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**BLACK GREEK-LETTER ORGANIZATIONS:
A LEGACY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The education of African American adults evolved in response to the changing social, economic, and political needs of the Black community. To address these needs, Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs) created and implemented initiatives at the local, national, and international levels using education as a catalyst to change aspects of African Americans' social conditions in the United States. Though many individuals and civic organizations influenced and contributed to the education of African American adults, the initiatives of BGLOs were left in the shadows. Although the historical and cultural aspects of BGLOs have been well documented, research has neglected to examine this role from a graduate or alumni perspective.

This qualitative case study sought to examine the role of five BGLO graduate chapters as providers of adult education, and to examine whether and how their initiatives embody the Black self-help tradition. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using ethnographic methods of data analysis, reflection, and writing. The findings demonstrate that BGLO graduate chapters sponsor and/or participate in educational programming that: (1) builds healthy communities; (2) develops communities economically; (3) advocates on behalf of the race; and (4) uplifts the community through service. This study also elucidated how the adult education initiatives embodied the self-help tradition.

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Ora na azu nwa. This African proverb describes the collective effort of a community to raise a child. All of the individuals that make up my community are too vast to name, but a few deserve mentioning. In no particular order, my village includes: Barbara Jones, Trancia Hankins, Moses Davis, Unity Church of Jesus Christ (State College, PA), Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church (Cleveland, OH), Heaven Sent Hair Salon (when you look good you feel good), the Wilson Family, the Jones Family, Roger W. Davis, Penn State ADTED, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (Alpha Omega, Epsilon Sigma Omega, and Delta Gamma), Penn State BGSA, Ohio State D9, Shirley Taylor, Kayla Harris, Dr. Stephanie Preston (elephant hugs, ivy kisses, and olive juice), Dr. JoAnn Olson (my lifesaver), Penn State OFSL staff, Wilmon A. Christian III, and a host of extended family and friends.

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DEDICATION

In honor of my mother, Wanda P. Kirk and my daddy, Keith M. Jones.

In memory of my grandfather, Theodore Jones.

This dissertation demonstrates the legacy of African American education
you passed along to me.

**It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.
-William Ernest Henley**

Chapter 1: Coming to the Question

Adult education is still a fairly new concept to me. Although I received my Master's degree in the field, I was unsure how I was going to use it to achieve my professional goals. Furthermore, I struggled with identifying ways to combine my professional and personal interests. Professionally, I was interested in entering the nonprofit sector and working with youth and young adults in urban communities. I wanted to civically engage this population with their communities while bridging the gap between the older and younger generations. Researching potential jobs showed that a terminal degree was not required for this career choice. However, on a personal level, I knew I wanted to obtain my doctorate degree, if only to have those letters behind my name. There were other letters I had also been seeking for quite some time...AKA.

I was introduced to Greek life as a little girl watching *A Different World*. A spinoff from *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World* was a television sitcom about the life of students at a fictional historical Black college/university (HBCU). The television show highlighted both the academic and co-curricular aspects of college life for African American students. Although many Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs) portrayed were fictitious, several of the characters were members, including the show's producer, Yvette Lee, who is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Throughout high school I learned about the good things Greeks were doing in the community via various media outlets but I had never seen it for myself. I often wondered what these organizations were doing to help uplift and educate our communities. What programs and activities were they sponsoring to shape our own communities? Were their efforts even visible to the communities they served?

I was initiated into a graduate chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha on February 12, 2006. It was not until I became a member of a BGLO that I saw what our organizations did for our communities. I wondered if others were aware of these contributions.

After taking graduate courses and conversing with my advisor, Dr. Elice Rogers, and professor Dr. Dwayne Wright at Cleveland State University, I realized how I could reach my goals and answer my questions at the same time. From this, I chose to continue my education at The Pennsylvania State University. At the time of my acceptance, the Adult Education program was thought to be one of the best in the country, and the campus had an active collegiate Greek community. Initially I planned to use the collegiate BGLOs as participants for my dissertation. It seemed a rather perfect idea, since I had established relationships with the students and had begun serving as advisor to the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). However, the educational programs, community service, and philanthropic efforts they sponsored lacked the depth I would need to create a higher-quality study. After much thought and consideration, it proved more practical to examine the adult education initiatives of graduate chapters because they would provide the complexity and insight I sought.

Statement of the Problem

With its roots planted in voluntary associations and organizations, adult education was professionalized with the formation of the American Association for Adult Education.

Longworth and Norman (1996) characterized adult educators as “the vast number of people who would not describe themselves as teachers but who nevertheless pass on information, knowledge, understanding, and sometimes wisdom” (p. 141). Like many other practitioners, nonformal adult educators serving in religious institutions, health and social services programs, and civic and fraternal organizations may not be “conscious that they are performing the increasingly precisely defined role of adult educator” (Knowles, 1980, p. 26). However, they, in fact, fulfill this role as members and leaders of their communities. This study brought attention to adult education practitioners in Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs).

The education of African American¹ adults² evolved in response to the changing social, economic, and political needs of the Black community.³ To address these needs, BGLOs created and implemented initiatives at the local, national, and international levels contradicting thoughts of African American inferiority that plagued the minds of mainstream American society. Historian Rayford Logan (1997) labeled the end of the 19th century as the “nadir of African American history” (p. 52). However, BGLOs established power and prestige among a

¹ The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably, and refer to a person who identifies as being an American of African descent.

² Any individual whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults.

³ For the purpose of this study, the Black community is defined as a group of people interconnected through an “infinite [or boundless] system of invisible threads [i.e., cultural artifacts, relationships, activities, and institutions]” (Page, 1999, p. 4) that sustain African American’s way of life (see also Cannon, 2009). It can both be experienced *in* a geographic place and *transcend* face-to-face interaction in a given locale.

select few and forged a community within themselves, using education as a catalyst to change aspects of African Americans' social conditions in the United States.

Though many individuals and civic organizations (e.g., Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and National Urban League) influenced and contributed to the education of African American adults, the initiatives of BGLOs were left in the shadows. "African American fraternalism," said Trotter (2004), "has suffered...neglect and distortion in U.S. historiography" (p. 357). These organizations "were more than just social service organizations...they became a forum to organize Black labor and to promote self-education and community uplift through political and economic advancement" (Williams, 1990, p. 151).

Whereas several scholars have attempted to shed light on BGLOs, their studies have been almost exclusively a collegiate or undergraduate phenomenon (Kimbrough, 1995; Little, 2002; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), and have focused on their historical and cultural aspects such as rituals, hazing, and stepping⁴ (Brunson, 1991; Kimbrough, 2003; Ross, 2000). Hernandez (2008) suggested that "intricate dynamics [exist] of alumni membership...once a shared campus environment is no longer a part of daily life" (p. 254). Graham (2000) also acknowledged this phenomenon by stating:

Black fraternities and sororities play a much more important role later in life and serve as a vehicle for Black alumni to contribute money and time to civic projects, scholarships, and other programs to aid disadvantaged Blacks in the United States and abroad. (p. 70)

⁴ A historically African American form of dance where the body is used as an instrument to produce rhythms, sounds, and movement, and is usually accompanied by singing and chanting.

However, research has neglected to examine this role from a graduate or alumni⁵ perspective.

Conceptual Framework

From their inception, the efforts of BGLOs embodied what scholars called the self-help tradition. They suggest:

The self-help tradition is so embedded in the Black heritage as to be virtually synonymous with it...The tradition of building institutions and initiating efforts both to defend themselves and to advance within a hostile society has long been a hallmark of Black American life. (Committee on Policy for Racial Justice, 1986, as cited in Carson, 1993, n.p.)

According to Gaines (1996), the self-help tradition represented “a group struggle for social advancement” and “a vision of racial solidarity” (p. 2). Racial solidarity also included the notion of uplift: the collective attitudes, practices, and services African Americans “generated to meet their own political, social, and cultural needs” in their struggle for human rights (Robinson, 2007, p. 5). This tradition also symbolized the attitudes and activities of Blacks to ensure their survival through the generations to come (Martin & Martin, 1985).

Historically, African American adults considered the pursuit of education as a collective effort that benefited the entire community (Brandt, 2001; Fisher, 2009). The self-help tradition is regarded in the same manner. Drawing from the perspectives of Martin and Martin (1985), Carson (1993), and Gaines (1996), the self-help tradition is conceptualized as the mobilization and exchange of resources by Blacks for the purpose of uplifting the African American

⁵ Using the term graduate or alumni varies among organizations. For the purposes of this study, the term graduate will be used and refers to alumni chapters of BGLOs established so that members could continue the work of their respective organizations within their local communities once a degree was obtained (Kimbrough, 2003).

community. Because of a legacy of racial uplift and communal advancement, the practices and programming of BGLOs are situated within this tradition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine the role of BGLO graduate chapters as providers of adult education, and to examine whether and how their initiatives embody the Black self-help tradition. The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the adult education initiatives of Black Greek-Letter Organizations?
- How do these initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical context of African American adult education?
- How do the initiatives of graduate chapters of Black Greek-Letter Organizations embody the self-help tradition, if at all?

