personally, and how their fraternity brothers responded to the possibility or reality of having homosexual members in the organization. Overwhelmingly, heterosexual respondents felt that a homosexual black man would not be received well by the other brothers, with some contingencies. One respondent spoke to his apprehension about having a homosexual member in his chapter of his BGF:

...Your sexual orientation is not an issue, however, the problem with it is...it's not your sexual orientation, but how you carry yourself. And so, what becomes the issue is not so much you messin' with other men, but is that [the fraternity] wants to represent what a man should be and stereotypically, what a man should be is, you know, the provider, have a certain look of professionalism to them and not try to act like a woman. In our chapter, we have gay members. We have past presidents that are gay, but we know that they are, but how they carry themselves, you don't think about it. They're really good brothers. But they're not like flamboyant. It gets to the point where if you're flamboyant, it becomes an issue for brothers. You can't come dressed like a woman [laughter] or like trying to act like a woman-

Another respondent expressed a similar opinion:

...I haven't had this experience, but I can only imagine, like you doin' certain thing, I mean you steppin'... it's just too much. (Laughter.) I hate to laugh, but I can only imagine what it would be like if we did. ...like this is what happened with people from [other nations]...like, if one [person from another nation becomes a member], they usually bring a legion, and that's what happened with us. Like we got one, and they are steady coming into our chapter now...we do not want that to happen with homosexuals, so you get one and...naw, that just ain't gon' work....Just for the sake of them bringing in others, that may not go over so well.

This particular respondent continued by speaking about why having a gay member in his chapter conflicts with the principals of manhood taught by the fraternity, and further would not be good for the black community overall:

AS: Why wouldn't [having homosexual men in the organization] go over well?

R: Then you would get a chapter full of homosexuals. And what's the point of having a male organization with a whole bunch of homosexuals?

AS: So are they not men because they're homosexual?

R: (Laughter.) I guess...most of them don't wanna be, I mean, if you're a homosexual, you really don't wanna be...you wanna have the title of a man, but some of them don't even want that...just on the same token, why would you want to have a white person in a black male organization...But, there's white guys in black organizations-I don't understand that, just because of the principals. On the same token, I don't understand if you're a homosexual why you would want to be in black male organization. I'm not saying that in a bad way, but why not start your

own? We started our own organization because of what we didn't like about the other organizations, or we didn't fit in... Why not join that? I don't understand why you can't join that? ...it's a matter of being effective. The whole reason to be in the organization is to be effective. Outside of it and on campus. It just don't seem right. You can't really be effective with 80 percent in a black man's organization. What about the stability thing and the family and you being a husband? That's not your mindset to have a wife that you provide for. I means its just a lot of things aren't meshing....you got two men, that ain't a family. There's a reason why women and men are a puzzle because we have to reproduce children. You have 2 stable beings in the house that don't work and a homosexual man cannot be a woman. You can[']t do the things that are naturally in a woman. So that ain't family to me. Its not. You can't produce. ...I do believe when it comes to family, all the efforts that black male organizations...we need those men to develop the real man. You can't have a world full of homosexuals, you have to have some men that strengthen real men, or heterosexual men. You gotta have something to do that. [Homosexuals in the organization] would not work at all. Just for that reason. The whole point of this is to strengthen the black man.

AS: So a homosexual black man doesn't need to be strengthened?

R: YEAH. I mean, when it comes to family. Look at America, black America we are lacking men to raise their sons to be stable. A homosexual man would raise another homosexual boy because boys pick up mannerisms. Definitely ain't gon' keep our race produc'in'. It ain't productive. It ain't gon do it. It ain't gon' do it. We need more men...Straight men, more heterosexuals to develop a family and produce kids from that. You can't even do kids out of [homosexual relationships], your race stops right there. That's it. ...You can't really be effective with 80 percent [gay members] in a black man's organization. What about the stability thing and the family and you being a husband? That's not your mindset to have a wife that you provide for. I mean it's just a lot of things aren't meshing.

One respondent vehemently expressed how he felt sexuality and fraternity membership are interrelated to projecting the appropriate image of manhood:

R: If we're gonna accept men, we gotta act like men.

AS: Okay. And what is acting like a man?

R: Acting like a man is like...I do not like a man who takes on effeminate characteristics. I don't like certain gestures, you know, when you're a man stand tall. Stand with pride. ...Speak with conviction. I don't like [when a man speaks with a lazy drone]. Hit the bricks! Because no one in my chapter would like that. I'm all for diversity, but I have my limits.

AS: So [hypothetically] if there was a man who didn't have these effeminate characteristics, then what?

R: Did I know he's gay?

AS: Yeah.

R: Naw.

AS: You still wouldn't let him [become a member]?

R: Nope.

AS: So now, it's not about how he acts and his character, it's about who and/ or what he is?

R: For me, because then...I understand there's going to be gay men in the organization, just not in my chapter...that I know of. It's his business, just not in my chapter. I'm not gonna say in my chapter we haven't slipped a couple of people through the door. We probably have, they will probably come out later on in life...[At that time,] They were probably sleeping with women. ...You got the perception that they were straight.

AS: So speaking locally, if there was someone of that same caliber and character who was openly gay, would you even let him begin the process?

R: Go to Alpha Phi Alpha for that.

AS: So, what he does in the privacy of his own bedroom, or who he chooses to be attracted to outweighs his character? He's an outstanding young man, he can take several hit a night, he knows the history [of the organization] inside out and backwards, but because he prefers men, he can't be part of your organization?

R: I would not be the one bringing him in. If someone else let him through, that's fine. Once you get into the chapter, will I accept him as a brother-absolutely. But the thing is that's once he gets into the chapter. But more than likely, it's not gonna happen.

AS: Why?

R: Because, I'm sorry, you wanna say we are not a discriminatory chapter, but we are! We are discriminate. We are discriminate! Don't like thugs; won't let you in the chapter. Don't like gay men; won't let you in the chapter! ...there will be certain things we will discriminate about ...there are certain things, certain reasons why you can't get in the chapter.