For the purpose of this study, the initiatives of BGLOs encompass their educational programming, community service, and philanthropic efforts, and may include social and cultural activities.

A case study, using ethnographic methods, was well suited to investigating the adult education initiatives of five BGLO graduate chapters. Data were collected using ethnographic interviews and organizational documents. I conducted semi-structured interviews with chapter presidents (n=4), chapter members (n=6), and an international officer (n=1). Last, I examined organizational documents such as websites, journals, magazines, program flyers, and advertisements.

Significance of the Study

Although literary and cinematic works have presented BGLOs from the perspective of members and nonmembers (see Spike Lee's *"School Daze"*, Tajuana Butler's *Sorority Sisters*, and Sylvian White's *"Stomp The Yard"*), few have been examined through an academic lens.

Findings from this study will add to the limited yet growing body of scholarship on BGLOs. This study will help to position the initiatives of BGLOs within the broader field of adult education. This study is also significant in its potential to serve as an impetus for further research on the contributions of other civic organizations to the education of African American adults.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I introduced my background and how I came to study the adult education initiatives of BGLOs. The purpose of the study and its significance to the field of adult education were also discussed. In the following chapter I paint a picture, using a backdrop of related literature, to illustrate how education was acquired, used, and shared in the African American community. I also provide a historical context of the development of BGLOs. I link the two by means of the self-help tradition and how it is embedded in both the African American and BGLO cultures.

Chapter three outlines my plans for conducting this study. Data collection and analysis strategies are mapped out and participants are introduced. In this chapter, I discuss the ethical issues that arose throughout the course of this study and how I addressed them. In chapter four, the adult education initiatives of the graduate chapters are thematically examined. And finally, in chapter five, I argue that the initiatives of BGLOs have earned a space within the field of adult education.

**Education wasn't a means to an end;
it was the planting of a seed that would eventually blossom
into a mass movement toward independence for Blacks
-Maisha T. Fisher**

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature as it relates to the education of African American adults. It focuses on the historical context of African American adult education through activities, individuals, and organizations that document their role as adult educators. This review draws attention to the initiatives and practices of BGLOs by situating them as organizations that, like other African Americans, have historically "assumed the responsibility of educating their own adult population" (Colin, 1994, p. 50). Framing the initiatives of BGLO graduate chapters within the self-help tradition helps to link the initiatives of these organizations to the broader field of adult education.

Self-Help Tradition

Definitions of self-help in the Black community have been a topic of discussion for years. While some scholars emphasize personal responsibility and competence (Newsome, 1973; Spiegel, 1982; Withorn, 1980), others argue that self-help is a collective strategy used to empower the Black community (Gilinsky, 1987; Rouse, 1987; Thomas, 1987). Scholars have provided in-depth historical accounts of the development of the Black self-help tradition (Martin & Martin, 1985; Thomas, 1987). Such development included efforts of the Black Church, benevolent societies, community institutions, and fraternal organizations, which sought to empower, foster, and advocate for racial pride within its members (Neighbors et al., 1990). However, the self-help tradition finds its beginnings in the extended family.

Origins of the self-help tradition can be traced back to Africa, saturating the life of its communities (Martin & Martin, 1985). Although resources were distributed unequally among social classes, no individual was allowed to go hungry or unsheltered. The community was responsible for ensuring the welfare of its members. As cited by Martin and Martin (1985), the cardinal tenet of African philosophy is “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (p. 12). It was common practice for Africans to place the greater good of the collective community above the concern for self. This tradition was so strong that it withstood the impact of the slave trade to the Americas.

Slavery inadvertently reinforced the self-help tradition because the system forced slaves to work together and cooperate (Martin & Martin, 1985). Status of power shifted, putting men and women on the same playing field while also extending the family network. With slaves being sold to different plantations, the slave trade broke family systems, and left the care of the elderly and childrearing to other slaves. These relationships eventually grew into forms of religious and racial consciousness, which led to the institutionalization of the self-help tradition (Gutman, 1976; Martin & Martin, 1985).

Free Blacks employed practices of self-help to assist in “reconstruct[ing] lives broken by war and devastated by years of bondage” (Martin & Martin, 1985, p. 94). To that end, they built institutional networks including schools, benevolent societies, and fraternal organizations. Lee (1992) asserted that the purpose of such networks was to “validate knowledge, help to shape visions, inculcate values, and provide the foundation for community stability” (p. 161). Peterson (1995) linked these institutions with statuses of power:

Institutions have often provided subordinate groups with a means to power: they create organized consent among their members by means of specific cultural, social, and

intellectual activities; they work to promote the welfare of the population as a whole over that of specific individuals or groups; they encourage the powerful planning of resistance strategies; they make public and thus more effective hitherto privately held sentiment. (p. 11)

Nevertheless, it was the church that was the most essential in promoting self-help activities among Blacks. By providing an environment for political and economic discussions and for the sharing of grievances, the Black Church has been at the forefront of African American life since slavery. According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), “not only did [the Black Church] give birth to new institutions...it also provided...an arena for political activities” (p. 8). White society’s efforts to eliminate Black churches evidenced how important they were for the Black community, offering leadership and services to assist in changing the circumstances of their lives (Carson, 1993).

In addition to the church, benevolent societies created environments for self-help and fellowship among African American adults. Since the 1700s, benevolent societies “served the masses of Afro-Americans and helped to bring a sense of security to a people who were going through one of the most trying times in their history” (Butler, 2005, p. 108). These societies were helpful in uplifting the race and represented a massive contribution of self-help in the African American tradition by reducing crime, helping the poor, providing financial assistance for burial of its members, and caring for widows and children (Butler, 2005).

Philanthropic Efforts

Black philanthropy, which included the collective donations of money, time, expertise, and goods, has been central to the self-help tradition of African Americans. According to Carson (1993), Blacks often used philanthropic efforts to “promote issues and programs that could not be pursued through established political means or mainstream organizations” (p. 3). To stress

the importance of philanthropy, Du Bois concluded, "Organization is sacrifice...of opinions, of time, of work and of money, but it is after all, the cheapest way of buying the most priceless of gifts – freedom and efficiency (as cited in Broderick & Meier, 1965, p. 60). By examining the development of Black philanthropy, one can begin to shed light on the community service and philanthropic efforts of BGLOs.

Mutual aid⁶ societies extending out of the Black Church laid the foundation of Black philanthropy. Like the Black Church, these societies were concerned with the advancement of the Black community. Mutual aid societies provided their members with a variety of services, including education, support for widows and orphans, burial fees, and basic necessities for the poor. Harris (1979) stated:

The early Black benevolent societies...served different functions because of the distinctive needs of the free Black populace...Common historical experiences, shared African ancestry, cultural affinities, and similar grievances brought free Blacks together into benevolent societies to provide a sense of security in their new status as freemen. (as cited in Carson, 1993, p. 10)

One of the first mutual aid societies was Prince Hall's African Lodge, which provided social recreation for its members, protection against enslavement, and programs to aid the poor such as free food and firewood during the winter (Butler, 2005).

During the Civil Rights Era, Black philanthropy began to include activities such as "raising money, collecting and distributing food, and carefully orchestrating boycotts, sit-ins, and marches" (Carson, 1993, p. 36). New organizations began to engage in community service, donate money for charitable purposes, and according to Carson (1993), address "problems of

⁶ The terms "mutual aid" and "benevolence" are often used interchangeably in the self-help literature.

special concern to Blacks” (p. 41). These problems were addressed by adult education initiatives.

Adult Education

Adult education is defined as any organized activity that is intentionally designed to bring about learning among adults, calls for voluntary participation, offers immediate usefulness for personal and collective enhancement, and helps improve the quality of life for an individual and the community (Gyant, 1990; Merriam & Brockett, 2007). This study examined the nonformal educational activities and initiatives of BGLOs. Nonformal education is defined as “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system -- whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity -- that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives” (Combs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973, as cited in Smith, 1996). Nonformal education differs from formal education in that its purposes are short-term and specific, content is individualized and practical, and its delivery is community-centered and flexible (Fordham, 1993). According to Gyant (1990), nonformal programs “provided a wide range of learning activities...and sought to improve the quality of life in both the family and the community” (p. 30). Examples of such initiatives include leadership development seminars, literacy and adult basic education workshops, and apprenticeship systems (Gyant, 1990; Smith, 1996).

Smith (2012) discusses the notion of valuing the use of existing learning systems that sit more comfortably with the historical and cultural contexts of a group. Nonformal education was not new to African Americans. Because formal education was denied to African Americans during slavery, nonformal activities were the only means to educate themselves. Slaves taught

one another to read and write in each other's homes, in churches, and in the woods (Gyant, 1990). The next section further examines this phenomenon.

African American Adult Education

History corroborates the value that African Americans place on education (Franklin, 1984; Locke, n.d.; Williams, 2005). Although slave holders wanted to keep education out of the reach of their slaves, many, including freed Blacks, participated in many forms of education. Ladson-Billings (2005) associated literacy with power and humanity. She argued that "literacy is deeply embedded in our conceptions of humanity early on in the construction of the United States and citizenship; that is, one must be human to be literate and one must be literate to be a citizen" (p. 135). Slaves caught learning to read or write were physically harmed. "To do otherwise," according to Fisher (2009), "would be acknowledging the men and women who were being used as chattel were indeed human" (p. 15). The physical beatings reinforced slaves' quest for knowledge and the importance of education for African American adults (Holt, 1990).

Slave narratives often expressed individuals' hunger to learn how to read and write (Banks & Carter, 1985; Cornelius, 1991; Webber, 1978). In his autobiography, Douglas (1845/1968) wrote about concerns regarding the education of slaves. He stated that education was "the pathway from slavery to freedom...Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read" (p. 47). Similar to Douglas' attitudes towards education, Johnson (2009) claims, "without the capacity to read [and] write...the oppressed African American individual would remain forever bound to and dependent upon the will of the oppressor" (p. 54).

Not only did these narratives equate literacy with emancipation, they also emphasized themes of self-help and the communal values embedded in African American adult education.

Perry's (2003) work revealed the philosophy of education as a "communal act":

While learning to read was an individual achievement, it was fundamentally a communal act. For the slaves, literacy affirmed not only their individual freedom but also the freedom of their people. Becoming literate obliged one to teach others... Literacy was not something you kept for yourself; it was to be passed on to others, to the community. Literacy was something to share. (p.14)

Holt (1990) also argued that the goal of education for Blacks was "social as well as personal improvement to uplift the people, to make conditions better" (as cited in Fisher, 2009, p. 17).

Programs and Activities. Analysis of adult education activities provided for and by African Americans were absent from the academic literature until the works of McGee (1971, 1973), House (1977), and McGee and Neufeldt (1985) surfaced. Since then, scholars have emerged depicting the creation, implementation, and participation of Blacks in adult education. Colin (1994) discussed several sources that provided such activities. Plantation apprenticeships, for example, "provided slaves with those skills that would enable them to function as slave laborers," and were seen as "one of the largest adult education programs operating in early America" (p. 52).

The American Association for Adult Education's experiments in Harlem and Atlanta were another example of educational activities provided for African Americans. The Carnegie Corporation funded these projects, housed them in community libraries, and developed creative programs to "expand the cultural, vocational, and social horizons" (Neufeldt & McGee, 1990, as cited in Cain, 2003, p. 33) of African Americans in the community. According to Reid (1936), the purpose of these experiments was to "outline and conduct an informal program

embracing the economic, social, and cultural phases of adult education...adapting to the purposes and policies of a library” (p. 21). Such projects included a Readers Advisory Service, discussion groups on literature, art, and modern social thought, and provision of resource materials for individuals, established groups, and organizations (Cain, 2003). Neufeldt and McGee’s (1990) *Education of the African American Adult: An Historical Overview* provides further evidence of the various adult education activities of African Americans.

Individuals and Organizations. The adult educator, activist, and feminist Anna Julia Cooper understood the importance of using acquired knowledge and skills to improve communities and society in an attempt to alleviate illiteracy, poverty, and oppression plaguing African American adults (Lemert & Bhan, 1998). According to Johnson (2009), Cooper believed that education for African Americans was about “self-improvement, self-help, racial empowerment, morality, and social transformation” (p. 48). The same sentiment is found in the work of Anderson (1988), where he described education “as a means to self- and community-improvement” (as cited in Guy & Colin, 1998, p. 86). This passion for educating others continued with the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and Booker T. Washington (1901), who discussed their yearning to collectively educate the African American community. Though their ideologies on how Blacks would acquire social and economic progress differed, they both agreed that the acquisition would have to be a collective effort.

Contemporary writers, such as Johnson-Bailey (2001), have also exemplified the importance of education for African Americans. In *Sistahs in College: Making a Way Out of No Way*, Johnson-Bailey examined the narratives of African American women who had different motivations for furthering their college education. In the book, Lynda’s narrative provides

additional evidence that education for African Americans is not for individual gain. Her main reason for giving up a “good paying” civil service job to pursue a college degree was to let her teenage children know “the importance of getting an education” (p. 75).

Organizations have contributed to the education of African American adults by “offering diverse...opportunities to adult learners through which the learners recognize their identity, potential, and significance within the...process,” thereby “contributing something to the public welfare; and providing a different voice in a common tradition” (Galbraith, 1992, p. 24).

Voluntary and community-based organizations and religious, social service, and civic institutions were among this group. Many of these organizations produced “educational activities for their members, who in return help inform and educate the general public” (Ferro, 1990, as cited in Galbraith, 1992, p. 24).

Examining the educational programs of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in the post-Civil War era illustrates how these organizations attempted to address the concerns affecting the African American community. Black branches of these organizations were established in major northern cities to sponsor educational programs for the growing population of Blacks migrating from the south. Programs consisted of recreational activities, vocational and leadership training, moral development, and religious education (Williams, 1990).

Since these organizations were created and founded upon Christian principles, religious training permeated their programs. National headquarters recognized the importance that religion played in the African American experience and sought to “promote a religious program in the branches that would preserve their heritage” (Williams, 1990, p. 145). A local Black

branch of the YMCA in Buffalo, New York initiated the Ministers' Institute, which "provided a network for ministers to discuss the social problems that their congregations experienced on a daily basis and, simultaneously, a place to devise strategies to solve them" (p. 140). In addition, the YWCA created books including folk songs and Negro spirituals, so that women and girls would be able to "draw on it for sustenance" (p. 145). Butcher (1956) examined the impact of such a book:

...spirituals naturally reflect the most serious and intimate aspects of the slave Negro...with semiliterate but deep absorption of the essentials of Christianity; the slave Negro found with remarkable intuition and insight his two main life-sustaining aspirations: the hope of salvation and the hope of freedom. This was creative reaction of the first magnitude; for it did much to save his spirit from breaking. (p. 38)

Perhaps the most enduring organization providing education to African American adults was the Black Church (Butler, 2005). Initially, the primary reason for Whites to educate Black adults was to "transmit to the Negro the religious ideas and practices of an alien culture" (Frazier, 1976, p. 44). However, Frazier stated:

Schools and colleges maintained by the Negro church...never attained a high level as educational institutions. They...generally nurtured a narrow religious outlook and...restricted the intellectual development of Negroes even more than the schools established...by White missionaries. (p. 46)

It was not until the Reconstruction Era that the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the Baptist Church, and numerous other developing churches began promoting the importance of education for citizenship (Banks, 1972). This citizenship was equated with economic mobility, social advancement, and personal fulfillment (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The creation and support of public and private schools at primary and secondary levels became a fundamental task of the Black church. Missionaries began teaching reading and math to those previously denied the opportunity for education.

At the turn of the century, African American women began creating organizations that embraced their efforts to improve the lives of African Americans (Lerner, 1981). The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), established in 1896, sought to provide opportunities for people of color by “meeting some of [their] neglected needs” (Busch & Isaac, 2007, p. 14). According to the authors, the NACW’s motto, *Lifting As We Climb*, suggested (1) an idea of life-learning based upon continuous self-improvement, (2) an elevation of status by participating in the educational opportunities provided, and (3) an implication of uplifting the community.

Although benevolent societies, churches, schools, and other institutions were created to advocate for the education of Black adults, several organizations began emerging to address the political and social ills Blacks faced. With Blacks migrating North in hopes of better economic opportunities, racial tensions and frustrations escalated. These new efforts were “designed to meet the needs of an expanding and increasingly sophisticated Black population determined to achieve equality” (Carson, 1993, p. 27). The educational activities of African American individuals, the Black Church, and organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, and NACW encompassed health, education, employment, training, cultural enrichment, historical preservation, and social and political advancements. These same activities were manifested in the adult education initiatives of BGLOs.

Black Greek-Letter Organizations

This study positions BGLOs as adult educators. Although members may not have identified as such, the programs and activities they sponsored fall within the field of adult education, specifically, African American adult education. The following review describes the historical development of these organizations and their adult education initiatives.

Historical Development

Individuals created Greek-Letter organizations to foster brotherhood and sisterhood among college students. Unlike the literary societies⁷ upon which these organizations were fashioned, fraternities and sororities “filled the social vacuum of college life,” providing an “escape from mundane class work and religious training” (Torbenson, 2008, p. 43).

On the campus of William and Mary College in 1776, Phi Beta Kappa became the first fraternity established in the United States. Regarded as the standard of the collegiate fraternity (Kimbrough, 2003), the founders of Phi Beta Kappa were “devoted to the pursuit of liberal education and intellectual fellowship” (Phi Beta Kappa [PBK], 2011, n.p.), and embraced both the academic and extracurricular activities of college men. The first sorority, Gamma Phi Beta,⁸ was established almost 100 years later at Syracuse University (New York) in 1873.