This particular respondent drew comparisons between his feelings about non-black man versus homosexual black men in BGFs:

R: I'm all for black guys being in the chapter. We're not an organization about stereotypes, it could be white, black, Asian whatever. But I do draw the line at sexuality.

AS: So if a white boy wanted to join, if he's straight, that's okay?

R: Absolutely.

AS: But if a gay black man wanted to...join your chapter that would be problematic?

R: Yep.

Many respondents expressed that it was not a man's sexual preference that concerned them, but rather how they presented themselves, irrespective of their sexual preference:

The way we look at it is, if you want to sleep with men, that's your personal preference. What matters is how you carry yourself. It's the same with [straight men and] promiscuity. If we are at a fraternity function and you're slobbering all over women, that's not cool because you're representing the organization. Don't bring that in public, that's your private life.

One member discussed how he negotiates his sexual identity among gay members:

Sometimes at certain events because of the gay thing is so big within [the organization] and how it gets stereotyped. Then you try not to associate with them too much because you don't want everyone else thinking that you're gay too. That happens a lot.

Respondents also spoke about how they feel associating with homosexual men reflects on them:

R: It's mostly in college, but at these type of events with a lot of people outside of [the fraternity], or outside of your chapter are there, that's when you start to see a distinction. Like I've been out [socializing] with some of the brothers that are gay and in my mind I'm thinking *Does somebody think I'm his boyfriend or something?* It just goes through your head. But see, I would feel that way regardless of whether I was Greek or not. That's just from a masculine standpoint, outside of Greek, like I wonder what everybody else is thinking. Like me and this cat cool, he ain't coming on to me, so even outside of race, its from a male, man perspective, you know, you don't wanna come off as soft, you don't wanna come off as weak and gay comes off as soft and weak. And some of these gay dudes, they don't play, they'll whoop your ass. At the same time, it's just the image.

Another respondent expressed similar sentiments-not being as concerned with a black man's sexual preference, but rather with black men exhibiting effeminate behavior:

I just think, and I'll be very honest, I personally, and I'm getting better, but I recognize it as a problem in myself, so I'm trying to correct it. I have a problem with effeminate men and particularly African American men because I think there are so many outside factors that are trying to tear down and strip away our masculinity that are now and historically there have been, ...because I don't have a problem with you...I know many homosexual men who are not effeminate, and I don't have a problem with that. Who you sleep with is your business, I think you can still be a man. I think you can still be an effective member of the community and by and large the most important factor, God, the one I serve and the one you serve of the individual still loves you, which means I have to too. So, that I don't have an issue with. Its just that when you are a man, especially a black man and I see you flippin' your wrist and switching when you walk, that's just not what a man is supposed to be, like brother, as your brother, I *need* you to be a *man*, because there are so few of us, we're a dying species, I'ma need you...like if you wanna sleep with a man, that's your business. If you are an effective community member and you put God first, I have no say in what you do, but do not smack your gum and me and pop your lips and twitch your hips and flip your wrist. *Please* don't do that, because that is not, that's just not masculine, that's just not something a man does. I'm sorry. I'm really trying to get better, I swear I am, I'm trying to get better about that, but that still bothers me to a very large degree. ...I understand that perception, especially for black people, perception is often reality in society. I get that, I swear I do. At the same time, I think it's unfortunate, I don't have the answer, I don't know how to change it, I don't know what we do, but I think it is a problem when you have solid, just good all around brothers who cannot join, who are prevented from joining organizations that could benefit them and for organizations that could benefit from their membership solely based on a perception that may not even be true, especially one as trivial as sexuality, but that solution is not just a Greek solution, it is based on society and out feelings of homosexuality, so I understand it, but it is unfortunate.

When asked if they felt that a homosexual member would reflect in some way on them and their brothers, one respondent said, "Yes. You know the other Greek organizations will be like, yep, all of 'em are gay, see, they got [a gay member]. [He's] gay, so everybody's gay". Another respondent spoke to how discrimination based upon assumed sexual preference impacted the selection of new

members in his chapter of the fraternity that he belongs to:

R: I can specifically remember several cases in which dudes who had good grades, who were effective members on campus, who were involved in several organizations at school, who were in professional organizations outside of school were not allowed to go past a certain point in the process simply because they could be *perceived* as homosexual.

AS: So how far would they get in the process?

R: Maybe into an interest phase where you're learning about the frat, we're testing your knowledge on African American history, on fraternity history, seeing where your academics stand. We would probably get your medical report at that point and we would engage you with some historical text and see how you interpret them and have discussions on those. Past that, you really wouldn't get past that point. And my thing was, if you're gonna do this, if you're gonna put them through this, but you have no intention of letting them go any further, that's a waste of your and their time. I never got that. You know what, I take that back, I get it, but I don't like it.

One respondent discussed the distinction between having a gay member and one who was not

“made” within the fraternity:

R: Well, I think before I remember saying that when you have someone that's not made, or someone who's being made to be a man, so to speak in the principles of a father figure, that's more detrimental than to have a homosexual. And they're both detrimental to me, but the organization's purpose is to develop men, to develop fathers, all that. Develop the whole stability of a man. So, if being made is taken away, then its no point of you being in the organization, and you're gonna cause more harm than good. A homosexual, they could get in the organization and they wouldn't be developing that trait either, so neither can be that father [figure]. That stability in their house that a family needs, which is what the fraternity is supposed to be doing. I would take that back and say both really detrimental really. And I would even say in college, more so, that having a homosexual is worse in college than it would be after, 'cause in college, you're worried about influencing other people. Your sexuality is more out in the open, now you're worried about taking on a legion of homosexuals in the whole organization. Being a homosexual, everybody sees that. Now you're worried about being seen as that. In the organization, you're representing more than you. You walk around with your letters on-or you don't have to have them on- people know you're a Kappa, you're a Sigma, or whatever. So if you're a homosexual *and* you're in the organization, the reality is, people are going to associate that with [other members]. When you're not made, nobody knows that.