Sororities were established to give women a stronger collective voice in campus activities (Montrose, 1956). Some fraternities allowed women to join but only with peripheral status; women offered their homes for entertainment, provided food for fraternity members, and decorated fraternity halls. Being prohibited from full membership, women banded together to create their own organizations with comparable activities (Baird, 1915).

Having been denied acceptance by White fraternal organizations, Black students followed the lead of early pioneers such as Richard Allen and Prince Hall, who, more than a century prior, started a movement by creating their own parallel institutions. Rejected by

⁷ Literary societies were organizations that provided students the opportunity to develop their speaking and writing skills and allowed for leisure reading (Torbenson, 2008).

⁸ Pi Beta Phi and Kappa Alpha Theta predated Gamma Phi Beta; however, they were classified as a women’s fraternity/organization rather than a sorority.

their White counterparts, these men established the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Masonic Lodge, respectively (Dickinson, 2005).

Although White fraternities and sororities were social in function, BGLOs were created with a more civic-minded purpose. BGLOs were dedicated to the advancement of the Black community's status in society through mutual support, economic enterprise, education, and social change, as evidenced by their mission and purpose statements. For example, the mission of Alpha Kappa Alpha is:

To cultivate and encourage high scholastic and ethical standards, to promote unity and friendship among college women, to study and help alleviate problems concerning girls and women in order to improve their social stature, to maintain a progressive interest in college life, and to be of service to all mankind [sic]. (Alpha Kappa Alpha [AKA], 2011b, n.p.)

Similarly, Phi Beta Sigma seeks to “reaffirm and maintain a strong commitment to brotherhood, scholarship and service,” as well as to “ensure that the Fraternity programs are focused and committed to serving humanity” (Phi Beta Sigma [Sigma], 2011, n.p.). Delta Sigma Theta is “a private, non-profit organization whose purpose is to provide assistance and support through established programs in local communities throughout the world” (Delta, 2011b, n.p.). In addition, “manhood, scholarship, perseverance and uplift” were chosen as the cardinal principles of Omega Psi Phi (Omega Psi Phi [Que], 2011, n.p.).

The first collegiate BGLO was founded on the campus of Cornell University in 1906.⁹ For a group of young Black men on a predominantly White campus, the idea of a fraternity provided a social support system to help them cope with the ills of racism and created a

⁹ Historical documents suggest that Gamma Phi Fraternity, founded in 1905 at Wilberforce University, is the first BGLO. However, they were only in existence for 30 years. Alpha Phi Alpha is the first continuous collegiate BGLO (Kimbrough, 2003).

sanctuary of racial solidarity and mutual exchange (Wesley, 1997). According to Wesley, the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha were concerned about their “struggles against segregation, discrimination, prejudice, mistreatment, and the advancement of themselves and their people” (p. 18).

After 1906, BGLOs began forming on other predominantly White campuses. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity was established in 1911 at Indiana University (Indiana) and in 1922, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority was founded at Butler University (Indiana). However, most BGLOs found their start at Howard University (Washington, DC), an historically Black college/university (HBCU). These organizations include Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (1908), Omega Psi Phi Fraternity (1911), Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (1913), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity (1914), and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority (1920). In 1963, Iota Phi Theta Fraternity was established on the campus of Morgan State University (Maryland).

According to the NPHC’s¹⁰ history, BGLOs:

...evolved during a period when African Americans were being denied essential rights and privileges afforded others. Racial isolation on predominantly White campuses and social barriers of class on all campuses created a need for African Americans to align themselves with other individuals sharing common goals and ideals. With the realization of such a need, the African American (Black) Greek-letter organization movement took on the personae of a haven and outlet, which could foster brotherhood and sisterhood in the pursuit to bring about social change through the development of social programs that would create positive change for Blacks and the country. (National Pan-Hellenic Council [NPHC], 2011, p. 1)

¹⁰ The NPHC is the coordinating body of the nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations (Alpha Phi Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Delta Sigma Theta, Phi Beta Sigma, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho, Iota Phi Theta) that promotes “interaction through forums, meetings and other mediums for the exchange of information and engages in cooperative programming and initiatives through various activities and functions” (NPHC, 2011, n.p.).

Table 2.1 provides organizational information of the nine BGLOs, or the “Divine Nine,” that constitute the NPHC.

Table 2.1 National Pan-Hellenic Council.

| Organization | Date Founded | Campus | Nickname |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity | December 4, 1906 | Cornell University | Alpha |
| Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority | January 15, 1908 | Howard University | AKA |
| Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity | January 5, 1911 | Indiana University | Kappa |
| Omega Psi Phi Fraternity | November 17, 1911 | Howard University | Que |
| Delta Sigma Theta Sorority | January 13, 1913 | Howard University | Delta |
| Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity | January 9, 1914 | Howard University | Sigma |
| Zeta Phi Beta Sorority | January 16, 1920 | Howard University | Zeta |
| Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority | November 12, 1922 | Butler University | SGRho |
| Iota Phi Theta Fraternity | September 16, 1963 | Morgan State University | Iota |

Adult Education Initiatives

In this section, I thematically examine areas where BGLOs contributed to the collective education of the African American community. Three themes were explored, highlighting both historical and contemporary programs and practices: educating the masses, social and political agendas, and a global focus. Although not every program of all nine BGLOs is mentioned, those emphasized help to place the initiatives of BGLOs within the field of adult education.

Educating the Masses. At a time when very few students of color had access to higher education, those who were afforded the opportunity belonged to the elite class (Du Bois, 1903; Gaines, 1996). Albeit measuring their educational attainment by the yardstick of White America’s values (Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2005), BGLOs considered themselves among this group. Unfortunately, according to Washington and Nunez (2005), “While their rejection by Whites spurred race-conscious responses, their unrequited quest for status in the White world led them to distance themselves from the masses of their own race” (p. 139). Nevertheless, the

struggle of racial and class identity¹¹ did not prohibit BGLOs from educating the masses. An article published in Alpha Phi Alpha's journal, *The Sphinx*, stated, "Our [BGLOs] job ahead required a fellowship which would embrace those millions outside of the 'talented tenth'" (Callis, 1952, p. 11). The "talented tenth" referred to a group of Black people who Du Bois (1903) believed would become leaders of the race by continuing their education.

Several BGLOs implemented programs targeting youth, whom they considered to be the future leaders of the Black community. Placing value on education and service to the race, Alpha Phi Alpha's first national program, "Go to High School; Go to College," encouraged young men to pursue secondary and higher education as a means to advancement. This initiative supported statistics that proved "school completion is the single best predictor of future economic success" for young African American men (Alpha Phi Alpha [Alpha], 2011, n.p.).

Similarly, Kappa Alpha Psi's Guide Right Movement catered to the young adult. Created in 1925, the program educated youth on possible career paths by using character, vocational, and educational guidance (Kappa Alpha Psi [Kappa], 1925). The program assisted male high school seniors in choosing and pursuing careers via personal interviews and assessments by Kappa men. In addition, students connected with men in the community who were employed in similar fields of interest. With regard to the Guide Right Movement, Mosby (1928) stated, "It does seem that with the wholehearted cooperation in carrying out this program, we shall be the instruments for helping countless Negro youth find themselves, and will be laying the groundwork for a generation of Kappa men to come" (p. 138).

¹¹ Educational programs addressing gender hierarchies were not prevalent in the BGLO literature; as such, this topic is beyond the scope of this study.

In addition to elevating the Black community's educational status, BGLOs sought to instill in them and foster racial progress. Omega Psi Phi in particular took an interest in this matter. Carter G. Woodson, a member of the fraternity, urged fellow brothers to gain knowledge about African American history and to understand its importance. At a national convention, Woodson spoke about "the need to address the ignorance of the masses of African Americans with regard to their own history [in order to] generate even more leadership among the masses" (Harris & Mitchell, 2008, p. 153). This ignorance fueled Woodson to establish the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). The ASALH continues "to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community" (Association for the Study of African American Life and History [ASALH], 2011, n.p.).

Woodson launched two initiatives still in existence today: Black History Month and Negro Achievement Week. The former was a campaign within the African American community. Beginning as Negro History Literature Achievement Week, the effort sought to "inform the Negro of his past, inspire racial pride and thus stimulate noble race achievement" (Dreer, 1940, p. 153). In 1924, Woodson changed the name to Negro History Week and moved the celebration from the month of April to February. This program is now recognized as Black History Month. Negro Achievement Week, however, focuses on the contemporary accomplishments of African Americans so that "boys and girls, young men and women, and the untutored, might be inspired to noble achievement through the example of their forefathers and the achievement of contemporaneous Negroes" (Dreer, 1940, p. 160). Likewise, Iota Phi

Theta's (2010) Cultural Education Movement program "educates the masses about the impact that the African-American culture has had on our society" (n.p.).