Further, he discussed the parallel between race and homosexuality as it pertains to BGF membership:

I would say still though that when you take on [homosexual members] it's not the same thing because if a white fraternity says we don't take on black guys, what differentiates them not taking you on is your skin tone. Your characteristics, your principals and your morals could be the same as theirs, but they're not turning you away because of something that is outwardly noticeable. However, if you got a homosexual who's outwardly homosexual, he's flamboyant, now, you're worried about that and you're taking him on is more harmful because you look the same, so it's like you really don't want to take that on. From the outside looking in, they wouldn't know who was homosexual or not, now it's still detrimental to the fraternity later on in life because they're still not doing what the principals are to do. It's a difference between turning somebody away because of their outward appearance versus somebody that outwardly looks the same, but principle-wise they don't respect what the fraternity upholds. That's kind of an internal thing. In the same token, the fraternity could say we won't take any white guys. That would be justifiable because it's a black fraternity, it wouldn't be justifiable to not take homosexuals. Its wrong not only because of what society says, only because the fraternity don't want to get sued, but its not

wrong when you think about what the fraternity upholds and what it will do as men and trying to build a family and all that kind of stuff, it don't make sense, but you cant say that because you're worried about legal stuff. A lot of people, I would think any man that would even answer that question and say that they don't think having a homosexual is not detrimental, they don't understand what the purpose of fraternity is. A fraternity isn't just to build yourself, it's to build your family. You're building yourself up to develop a family, and that's all part of that, so you can't think of it as you. How can you build a family and then develop and be okay with that? You can be a homosexual all day, but when it comes to the frat it don't make sense. Like a white dude in the frat don't make sense. The organization is supposed to develop fathers. It don't make sense. I don't see it.

One respondent discussed the importance of knowing one fellow member's sexuality:

[The actions of one brother] it wasn't to out him in front of everybody, but if we all supposed to be brothers, then you need to let us know everything about you, 'cause, when you're on line, its like, my brother next to me, my line brother, he knows my salary, what I do, he knows my parents names, he knows everything, so you're being secretive about this one aspect of your life, then you're not being a true brother...he was embarrassed though.

Few respondents referenced the impact of religious beliefs on their negative views on homosexuality:

...I don't agree with it. That has to do with my faith. I do not agree with that lifestyle. My father put it down this way...you being gay in orientation does not bother me. You being gay in orientation is not a sin. Until you start practicing that lifestyle, it's not a sin. The same goes for heterosexual people. That's the orientation that we take on-heterosexual. Before marriage, it's a sin.

Another respondent spoke to passages he claims are contained within the Bible that speak to homosexuality and how some Christians who oppose homosexuality are unaware of them:

This is my thing, for some individuals, it has a Christian basis. I talk to many of these individuals and they have no idea what a clobber passage is in the Bible, clobber passages being those around 7 or more passages in the Bible which allegedly speak to homosexuality. These men [who disagree with homosexuality] don't know where [the passages] are in the Bible, don't know what they say, so you are going off of something you heard in church or from family members that is allegedly un-Christian, but you have not looked in the text yourself to see what the word actually says regarding homosexuality, and that's why I get upset, because you have a staunch malice toward this group of people based on principles that you don't really have a true concept of.

Despite the origin of any individual respondent's feelings about homosexuality, one respondent's experiences illustrated the impact of discrimination based upon homophobia. He recalled how assumptions about his sexuality nearly kept him from being considered for organizational membership:

Now for me, my situation was...the way it turned out there was one line, the line that was really badly hazed. There were 8 of them. When their line was stopped, they were all given the option to come back. Four of them came back...then there were the other 4, so the new four and the old four were combined to make one line So it was difficult to deal with because I was initially not



accepted before the paperwork process started, I was told that I wouldn't be accepted, so I was a little worried, a little heartbroken. I was so sure that of all the people in the room there were only two or three that were more accomplished than I. And I knew there had to be a significant line because we hadn't had a line in years. So the only reason I was being denied was because I was gay. And that was...at the time I had a girlfriend and we had been together for almost two years. I was always seen as less than or not good enough-a disgrace to [the fraternity]. It didn't matter [what else I had done on campus]. And that was difficult.

Additionally, he discussed being singled out during the hazing process due to his assumed sexuality and how he dealt with it:

R: We were being hazed not nearly as physically as they had been in the past, but it was much more mental and it was extremely challenging because they would always attack me still for being gay and...so I was always arming myself and arming myself with knowledge, so I was always the most read and researched...I always knew everything because I know they can attack me on this. Then that way I sort of became a leader among us because I had to lead or step up for the brothers who didn't know the information. ...There was a night in our process that was dedicated to homophobia and the ...proliferation and propagation of homophobia... [according to the men that were "making" us] fags and sissies would not be allowed in [the fraternity] because they only want real men.

AS: So what happened during that session?

R: For the most part I was silent. I felt like all of their comments were being directed at me. So I didn't say anything because in my head, the way I figured it, if I spoke up in any way, it was proving their point.

He also discussed the hypocrisy of being shunned for his sexuality, yet being pledged by men whom he felt lacked moral character:

...these were men that were just, honestly, I'm listening to men who have committed crimes, serious crimes, like grand theft auto and vandalism and adultery and just there were things that were just sins...and I'm looking [at them] like for real? How are you teaching me anything? It was a lot.

As well, he shared an experience of being baited to confess his sexuality by his fraternity brothers *after* he became a member:

There was one brother in particular who rode me because he knew in his heart that I was gay. Now, to be fair, he was right, [laughter] but the extent that he took it could never be justified in any way. I had already been a member for six months. I received an anonymous phone call, a blocked phone call, from someone claiming to be interested in [the fraternity]. It was very late at night and the phone call came from...well, its not that he was interested in [the fraternity], but he was interested in me because I was "hot". The guy wanted to go on a date or meet up at a coffee shop or a flower shop. I'm thinking I can't deal with this. I was like *Look, I'm only willing to discuss [certain topics] with you, so if you want, you can make an appointment in my office and you can meet me in my office and we can talk then during normal business hours*, at which point was the end of the conversation. Now two days later...I got another phone call from the same guy, the blocked number originally. He was complimenting me and telling me how hot he thought I was and I said we can meet at 9am; that we could talk in my office. A few weeks go by and I told [one of my line brothers] about it, and he told me he had also received a phone call similar, but not

nearly to the extent of mine. Everyone thought he was gay because he never had a girlfriend, but a few weeks go by and [during a meeting, one of the brothers] mentioned the phone call. As it turns out [one of the brothers] actually made the call and had [other brothers] on silent as he did all of this. So three adult African American men calling me, another adult African American man as if we were fourteen year old white Catholic school girls. Homecoming was approaching and all of the brothers were coming back and as it turns out all of the brothers wanted to question me about this phone call. Question me? You want me to come over to your apartment? You wanna get me in a locked room with men who I know are deeply homophobic? And you want to question me? Yeah, I'm not gonna do that. So, I actually ended up going home that weekend. Later on after our programming week, I went to our grad chapter's meeting to report on [activities]. I was thrilled. As I was leaving, [some of the brothers] wanted to speak with me and [one said] "I just wanted to apologize to you for the phone call. A lot of brothers questioned my sexuality in undergrad because of the context. I hope you accept my apology because your contribution to the chapter has been amazing." I said "I don't want to know about your sexuality because I don't care. It doesn't matter what I think about your sexuality, the only person that it matters to is you." Black men acting like Catholic school girls. I wish that things were different. From what I was told later on the older brothers called all of the younger brothers on my line and they all ended up taking wood for me because I wasn't there.

Moreover, he discussed the moment he realized that his line brothers "got made" without him and why he was excluded from this rite of passage:

...it came time for this [new] line to come out. And they were about to have a death march [a tradition in which the new members of the fraternity carry around a fake casket and then they break the casket symbolizing the death of their old selves]. I was forced to take a back seat inside of this organized crowd while all this is happening...[I thought] we're all brothers aren't we? Then we got to the party. And it became more and more apparent that our process...had been very different...new brothers knew material that I didn't know. There were a lot more older brothers from the chapter who were present...giving handshakes and spitting lit[erature] that I didn't know. And then I realized that these new brothers got made, without my knowledge...I really had nothing to do with them. And that was difficult. And then [someone] said, *If they got made, did [some of our line brothers] go get made?*...[later on I asked another brother] why would you all let them get made when we talked about that, especially when we didn't want the older brothers to be involved in the chapter? And then [someone] told me that he [and some of our other line brothers] had gone back and gotten made. All those times I had wondered where they are, they were pledging again. It was the most intense betrayal...here I was giving my life to this chapter and I didn't need the publicity or notoriety...I didn't join [the fraternity] because I wanted to be popular...I didn't understand how they could. I was done. Two to three weeks later...they called a meeting of all of us to try to figure out what to do... [a brother explained] why some of us were not selected to go back and pledge again. [I was told] that they weren't sure if they could trust me. And he told me that he did not regret [hazing the new line]. He said if you have a problem there is nothing he can do about it. ...I have not spoken to him since. ...I mean, that argument doesn't even hold water. Like, out of everything that I've done, I couldn't be trusted because of that, which was so stupid. I think it was because they just didn't want to include me and I'm sure the older brothers told them not to include me.

He went on to discuss negotiating his sexuality in terms of the fraternity:

Homosexuality was looked poorly upon. It was countless times I would walk past conversations where they would pause. It's really ridiculous because look at our stereotype-professional, well dressed men who are efficient, handsome. You see where this is going? There are so many down low brothers in fraternities, it's ridiculous. None of them ever come out; never accept who they are fully, partly because of the fraternity, partly just because that's what we experience as black men. That you're not really a man, somehow you're inferior, you are a mistake, that you're wrong.

There were times in my life where I honestly felt like an accident and I would pray to God to fix me and wonder why if he's perfect and he makes me in his image... why would he make me to live a life of suffering. It doesn't seem Godly does it? I never understood that. I know several brothers, who I am almost positive are gay...just fraternities in general. I know they are having kids, getting engaged and getting married, and I'm just like...I hope that at some point they allow themselves to be who they are...that's all I can do.

Despite his experiences, he was able to reflect on and use them to accept himself:

I'm still the same person I was before I joined. ...In fact, I would say that [the fraternity] is one of the biggest components in me actually fully accepting who I am. Because I never wanted to be in a position where I was defending a lie. I realized that who I am who I am and I can't change that. And I can't allow anyone else to have the power over me that I don't even have over myself. Coming out helped me know me better than I know me and that's accessible.

What is more, he discussed how he feels about his membership today:

...I've often thought about this because someone asked me if I would do it all over again. Everything that you go through, everything I am today is reflective of that. There were the strengths that I found in that I really don't think I would have found anywhere else. Within that struggle you find a determination and a focus and a drive that didn't exist. It couldn't have. And the experience had actually been valuable to me. You call upon that. I'm thankful that it all happened. Would I do it all again knowing what I know now? No. I would have waited till I was in grad school, which honestly means that I would not have done it yet. I wouldn't be [a member] today. Learned a lot...there was so much strife. Things that I still till this day cannot look at because they...the emotions are far too visceral. There are still a few things that are just too much.

When asked about the impetus for gay black men to join BGOs, he stated the following:

I feel like its more or less trying...it's another thing they can say that *Well, I can't be gay because I'm a [a member of a BGF]*. It makes no sense. Validation...in the event that you might possibly...if you can do it there, no one else can deal with you, no one can challenge you, because it's another level of manhood.