Social and political agendas. The progress of BGLOs over the years has represented the changes of African American participation in civic life. Like Du Bois (1903), who suggested that "a singular group of well-educated men and women would set the agenda for the progress of the entire race" (as cited in Parks, 2008, p. 144), Gaines (1996) posited that BGLOs "saw themselves as being chosen to usher the Black masses" (p. 2).

The longest standing programs sponsored by BGLOs are those that sought to educate African American adults on voter registration and legislation affecting the Black community. Originally called "Education for Citizenship," Alpha Phi Alpha's "A Voteless People Is a Hopeless People" initiative sought to extend the social action arm of the fraternity beyond that of the African American elite. The campaign sought to blur the lines between the working class and elite Blacks regarding voter registration. According to Janken (1993), the goal of the program was to "appeal not only to college men and women, but also to all other classes of our population. It [was] flexible enough to meet the needs of every community" (p. 103). Similarly, Iota Phi Theta's Minority Political Mobilization program seeks to "make minorities aware of their role in the political process" (Iota Phi Theta [Iota], 2010, n.p.).

Both Delta Sigma Theta and Kappa Alpha Psi initiated efforts to educate not only their members but also the Black community on political matters. In the 1920s, Delta Sigma Theta created the National Vigilance Committee, whose goals were to "address political issues relevant to African Americans, endorse the appointment of African Americans to policy-making positions, and lobby the federal government on a number of issues of international and

domestic concern (e.g., anti-lynching legislation, anti-poll tax, and foreign policy)” (Vroman, 1965, p. 40).

Kappa Alpha Psi sought novel ways to inform the Black community on these issues. To educate the fraternity on the Gavagan Bill (anti-lynching law), Lionel Artis, the editor in chief of the Kappa Alpha Psi Journal, printed the bill in its entirety in the fraternity’s magazine. Artis encouraged members to mobilize and contact their respective senators and stressed the importance of solidarity among African Americans on the issue (Harris & Mitchell, 2008). Although the bill did not pass, Kappa Alpha Psi continued to use the organization as a tool of social action. As such, BGLOs used their conventions at the regional and international levels as mediums for dialogue and education.

In 1938, Alpha Kappa Alpha established the Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs. The purposes of this lobby program were to increase voter registration, to attempt to eliminate police brutality, and to pass antidiscrimination legislation (Harris & Mitchell, 2008). In 1946, national president Beulah Whitby invited other BGLOs to join the lobby program. The American Council on Human Rights (ACHR) directly resulted from this collaboration.

In 1948, six of the nine BGLOs: Alpha Phi Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho formed the ACHR. Taking advantage of the status and resources of its members, the ACHR sought to “eliminate racial segregation and discrimination in employment, armed services, international affairs, accommodations and transportation, and other areas of civil rights” (Harris, 2005, p. 217). Such actions included the passage of civil rights laws, the submission of immigration and education bills, and the extension of social security benefits (Harris, 2005).

BGLOs were also instrumental in the war efforts in the early 1900s. During World War I, Phi Beta Sigma set into motion training camps for African American officers in the military. Although African Americans “pledged themselves to assist in the war effort overseas” (Harris & Mitchell, 2008, p. 157), Jim Crow Laws prevented their integration. Phi Beta Sigma, in conjunction with Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, and Omega Psi Phi, formed the Central Committee of Negro College Men, which lobbied for Black officers to lead Black troops. This collaboration resulted in the commission of 639 officers (Scott, 1919).

A Global Focus. Not only do BGLOs shape the lives of their local communities but their reach also extends beyond borders. A few organizations have established chapters in other parts of the world (e.g., Johannesburg, South Africa; St. Croix, Virgin Islands; Monrovia, Liberia), providing a global focus of their adult education initiatives. International initiatives are less common and not undertaken by all BGLOs.

Alpha Kappa Alpha exemplifies this with its international program initiative, “Global Poverty” (AKA, 2011, n.p.). Collaborating with UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization), Alpha Kappa Alpha seeks to:

End hunger, preserve the environment and empower women [by] provid[ing] food production skills and training in self-reliance through gifts of seeds, livestock and training in environmentally sound agriculture. Education in sustainable food practices will make women equal partners in ending poverty and hunger...Alpha Kappa Alpha [has] global partners for self-help projects and awareness campaigns within the United States and abroad. (AKA, 2011a)

In other collaborative efforts, Iota Phi Theta has partnered with Health through Walls to help raise awareness on the current conditions of Third World countries. Health through Walls is a nonprofit organization based in Florida that focuses on improving the prison health care services in developing countries. Considering the recent natural disasters in Haiti, Iota Phi Theta

initiated monthly trips to aid in the rehabilitation of the devastated country (Iota Phi Theta, 2011, n.p.).

Delta Sigma Theta also embraces global communities, exemplified by their creation of Mary Help of the Sick Mission Hospital in Thika, Kenya. The purpose of the hospital is to “provide affordable prenatal and postnatal care, nutritional education, child immunization, and family planning” (Delta Sigma Theta [Delta], 2011a, n.p.) to Kenyans. In 1985, Delta Sigma Theta donated more than \$20,000 to build two additional maternity wards and an administrative office.

The aforementioned programs sought to highlight the educational initiatives of BGLOs. I now transition to frame these efforts within the self-help tradition.

Self-Help in BGLOs

Several Black leaders and organizations contributed to “the formation of the Black self-help tradition and to an establishment of an economic ethos of uplift for the race” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 243). BGLOs were among this group. Individually, these nine organizations’ respective purposes and missions were seeking to uplift the African American community. Collectively, they provided a platform from which to advocate on behalf of the race.

The practices and programming of BGLOs have changed to address the varying needs of the communities they serve. However, embedded within these changes is a tradition that has remained constant. According to Hobhouse (1911), tradition is “the link between past and future; it is that in which the effects of the past are consolidated and on the basis of which subsequent modifications are built” (p. 34). Built upon principles of racial uplift and social advancement, the initiatives of BGLOs embody the self-help tradition by emphasizing service

and philanthropy. The self-help tradition frames this study as a communal effort, involving the mobilization and exchange of resources for the purpose of uplifting the African American community (Carson, 1993; Gaines, 1996; Martin & Martin, 1985).

As BGLOs grew in numbers with chapters spanning across the country and several continents, members began to use their organizations as vehicles for self-help. BGLOs continue to actively engage in service and philanthropic efforts within their communities by sponsoring educational programs for youth and adults and raising money for charitable purposes. Sororities have gone a step further and created tax-exempt organizations at international, national and local levels to strengthen their charitable activities.

Alpha Kappa Alpha created the Educational Advancement Fund (EAF), a not-for-profit organization that “promotes lifelong learning by securing charitable contributions, gifts and endowed funds to award scholarships, fellowships and community assistance awards” (AKA, 2010, n.p.). Delta Sigma Theta has three such organizations in their Washington, D.C. alumnae chapter: D.C. Delta Alumnae Foundation raises money for college scholarships, the Delta Housing Corporation operates a 500-unit housing facility for the elderly, and D.C. Delta Life Development Corporation assists Blacks with job training (Giddings, 1988). Established in 1975, Zeta Phi Beta’s National Educational Foundation promotes service and education through community programs and scholarship grants to worthy students for higher education (Zeta Phi Beta [Zeta], 2010, n.p.).

The programs and initiatives enacted by these sorority women are a continuation of the Black Women’s Club Movement. Just as their great-grandmothers had organized a century

prior, Black sororities carry on the tradition of addressing issues of education, employment, housing, and uplifting their community.

Black Greek-Letter fraternities have also implemented initiatives in the self-help tradition to support the advancement of the African American community. Alpha Phi Alpha's Business and Economic Development Foundation seeks to:

Promote and encourage economic development in minority and disadvantaged communities by expanding the opportunities for the residents of those communities to enter into, own, manage, operate and/or be employed in business enterprises which are based upon the substantial participation of the low income community. (Alpha Phi Alpha [Alpha], 2010, n.p)

Similarly, the Kappa Alpha Psi Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the fraternity, assists the community by providing scholarships, creating after-school programs for youth, and supporting national program initiatives (Kappa, 2010).

According to Omega Psi Phi's national website, the fraternity "is expected to facilitate, participate and coordinate activities that will uplift their communities" (Que, 2010, n.p.). Such activities include voter registration and education, literacy programs, participating in Habitat for Humanity, and sponsoring fundraisers for various charities.

Chapter Summary

Two centuries of African American history and 100 years of BGLOs' existence have produced creative responses to the needs of the Black community via adult education initiatives. Traditions of self-help through educational programming, community service, and philanthropic efforts have been evident throughout this history. Organized giving and service by Blacks can be traced to Africa, the early Black churches, mutual aid societies, and fraternal organizations. These institutions began by providing for the extended family and now have

“developed a complex network of vital services not only within their communities but also to address the needs of the larger Black community nationwide” (Carson, 1993, p. 49).