From the respondents' comments on homosexual members in BGFs, it is clear that the sexual preference is a significant marker of one's masculine identity (Kimmel 2006). More than sexual preference, a black man's demeanor becomes a cause for concern in the event that he is too effeminate (Laumann, et al. 2004). Further, respondents felt that blackness and hypermasculinity were intricately connected (Ward 2005). Many respondents also stated in their interviews that when there were members who they assumed were gay, that individual would be ridiculed and ostracized. The construction of black masculinity incorporated the intense disapproval of homosexuality veering outside of the normative gendered sexual script (Lorber, p. 30), some of which was learned and

reinforced interactions with other BGF members (Hall and LaFrance 2007), or (seldom) through one's religious background (Ward 2005).

*Talk is (Not) Cheap:  
Using Dialogue to Build Brotherhood*

According to one interviewee, the pledge process is about having control of a particular aspect of a pledge: "The good thing about the hazing part is that you have control...you have control of their time. You have time to kill with them. People think they know hazing...it would be time just to talk about life, talk about where you're going. Talk about the interests you have now. Talk about how you're gonna get to your goals. So you have time to get to know them." Through interviews with members of BGFs, it became apparent that the bonds of brotherhood are built not only through the act of hazing, but also through time spent with pledges before the process begins:

R: ...we never had a large problem with the hazing, we knew it would never go past a certain point...because so much happens before that such as building relationships and that trust and getting to know one another before that part of the process takes place and I think that a lot of organizations, primarily white fraternities, they don't do that.

AS: So there is a dialogue before and after and relationship building?

R: I started [in one semester], I didn't go on line until [the next semester]. So [during that interim period], that's all that building of that relationship and that African American history and that familial feel and that trust, all that takes place before. That line joint is only like 6 weeks. It feels like forever, but it was only 6 weeks.

Dialogue continues during sessions where pledges are being hazed:

AS: You also said 'when you're made right'. So, what is being made right? Or what's not being made?

R: ...Now, what's not being made right is I would say when the people that are 'making' you so to speak are not being conscious of teaching you the [principles of the organization]. Now, you can easily...well, frat brothers at the time that is not trying to teach the line the principals I mentioned and you put another one that is trying to teach the principals that I mentioned, you will probably get hit multiple times. The difference between that is that they boys aren't getting nothing out of it. When you have a line that you makin' right, at the end of session, it ain't like you say 'go home, leave me alone'. You sit people down. You sit 'em down and let them know, this is what we learned today. This is what we were taught. You progress. It's like the army, you teachin' somebody, but you also discipline them. Like you're learning both ends of the stick every night. The difference is...when you are hit, you are learning from the hits. The other end, you just getting' hit. I've seen that happen, where people just want to see how hard they can hit somebody. And that's not being made. On the outside looking in, a lot of guys will say they're made because you saw a line, but that don't mean nothing. The whole idea of being made you can tell that from how your line turns out; the quality of your line.

Other respondents decided to become a source of support and encouragement for the aspirants who were being made in their chapter:

...my thing was I wanted to build people up, a lot of brothers say we have to break you down and build you back up, I'm like, can we just build on top of what they already have, like that just seemed better to me. I was always trying to instill confidence because brothers play different roles in the chapters, some bros will be the go hard, stroke, stroke, stroke, and other brothers will be the encouraging one, so I'm like, I'm gonna be the encouraging brother. Like, *Good job, Well done, Do you need anything?* How are you doing in school? That type of thing. That's the type of role I like to play. There was enough of the negative dynamic or the physical, deterrent dynamic. I'm gonna do something else.

Another respondent also spoke to his personal desire to want to be a source of support for pledges:

If anything [hazing a new line] was more or less for me challenges that I experienced as [a pledge] that I wanted be sure that [new pledges] could endure. My goal was always never to become "that guy," or [think] because [physical hazing] happened to me, I'll make it happen to you. I never wanted to be that. That was one of my goals as I was joining. ...I would make them talk to me about what was going on in their lives and like be completely honest no matter what. ...I'm not judging you, but you have to be completely honest with me. And the reason I wanted them to tell me all their business is because they needed to get it off their chest.

Respondents engaged in *pre-pledging*-an opportunity for current members get to know pledges prior underground pledging or nationally sanctioned practices begin (Parks and Brown, p. 444). Unlike the misconstrued views about hazing practices held by many, the Afrocentric model of masculinity (McClure 2006) is enacted by members of BGFs. By engaging in dialogue, pledges and members are able to facilitate bonding and mutual understanding in a safe space that does not condemn men for being vulnerable. Through dialogue, pledges can receive positive reinforcement and support from their big brothers, a vastly different picture from the hazing that is well known to take place.

*Making Without Breaking:  
Black Fraternities and the Membership Intake Process*

Regarding hazing, one respondent to this study stated that hazing is "a tradition that needs to die, but I'm not going to be the one to break it". When asked to explain his rationale, he said that if he could endure hazing, anyone can do it. This mentality has kept hazing alive for decades. However, many respondents mentioned (even in brief) the Membership Intake Process (MIP). Two of the

respondents to this study became BGF members through MIP. Below, one outlines his experience going through this process:

Well, I knew they were having a line pretty soon, so I reached out to the people who in charge of that and told them I was interested and they got my info. I went to an informational session. They explained to me what the fraternity is about and...I got to meet...people who were interested like myself...for intake, it was...they have basic qualifications they want you to meet, no criminal record, stuff like that. ...You have to have at least 3 letters from someone who is a financial member, things of that nature. ...Its an interview and they ask you questions...its like a regular interview, like a job interview, but instead of one person talking to you, there are several people talking to you and staring at you and they ask you a bunch of questions about your background and if you're related to a member, stuff like that. And they ask you what you know about the fraternity and stuff you've heard about it. That's pretty much the interview. Then you have someone contact you via phone or e-mail telling you that you made the next step, and then when you make the next step you meet other people who got the call to move forward. And at that point the line is formed. ...So the guys you meet with, you get together and kind of get to know each other and make plans to hang out and get to know each other, and the person who's the head of our line...or what may be called in undergrad the "dean" and they pass information on to us...we quiz each other in different ways about what we are supposed to know, the by laws and the rules of the frat, getting to know like the history of the particular chapter as well as the fraternity as who is who, Polemarch, or whomever. A lot of studying and homework involved. It can take hours, days, sometimes you're up at night learning this stuff...For me, it wasn't any type of physical harm or physical damage. It was more of a mental thing...It was a lot of information and it was...it was like the Bar exam...it's a lot of information. You have to know it and memorize it. The thing is...you're also waiting on the other people on your line to know this information, so we're constantly quizzing each other ...its a process... its kind of like you're in a study group....We got a test to see where our knowledge is at, and once I passed that, we were initiated...it was a ceremony, ceremonial process to become official members of the fraternity.

This respondent was asked whether he feels that he is perceived differently by other fraternity members because he was not hazed physically:

No, no one has come to me and said, "You're not a member because you didn't go through what I went through", so...they call [the intake process] skating or paper. Personally, no one has directed that toward me. ...but honestly, I'm just as much of a brother or member as they are, so, maybe someone went through a different process that I did, but no one has ever said something to me, like, *Hey, you didn't do what I did, so I don't honor you or recognize you as a member.* ...That's the thing I explain to people, you never know what somebody was going through during that time [they were going through the Membership Intake Process], they probably went to a school where there wasn't a chapter, or joined the military, or dropped out of school. There are many variables to the equation....Personally, I was dealing with class load and...I didn't have time for [the regular process in undergrad]. There's many variables why someone didn't do pledge or intake in undergrad. A lot of people from different organizations realize that and they're trying to change the negative stereotypes like that and reverse...change opinions of Black Greek Letter Fraternities and Sororities.

Some respondents who went through the national process and the process that is not sanctioned by the national organization shared their opinions about hazing and the alternative of MIP:

There's an alternative to [the underground process], but it has to be universally accepted and that's where the problem came in. So, [hazing] is all underground, our national process it seems like its

no hazing whatsoever. Everybody knows hazing goes on, if you're dumb enough or stupid enough to where something happens and it comes out to the public and nationals know they have to suspend you, you know, they still try to get you to stop to a certain extent because they know it's gonna cost them money, like they're getting sued a lot. So like, we're coming up with a new process this summer and that changes things and makes it a little more interactive and...connect more brothers to stop going underground and doing it this way versus what our current national process is. It doesn't have to be done. I think...not just the hitting or the paddling, its like calisthenics that goes on...that stuff...certain aspects of it that aren't needed, but the mental aspect is needed, but that's the mental piece of it can still be considered hazing.

One respondent who went through both sanctioned and unsanctioned processes for BGF membership believes that MIP can work, but is critical of how it is being implemented:

...It could be very simple in that it could create...the program that is in place, the membership intake process, MIP, is there. It just needs to be strengthened. Because all the organizations are taking a zero tolerance policy on hazing, but that's really, on the front. Like it's on the face because you know behind closed doors everybody's talking about how they were hazed and everything that they went through. [For example,] I'm stronger than you because I went through this, well, I'm stronger than you because I went through that *four* times, you know. Like, you can't denounce it on a podium and then backstage applaud it. And that's what's happening. So if it's going to be the MIP process then it has to be strengthened. ...programs and the activities and the events within the program-the process need to be universal, they need to be uniform and they need to be strong. There needs to be a very clear set of principles on which it's founded. And the activities need to teach or impart wisdom about these principles need to be across the board. For example, you have an activity and you have [a certain] amount of time to accomplish this amount of goals. How do you do this? Like you need to be problem solving as opposed to get me a key lime pie or get "in the cut" [the position to be paddled]. What the hell?

One respondent discussed one of the potential drawbacks of members who go through MIP, as it does not facilitate a bonding experience with other members who have been hazed:

AS: Do you think that men who don't go through this process are looked as less than because they don't go through the process? Is it simply because they didn't go through the process or is it linked somehow to being a man?

R: It's not even linked to being a man, its just...they didn't go through the same process or the same lengths you went through to get these letters. So...in order to earn you letters, you basically have to go through hell and back to get 'em. And if you just signed your name on a piece of paper and took a test 'cause you studied a book, that don't go over well. ...everybody's process is different. You don't know what one chapter does from the other so...sometimes, cats try to feel you out to see what know and what you don't know. So like, even after you in [the fraternity], it doesn't necessarily mean that you're gonna be accepted.

In speaking to respondents, it is clear that MIP has been enacted in some chapters of some organizations, though not necessarily universally accepted. For the members who go through this process, it may become difficult to develop bonds with a larger group of members who had a vastly different experience gaining entry into an organization (Parks Brown 2005; Jones 2004). Further, for

some, there seems to be conflicting ideas about whether this alternative process is the most effective way of “making” members, considering that MIP program has not been solidified. Based upon the comments of the two respondents interviewed who gained membership through MIP, they had as much knowledge of their fraternities as did the other seven respondents, which is an essential piece of membership to a BGF (Kimbrough 1995). In either case, MIP has compelled BGF members to rethink the methods of how to “make” men.



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

“A great human revolution  
in just a single individual  
will help achieve a change in  
the destiny of a nation and  
further, will enable a change in  
the destiny of all humankind.”  
(Ikeda, p. vii)

I can recall a conversation I had once with an acquaintance of mine during my undergraduate studies. He had recently been initiated into a black fraternity. I congratulated him on enduring the journey, to which, he coyly smiled and said “Thank you”. He also explained that he was coming from a meeting with his professor because he was failing a course. I asked why he was failing to which he looked down at his fraternity jacket and explained, “I was hospitalized because they paddled me so hard I was urinating blood for two days.”