In this chapter, I examined the literature on African American adult education, situating the initiatives of BGLOs within the body of scholarship. I described the historical context, though not exhaustive, which gave birth to these organizations, and framed their practices and programming within the self-help tradition.

**Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted
- Albert Einstein**

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to describe the adult education initiatives of BGLO graduate chapters. I also sought to examine whether and how these initiatives embodied the self-help tradition. The following research questions guided this study: 1) What are the adult education initiatives of Black Greek-Letter Organizations? 2) How do these initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical context of African American adult education? and 3) How do the initiatives of graduate chapters of Black Greek-Letter Organizations embody the self-help tradition, if at all? In this chapter, I argue that a collective case study, using ethnographic methods, was well suited to explore this topic. I describe the design of this research project, participant selection, data collection and analysis, and data quality. I close this chapter by describing how my background and identity have shaped my involvement with the participants of this study.

This study was grounded in the qualitative research tradition, which emphasizes the pursuit of meaning and understanding and produces richly descriptive findings (Merriam, 2009). The strength of qualitative research is “the ability to provide an account of the means by which individual outcomes are achieved, considering both context and participant meaning rather than focusing on the relationship between predefined criteria and outcome variables” (Baber, 2007, p. 45). Because the primary focus of this research was a detailed examination of the initiatives of BGLOs from multiple graduate chapters, a case study approach was most suitable.

Aligning with Stake (2005), a case study is a choice of *what* is to be studied rather than

how. A case study design is particularly useful when the phenomenon under investigation is ingrained in the context in which it exists (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003). For example, the initiatives of BGLOs are so embedded in their social and cultural practices that members may not even realize they are providing adult education. A collective case study explored this phenomenon within a contemporary, real-life context through the collection of data from several cases (Yin, 2003). The ability to collect and analyze data through multiple cases provided for a more robust study.

A case study is defined by the researcher's interests - intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Stake, 2005). Since I was interested in a case (BGLOs) to provide insight into the specific phenomenon of African American adult education, my interests were more instrumental than intrinsic. This study examined particular cases of BGLOs to study the phenomenon; hence, a collective case study was used.

To be considered a case study, the choice of what to study – the unit of analysis – must be a bounded and functioning entity. Employing a case study approach to qualitative research allows the researcher to:

explore a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (Creswell, 2007, p. 73)

This collective case study sought to examine the practices and programming of five graduate chapters to provide insight into the adult education initiatives participated in and sponsored by BGLOs.

I chose a case study design because of the many possibilities it brings. It can “bring about the discovery of new meaning...or confirm what is known” (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). Stake

(1981) further suggests that “previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies, leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 47, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 44). This study was not concerned with population generalizations. Instead, I attempted to provide a deeper understanding of the adult education initiatives of BGLOs. By carefully selecting purposeful samples of these organizations, I anticipate that the initiatives I described may provide insight to the collective group.

Data Collection

This study used multiple case studies where the cases were graduate chapters of BGLOs whose initiatives educated the African American communities they serve. The following section outlines my data collection plan. I begin by describing the unit(s) of analysis for this study. I continue by discussing how I recruited study participants. The section closes with a discussion of the types of data I collected.

Sampling

A unit of analysis is “an entity that is capable of expressing, exhibiting, or eliciting the phenomenon under investigation” (Baptiste, 2008, class discussion). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the adult education initiatives of BGLO graduate chapters. Of the nine BGLOs, I chose five for in-depth investigation. Since I planned to use ethnographic tools to collect information-rich data, studying all nine BGLOs would have been an overwhelming task. Hence, I elected to study two fraternities and three sororities to provide a variation in the initiatives of these organizations. Patton (2002) suggests that sample size for qualitative research depends on what the investigator is attempting to study and the available resources: “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have

more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p. 245). To gain information and insight about my units of analysis, I selected one graduate chapter each from five organizations. Chapters were selected based on available resources, accessibility, and program initiatives targeting the education of adults.

Using convenience sampling¹² as described by Patton (2002), I chose a peri-urban city in Pennsylvania as the research location. Although other sites were considered, this particular location provided the access needed for data collection. The relationships that I had fostered as a graduate student at Penn State aided in gaining entrée and establishing rapport with key informants. In addition, the research location had an active National Pan-Hellenic Council consisting of graduate chapters from eight of the nine BGLOs.

Once my dissertation proposal was approved, I began to research organizational and local websites to see which chapters fit the established criteria: (1) the purpose of educational initiatives was to facilitate learning for chapter and community members, (2) the initiatives of the chapter sought to uplift the African American community, and (3) the chapter had a minimum of 25 years of involvement in the African American community.¹³ After obtaining contact information from the chapter websites, I emailed four chapter presidents, introducing myself and the purpose of the study, including a detailed description of the expectations and rights of participants in the study. Two chapter presidents responded to the initial communication, one fraternity and one sorority. Since I did not have the contact information

¹² Although convenience sampling is the least desirable among sampling strategies, it was the best way to gain access to organizations of which I was not a member.

¹³ Twenty-five years assumes longevity in the community.

for the Alpha Phi Alpha chapter president, I sent him a message via the chapter's email address provided on the website. While attending an event sponsored by the Alpha chapter in early December, I made sure to reintroduce myself to him so that he would be able to put a face with the name on our communications.

One of the participant organizations, Sigma Gamma Rho, did not meet all of the established criteria, having only been chartered within the past five years. However, I added them to the study to provide a contrast of adult education initiatives sponsored as compared to the other four organizations.

Five chapter presidents indicated their interest in participating in the study: Alpha Phi Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Delta Sigma Theta, and Sigma Gamma Rho. I conducted exploratory interviews with the presidents¹⁴ to gauge the spectrum of programs their respective chapters sponsor. Topics included purpose of program, target audience, length of program's existence, and any outcomes or results of the program (see Appendix A). Table 3.1 provides a thematic chart of programs sponsored by these chapters¹⁵. Chapter presidents were then asked to suggest additional members to participate in the study who had specific expertise in a particular adult education initiative or program. In all, eleven members participated in this study (five fraternity members and six sorority members).

¹⁴ The Sigma Gamma Rho president did not participate in this study due to schedule conflicts. The president-elect participated in her place.

¹⁵ Although several of these initiatives are geared toward youth, only those specific to adults were examined in this study.

Table 3.1 BGLO Graduate Chapters' Thematic Programming¹⁶

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health Fair and Carnival ▪ Making Strides Against Breast Cancer ▪ Juvenile Diabetes Walk* ▪ American Kidney Fund ▪ March of Dimes ▪ Soul Line Dancing ▪ Project Cradle Care ▪ H3: Healthy Me! |
| Environmental Concerns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Energy Education Forum ▪ County Recycling ▪ Heifer International |
| Economics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Green Pages ▪ Mortgage Foreclosure Program ▪ Financial Fortitude ▪ GLAD |
| Political Advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alpha Day at the Capitol ▪ A Voteless People is a Hopeless People ▪ AKA Day at the Capitol ▪ Race For Diversity* ▪ Delta Days |
| Service and Philanthropy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food Bank* ▪ Soup Kitchen* ▪ MLK Day of Service ▪ City Mission* ▪ Salvation Army |
| Education and Mentoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emerging Young Leaders ▪ Senior Salute and Scholarship ▪ Roger Davis Scholarship Award Program* ▪ Project Alpha ▪ Big Brothers Big Sisters ▪ Brother's Keeper ▪ 7 Jewels Foundation* |

According to Patton (2002) there are no set guidelines for selecting sample size. The eleven participants ultimately represented the breadth, depth, and longevity of programs

¹⁶ The names of local initiatives that BGLO graduate chapters sponsor or participate in have been changed to maintain confidentiality. These initiatives are marked with an (*).

participated in and sponsored by the chapters. Due to time constraints (e.g., data collection during the holidays, founders' day celebrations, and programmatic breaks) and resource constraints (e.g., funding, time away from work), more participants were not added to the study.

Participants

This section introduces the eleven adults from five organizations who participated in this study. For the purpose of confidentiality, I have changed the names of participants and other identifying information.

Alpha Phi Alpha. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated was founded on December 4, 1906 at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. The local chapter was chartered in the mid-1950s. The chapter's membership consists of professionals from the fields of higher education, law, business and the military. About 15 of the 45 men in the chapter meet on the third Thursday of every month (September-May) at a local church to discuss the business of the organization. The annex of the church is set up conference-style with brothers sitting around the rectangular table. The average age of members has decreased within the last few years from 50 to 45.

Jackson, an African American man in his late 50s, is president of the chapter. He became a member of the organization in the late 1970s. Jackson sought membership in his fraternity as a means of social support:

I attended a predominately white institution [where] Greek life was an important element for socialization and recreation. The Greeks on campus provided a lot of the social outlets for the African-American students, [which] made it all the more appealing at the time. So I guess that would be what piqued my interest. It was the Greek groups

on campus who we could relate to as minority students at a predominately white university.¹⁷

Jackson has been a member of the chapter since 1981. As president, his responsibilities included overseeing chapter programs, providing stability and leadership to members, and motivating brothers to get and stay involved.

Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders, Franklin, the chapter's historian and member of five years, discussed his reasons for wanting to join a fraternity during his time at an HBCU in the South:

During the 60s, with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King was spearheading that. As a college student, I was influenced to join a fraternity because of the work that he was doing and not particularly because of the activities of the fraternity on the campus. I really didn't know that much about Greek lettered organizations, but once I learned that he was an Alpha, that was the primary motivation for me to join the fraternity.

Cory became a man of Alpha at an Ivy League institution in 1997. One of the youngest members in the chapter, Cory is the immediate past president and currently serves as Webmaster. The oldest of six children and the first to attend college, Cory joined the BGLO to fill the void of not having his father in his life: "I didn't have my father around, and really wanted to surround myself with strong male role models."

Alpha Kappa Alpha. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated was founded on January 15, 1908 at Howard University. Currently a medium-sized chapter, its 77 members have careers in politics, law, education, business, and nonprofit organizations, among others. The chapter is also home to an international officer of the sorority. The community center of a local grocery store hosts the chapter's meetings the first Saturday of every month (September-May). Forty is

¹⁷ Excerpts have been edited for readability

the average age of the women in the chapter and 30 is the average number of women who actively attend meetings and programs. Four rows of two tables each line both sides of the room with an aisle in the middle. Two tables in the front of the room seat the chapter president, parliamentarian, and secretary who face the body. The chapter's treasurer and financial secretary sit at the back of the room to conduct the financial operations of the chapter and not interfere with the meeting.

Gwen, a retired governmental employee, is an African American woman in her early 60s. She has served the AKA chapter twice as president and as the *Ivy Leaf Reporter*. The *Ivy Leaf* is the journal of the organization published four times a year. The *Ivy Leaf Reporter* is responsible for submitting newsworthy information of their respective chapters to national headquarters to be shared with the international body.

Gwen joined the sorority in the mid-1960s. As a freshman she was escorted around to become familiar with the campus and her new environment by a member of the organization. Already having an interest in the sorority, Gwen was amazed at how "dignified and classy" the young lady was, which "sealed the deal" for her. Gwen became a member of the graduate chapter in the early 1980s.

Sallie has served her chapter for 25 years in many capacities: Vice President, Cotillion Chair, Health Fair Chair, 50th Anniversary Chair, and Treasurer. She also serves the sorority as an international officer of the organization. Although the latter position takes her across the country, she calls the local chapter her home. Sallie was initiated into Alpha Kappa Alpha in the late 1970s.

Brenda was initiated in AKA in 1967 at an HBCU in the South. She has been an active member of the graduate chapter since 1986. Since that time, Brenda has served as president twice, vice president, corresponding secretary, and chair of several committees. Currently, she is the Protocol Chairman. In this capacity, Brenda educates members on the rules and procedures of the organization, ensuring that the chapter adheres to the standards that have been established. In addition, she makes sure that members are conducting themselves in an orderly and ethical manner.

When asked what led her to join a BGLO, Brenda responded:

...there were a number of Greek letter organizations on my campus. And most of these students were the student leaders on campus. And they were people that I admired, and looked up to. [I] wanted to be like them. I saw the activities that they were doing, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Unlike the other three AKA participants, Joyce was initiated into the organization through this local graduate chapter. Joyce always felt she had a connection to the AKAs, even at the undergraduate level:

When I was in college... looking at the different organizations, I did not join at that time...[AKA] was the only sorority that was looking at me and that was the only sorority that I was looking at. So it was a mutual interest. But for my own personal reasons, I chose not to go any further at that time. And so, in my professional life and personal life, it seemed there was always a click and a connection with women of AKA. And it was interesting. So when they asked me to join, I knew that it was a good fit. I was already going to some of their programs and whenever they came to the Capitol, they had always asked me to help out with that and everything.

Joyce has been a member of the sorority since June 2007. As the chapter's parliamentarian, she maintains the order of all chapter meetings. In addition, her career as a government employee assists in her work she as chair of the Connections Committee by ensuring that the chapter is kept abreast of political advocacy efforts in the community.

Kappa Alpha Psi. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated was founded January 5, 1911 in Indiana on a predominantly white campus. The alumni chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi was chartered in the summer of 1960. Although a small chapter with about 25 members, of which 10-20 members are actively involved, several members hold leadership positions at the international level. The chapter meets at the local YMCA the first Saturday of every month, except for July and August.

Ernest has been a member of the organization for over 42 years. Initiated at an HBCU in the South, he explained why he chose Kappa:

...going to an HBCU I knew nothing about fraternities or sororities. Nothing about Greek life at all. And so everything that I learned, I acquired through observation. I saw the different men on campus...how they dressed up, carried themselves...then I discovered that they were Kappas... The older students were very professional in their demeanor and how they carried themselves. And, so... through observation and I guess also in my major, political science and sociology...how they presented themselves fit with how I thought you should present yourself. So I identified with Kappa Alpha Psi, not knowing anything other than that observation. And, so then my next goal was, 'hey, I gotta get my grades in order to be able to do that.'

Ernest joined the graduate chapter in 1995 and currently serves as the president. He also serves his area as the chairman of the chapter advisors. In this capacity he is responsible for the training of all advisors who are alumni members wanting to assume the role of collegiate advisor.

Jeremy wanted to join his organization for one reason: networking. He became a member in 1991 and has been in his current chapter since 1996. Jeremy serves his chapter as the Guide Right Coordinator (see page 26). Jeremy described his chapter as a transient one, since many men are affiliated with the military and/or are in graduate school. The majority of the members are not permanent residents of the town.

Delta Sigma Theta. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was founded on January 13, 1913.

The local graduate chapter was chartered in 1956 by recent graduates returning home from college. A chapter of almost 90 women, about 40 members consistently attend monthly chapter meetings. Two months out of the year, the Deltas and AKAs host their chapter meetings in the same location but at different times. The chapter consists of women working in private industry, local governmental offices, and education.

Though interested during her collegiate years, Debbie did not join her sorority until she had completed her undergraduate degree. She has been a member of her sorority and chapter for more than 20 years. Just completing her first year of service, Debbie put her doctoral studies on hold to serve the chapter as president.

Sigma Gamma Rho. Organized by seven school teachers in Indianapolis, Indiana, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority strives to “enhance the quality of life within the community” and addresses “concerns that impact society educationally, civically, and economically” (Sigma Gamma Rho [SGRho], 2012a). The local chapter was chartered May 8, 2008 by a small group of paraprofessional women who are young in age¹⁸ but seasoned¹⁹ in the sorority. Although the chapter primarily consists of women who identify as African American, there are two who do not (one is Hispanic and the other is Caucasian).

Tracey, a social worker by profession, serves as the graduate advisor to an undergraduate chapter at a nearby university. She is also on the ballot to run for president. Tracey was first introduced to Greek life by her brother, who participated in the United Negro

¹⁸ The average age of chapter members is less than 35 years old.

¹⁹ Seasoned members have been in the organization more than 5 years.

College Fund’s college tour. Upon his return, he shared with Tracey all he had seen and encouraged her to join a sorority. When it was Tracey’s turn to tour colleges, she finally understood her brother’s excitement. She said this of her experience:

I went to a Step Show (see page 4) for the very first time, ever. At the time, there were only three of the four sororities on campus. I was like, “wow, that seems like a really big, fun thing.” I really didn’t know anything outside of what I had saw, from the Step Show. But I’m the kind of person that once something piques my interest, I want to know more. So, I just started researching all the ones that I could remember... When I started school, I had an opportunity to learn more about them and meet some of the ladies that were in the sorority at that time.... And so that next spring I was inducted into Sigma Gamma Rho.

Table 3.2 provides a classification of the participants and their Greek affiliation.

Table 3.2 Participants and Greek Affiliation

| Participant | Affiliation | Chapter Status |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Brenda | Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority | Member |
| Cory | Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity | Member |
| Debbie | Delta Sigma Theta Sorority | President |
| Ernest | Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity | President |
| Franklin | Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity | Member |
| Gwen | Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority | President |
| Jackson | Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity | President |
| Jeremy | Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity | Member |
| Joyce | Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority | Member |
| Sallie | Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority | International Officer |
| Tracey | Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority | Member |

Data Sources

The strength of a case study design is the opportunity to use several sources of data. This triangulation provides a convergence of the data collected, which in turn validates one source of evidence against another (Merriam, 2002). Triangulation of data helps strengthen the validity of a study because various sources provide multiple observations on “what is really going on” in the case (p. 25). For this study, ethnographic interviews were the main source of

data, supplemented by organizational documents and one observation.²⁰ Following Wolcott's (2008) suggestions, I enquired about the adult education initiatives of five BGLO graduate chapters and examined organizational and chapter documents to capture the essence of what I was looking for.