I was disturbed by his admission, and as time went on, I found myself even more disturbed by how his life unfolded. Because he failed the course he mentioned, he was unable to attend the university the following semester, and while he still tried to keep a presence on campus, he went from one college to another for some time until he faded into obscurity from the campus where he pledged and crossed all together. I am not certain where he is today (and my hope is that he is doing well), but I wonder at times if things could have been different for him. While I have known young black men who have pledged and crossed into black fraternities and go on to achieve great success in various aspects of their lives, I cannot help but think of those who have not. It is because of young black men like the one mentioned above that I decided to conduct this study.

According to Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004), “Essential to the research for the principal investigator was the process of reflexivity-understanding and examining how one’s social background, positionality, and assumptions affect the practice of research” (p. 115). Given that I identify myself as a black woman who is heterosexual, not Christian and not a BGO member, as well as my own personal thoughts about BGO pledge processes, I had to be cautious about how I approached conducting this study, and not enter into the project looking for specific data that would confirm my own personal feelings about BGOs today. I had to be open to the process and the responses. Thus, I decided to approach the research as a womanist, “committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Collins p. 42).

The research questions for this study is as follows: How is the black masculine identity developed and negotiated within the black fraternity structure? When beginning the study, I did not have many expectations, as I did not want my ideas about BGOs based upon my own personal experiences to completely inform the process, and therefore, impact how I conducted interviews with respondents. Moreover, I felt it necessary to prepare myself for the possibility that respondents would become emotional, reclusive and unresponsive based upon the nature of the questions being asked and the desire to protect themselves, their organizations, and their brothers by any means. If, by chance, they did not disclose things to me, I expected to find that black men joined BGOs to become part of a large, well-known social network on campus in the face of a limited black male population; that there would be substantive explanations for hazing practices in BGOs and why black men not only endured, but also practiced hazing on others; and that attitudes toward homosexuality, and further homosexual members, would be negative, to say the least.

Based upon the findings of this study, it is clear that respondents began developing their gendered and racial identities in childhood, prior to becoming members of BGFs. They experienced models of both hegemonic as well as Afrocentric masculinity from their own family structures. McClure (2006) acknowledges the use of both models specifically within the black fraternities, however, the findings to this study reveals that both masculine ideals are exhibited outside of the BGO structure as well, and further, early in the lives of the respondents. Thus, the relationship between both models can be said to extend from one's early life into the fraternity, and not a relationship that is solely experienced in BGOs.

In negotiating race and gender in higher education, feelings of estrangement and distress, particularly in the classroom, were widely reported among respondents. While respondents overall did not have a problem engaging with students of other races socially, they actively sought other black students, especially other black men, to relate to. For respondents, tensions did arise, however,

as they developed relationships with other black students, based upon other social structures, particularly economic class.

The performance of gender as it pertains to hazing became one of the major topics explored in this study. Respondents revealed the nature of hazing in the BGF instance, and its ties to specific representation, and further, its use as a tool to facilitate bonds among current and new members through a universal experience (Jones 2004). Additionally, respondents spoke to the use of hazing for pledges as a means to connect them further their racial identity and the struggles endured by blacks in this country since the Trans-Atlantic slave trade through the early part of the twentieth century (McClure 2006). Hazing was also noted as a disciplinary tool for pledges that did not live up to all of their responsibilities of balancing life as a pledge and as a student. While both black and white fraternities use hazing tactics, respondents employed hazing to affirm masculine characteristics and ideals, whereas Sanday (2007) found that white fraternities use hazing for pledges achieve manhood through “cleansing” them of femininity (p. 179). The ability to withstand hazing was found to develop and validate a pledge’s racial and gendered identities. hooks (2004) notes that black parents reinforce the value of aggressive masculine values in hopes that their sons will be able to efficiently and effectively deal with the realities of being black in a racist society (Johnson, p. 183). Based upon the findings of this study, it could be argued that BGFs function in the same capacity, covertly highlight aggressive behavior to strengthen black men in preparation for navigating their way through systems of discrimination. Despite efforts of respondents to reiterate the importance of academics as essential to the success desired by pledges in line with hegemonic models of masculinity, through hazing, it is still maintained that “masculinity is associated with the use of the body, not the mind” (Collins 2004:176).

Another topic discussed at length by respondents was sexuality. While many respondents discussed their disapproval of homosexuality, few stated that these opinions were related directly to their religious beliefs and/or church attendance. This does not negate that their religious backgrounds

have some influence on their views, however, these findings are contrary to Ward's (2005) insight on hypermasculinity and the black church. Consistent with Hall and LaFrance's study on the social adjustment function (2007), respondents' feelings about homosexuality were highlighted by their fraternity brothers either through interpersonal communication or through hazing practices. What is more, respondents were not concerned with a BGF member's sexual preference, but rather whether he appeared effeminate (Laumann, et al. 2004), and further, how an effeminate fraternity brother's behavior and demeanor would reflect on them individually, not just on the fraternity, as found with Hall and LaFrance (2007). Respondents quickly assumed effeminate men were also gay, but were able to look beyond fraternity brothers who were homosexual, so long as they were not effeminate. These attitudes will continue to work against black men in BGFs. According to Collins (2004), "Black gay sexuality as Black male emasculation simultaneously threatens heterosexual African American men, upholds Black male hyper-masculinity...and protects hegemonic White masculinity" (p. 174). Lastly, there was little concern mentioned that having a homosexual member would affect relationships with women in sororities (Hall and LaFrance 2007).

While respondents stated that there was some secrecy surrounding hazing practices in regard to knowing what would occur at various sessions, there was a great level of transparency between pledges and fraternity brothers, particularly after sessions when hazing took place. Respondents discussed the ability to openly dialogue with their big brothers about their thoughts and feelings without fear of criticism. Additionally, respondents expressed their desire to providing this opportunity to new pledges. Hence, dialogue became a major component in pledges endorsing elements of Afrocentric models of masculinity (McClure 2006). This counters the notion of "masking" that is thought to be used by black men to conceal any vulnerability to an outsider (Majors and Billson 1992).

The Membership Intake Process that BGO administrators are attempting to institute was given much attention in the interviews with respondents. For those who are initiated through MIP,

they did not experience any consequences of being viewed as less masculine for doing so, though becoming a member through MIP would not necessarily grant them the same respect as other members. While some aspects of “traditional” hazing, such as calisthenics, were viewed as questionable, most respondents said they would not engage in hazing today due to the personal risks involved, but said little about efforts to remove the practice entirely.

This research contributes a greater understanding of hazing in black fraternities. Some scholars suppose that all fraternal organizations are nearly identical, and more so, that their activities also are identical. However, the interpretation of these activities, specifically hazing, place violence by black men as being problematic:

Male violence is a central problem in our society. Black violence simply mirrors the styles and habits of white male violence. It is not unique. What is unique to black male experience is the way in which acting violently often gets both attention and praise from the dominant culture. Even as it is being condemned black male violence is often deified. As Orlando Patterson suggests, as long as white males can deflect attention from their own brutal violence onto black males, black boys and men will receive contradictory messages about what is manly, about what is acceptable (hooks P. 66).

This has also caused BGFs to be viewed as “educated gangs”, which Hughey (2008) postulates upholds racism:

First, portraying black Greeks as a ‘gang’ enables the collective memory of personal hatred and fear, as well as structural racism, to have an easy target. That is, if even the black elite, college-attending youth act like a gang, then they can be used as ‘evidence’ for arguments extending from black biological inferiority to black cultural deficiency. Second, the striking irony of framing organizations like BGLOs is that the black exceptionalism of BGLOs becomes refigured as a deficient form of ‘otherness’. Behavior that, under a white face, would be ignored, excused, or explained away to personal, rogue, or ‘bad apple’ elucidations becomes a sociological accounting book for the ‘true nature’ of BGLO ontology. Third, race then operates relationally. That is, race holds both meaning and power through its relationship with other categories and through the ways that boundaries of difference are drawn between those types. By taking discussions of BGLOs outside of the discussion of the political economy of identity and power, there results a singular, reductionist focus on BGLO shortcomings. Many of those shortcomings do exist, and should not be excused for their deleterious effects in, and outside of, the African-American community (P. 456).

However, the findings of this study provides evidence to the contrary, and in fact, that modern hazing has ties to a larger historical significance with the ability to instill a sense of positive racial and gendered identities in those who participate in it. For this reason, while specific hazing practices should remain secret, the intent behind them should not, as such secrecy further exacerbates pre-conceived notions that reduce BGOs and their members to being perceived as “educated gangs”.

Clearly, there are limitations to this study. First, the snowball sample recruitment yielded only nine respondents. This could be due to the nature of the study and, consequently, apprehension by potential respondents to participate, and/or the method of recruiting electronically. In either case, whereas respondents provided a lot of insight into masculine identity development in BGFs, having more respondents may have provided added insight. Second, nearly all of the respondents to the study pledged in the Midwest-only one pledged in a different region of the country. It would have been advantageous to Interview more respondents who pledged on the East coast, as well as in the South and the West coast to determine whether ideas about masculinity vary based upon geographic region. All but one of the respondents attended predominantly white colleges and universities, thus conducting this study with BGF members who pledged at HBCUs would be beneficial. Third, all respondents were between the ages of 25 and 35. This study, as a result, excluded BGF members who were younger (and likely newer) members of BGFs, who could provide a fresh perspective, as well as older BGF members who were initiated during different social era, and therefore, may have expressed very different views about the development of a masculine identity and BGFs. What is more is that younger men may have provided more insight into MIP, as this process is being implemented among new initiates, and older men could have provided more of a historical perspective on BGFs and hazing. Finally, respondents represented three of the five BGFs governed by the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and accordingly, the study lacked a perspective from members of the other two fraternities.

After the reemergence of Black Greek Organizations on a Midwestern campus, the president of one BGF stated “Now we’re all asking ourselves one question: How do we remain relevant?” (Bankston 2011). Author and peace activist Daisaku Ikeda describes the pitfalls of a stagnant organization:

In a buffalo herd, all the individuals in the group follow the lead buffalo; they go where he wants to go and they do what he wants to do. In other words, they merely wait for the instructions of the leader. When human organizations follow this model, they also become an unthinking herd. Unable to adapt to changing times, such organizations travel a course to inevitable decline (1999: 237).

Ikeda provides a contrasting view of a successful organization:

In a successful organization, some authors propose using a model based on the image of a flock of geese. The flock of geese that they envisage is flying in a “V” formation, with the leadership of the flock changing frequently as different geese take turns leading the way. It is a model in which everyone in the organization takes responsibility, everyone is equal and everyone unites together solidly in their shared objective. An organization of this kind, the authors argue, will be successful in the changing times in which we live (1999: 237).

The response to the question of how BGFs can remain relevant is found in the aforementioned models of leadership cited by Ikeda. In the twenty-first century, BGF members, administrators and aspirants to these organizations must decide whether they want to be buffalo or geese. According to McWilliams (2006) “...at its best, fraternity pulls men away from sexist convictions that caring for others and being cared for are women's roles, and that those roles are undesirable” (p. 211). Thus, in order to remain relevant, it is necessary that BGFs build upon their great potential, seeking new leadership that will move these organizations into the future, redefining masculine ideals based upon race, gender performance and sexuality.

The opportunity to experience BGF membership is one available to the few who *can* attend college, given the dropout rate among black men in high school (Davis 2006). For those who are able to take advantage of the opportunity, their chances of experiencing BGF membership may be limited as well, for if extreme hazing practices insist, Kimbrough warns, “the courts will soon abolish black fraternal organizations altogether” (2005:29). The findings of this study are essential to beginning a dialogue not only in the Black Greek community, but also in the black community at large about transforming ideas about masculinity, with each person being an active participant in this change.



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