Interviews. When a researcher enquires they begin to probe, asking questions of the experience. Enquiring forces the researcher to “intrude on or initiate activities and conversations with those among whom we study” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 49). Qualitative interviewing provides that opportunity, the means by which the participants and I can have a “conversation with a purpose” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 102). These conversations provided clarification of meanings and behaviors held by the participants.

Ethnographic interviews were the primary source of data for this study. They sought to “gain the perspective of the participant that is informed by the social context and the participant's position within that context” (Stage & Manning, 2003, p. 37). Interviews were semi-structured, permitting me to investigate general topics and the participant to frame their own responses. Such topics included the chapter's involvement in the African American community, examples of programs participated in or sponsored, and how initiatives changed over the years. Table 3.3 provides an example of the research questions and their relationship to the interview guide (see Appendix B for the full instrument). Interviews were conducted with key informants who were able to provide the most information-rich data possible.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with eight of the eleven participants. Three interviews were conducted by phone due to (1) a delayed flight and illness that caused one

²⁰ Only one observation was conducted due to scheduling conflicts.

participant to reschedule on more than one occasion, (2) another participant was in the field collecting dissertation data herself, and (3) scheduling conflicts due to travel did not allow a face-to-face interview with another participant.

Table 3.3 Research questions and related interview guide

| Research Question | Related Interview Questions |
|--|---|
| What are the adult educational initiatives of BGLO graduate chapters? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide an example of internal programming for chapter members and external programming for community members. ▪ How is this need distinctively African American as opposed to a broader, community-wide need? ▪ Does your organization have any global initiatives that involve educating adults? If so, can you discuss them. |
| How do these initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical context of African American adult education? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How have your chapter's initiatives shaped the lives of Black adults in the community? ▪ How are your chapter's initiatives different now than in the past (e.g., which groups they focus on, how they're implemented, content, objectives)? |
| How do the initiatives of graduate chapters of Black Greek-Letter Organizations embody the self-help tradition, if at all? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you see as the chapter's responsibility toward the education of Black adults? ▪ How is this responsibility expressed in the chapter's activities? |

Participants included the current, outgoing, or incoming chapter president, an international officer, and chapter members. The first round of interviews was intended to provide a historical and contemporary perspective of the adult education initiatives within the chapter. A second round of interviews was needed with members of Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi to address questions and concerns that arose during the analysis phase. Several emails were exchanged between me and participants requesting clarification and follow-up questions that did not necessarily warrant another interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 10 and 45 minutes.

Artifacts. Examining, or document analysis, allows the researcher to “turn attention to what has already been produced by others” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 50). During the examination phase, a researcher may come into contact with public or private artifacts that add to the substance of the research. Archival data, such as organizational publications and documents (e.g., journals, newsletters) as well as any other electronic materials, served as supplements to other data collected.

I began my analysis by browsing the international organizations’ websites to get an idea of their national programs and/or initiatives. By doing this, I was better able to formulate my interview questions to gauge how they were implemented by the local chapters. In addition to the international websites, I also examined the chapter websites. The local websites provided me with historical information of the chapter including when it was chartered, honors and accolades of the chapter and individual members, and upcoming events.

The Beacon and *PASSION*²¹ are the newsletters of the local Alpha and AKA chapters respectively. Both the *Beacon*, published quarterly, and *PASSION*, published monthly, highlight past and current events the chapter sponsored and participated in and have welcoming messages from the chapter president and news pertaining to the collegiate chapters they sponsor. *PASSION*, however, also contains reports by the various committee chairpersons, shares sisterly concerns (e.g., birthdays, achievements, illnesses, and deaths), and includes the agenda for the upcoming meeting. SGRho, Kappa, and Delta did not have local newsletters but referred me to their international organs, the *Aurora*, *The Journal*, and *Delta Journal* respectively.

²¹ Parts of the name of both newsletters were omitted to protect the identity of the chapters.

I also collected informational brochures of the various programs the Alpha, AKA, and SGRho chapter participated in. My analysis of these documents focused on corroborating or contradicting claims made by participants regarding reasons why they engage in certain activities in the communities they serve. These documents also provided further explanation of the shift in programmatic focus of many BGLOs concerning the intended audience of programs sponsored (I discuss this further in chapter 4).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began when the first email was sent to solicit participants. It was an iterative process that continued throughout the study. For this collective case study, analysis occurred in two phases: within-case and cross-case (Merriam, 2009). In the first phase, each case was examined and analyzed individually for its particularities. In the second phase, themes and categories were created to build general explanations across cases.

Participant interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, and then reviewed for accuracy by myself. I repeatedly listened to the interviews following along with the transcripts, making corrections and filling in missing pieces of text. The transcriptionist provided a guide when audio was unclear or the spelling of a name was uncertain. As I coded, I made notes about what I was thinking, how participant comments made me feel, and questions I needed to ask for clarification. By becoming familiar with the transcripts, I was able to identify preliminary themes such as “education and mentoring,” “giving back,” and “civic service.” Dr. Olson, my mentor and former colleague, provided triangulation by reviewing my beginning interpretations and analyses of the data.

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data. I was interested in what participants said, what these organizations have done, and what they are doing to educate the African American communities they serve. A review of the literature had already presented sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954) that I looked for: social and political agendas, educating the masses, a global focus, and racial uplift. However, I did not limit myself to these four, as they only served as “a general sense of reference and guidance...suggest[ing] directions along which to look (p. 7). Charmaz (2003) further stated that sensitizing concepts “offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience...they provide starting points for building analysis” (p. 259).

Although I employed the use of NVivo, a computer software program, for the purpose of keeping the data organized, I preferred coding manually by using different colored fonts to represent the various codes in a Microsoft Word document.

Creating a thematic map (see Chapter Four) allowed me to conceptualize themes generated from the data. Relationships between categories (e.g., education related to health disparities) and codes (e.g., obesity, prostate cancer, heart disease) were considered and reevaluated. Data were recoded to ensure a “fit” existed within the codes and developed themes. I then wrote a detailed analysis of each theme, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), to “consider how it fits into the broader overall ‘story’ that you are telling about your data, in relation to the research question” (p. 92). The final phase of data analysis involved producing the report that would convince readers of how the data supports the story I was trying to tell.

Standards of Evaluation

A debate exists concerning issues of evaluation in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2003; Patton, 2003; Yin, 2003). The applied nature of qualitative inquiry “makes it imperative that researchers...and others be able to trust the results of research” (Merriam, 1988, p. 164). As the researcher, I am responsible for ensuring that the results of this study are authentic (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In other words, I had to be comfortable and secure with my research procedures and findings. For this study, I addressed standards of evaluation by discussing validity, reliability, and transferability, as suggested by Merriam (2003) and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Data Quality

Validity guarantees that results of a study are “credible given the data presented” (Merriam, 2002, p. 213). Throughout the process I asked myself: Do the findings capture what is being investigated? When assessing validity, the data did not speak for themselves, since I was an interpreter. Because I was the primary instrument of data collection, I interpreted the essence of the phenomenon directly based upon interview data and documents collected (Merriam, 2003).

Triangulation of data enhanced validity by allowing me to check data collected from one source (program brochures) with data collected from another source (interviews). Similarly, member checks provided an assurance that addressed validity. Once the interviews were transcribed and emerging themes generated, I provided the participants with an electronic copy of my beginning interpretations to ensure that I accurately captured what they had said.

After establishing initial codes, I then solicited commentary from colleagues to check my beginning themes. Maxwell (2005) states:

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

I intended to keep a journal to privately document my feelings, thoughts, biases, and assumptions about the research process. However, I did not write in the journal as often as I intended to. The journal served as more of a time stamp, documenting when and what I did throughout the study. I documented thoughts and ideas that arose during data analysis, many of which are beyond the scope of this study.

Because I belong to a BGLO, I risked romanticizing the contributions these organizations have made to the African American communities they serve. However, I did not go into the field with a notion that BGLOs are inherently good and can do no wrong. I acknowledge that there are positive benefits to being a member of a BGLO. However, I also recognize that not all experiences are positive. This knowledge, along with my experiences in two very different graduate chapters of my sorority, helped me keep an open mind. I did, however, take note of my feelings and concerns about the amount of programming the chapters in this study sponsored in comparison to one another.

Reliability addresses concerns of study replication by other researchers (Merriam, 2009). However, because qualitative research is concerned with the *interpretation* of reality rather than reality *itself*, expecting the same results by replicating a study is not logical, since the same

data can produce numerous interpretations. Rather, qualitative research seeks to ensure that the investigator's conclusions are plausible given the data collected. Wolcott (2005) argues:

In order to achieve reliability in that technical sense, a researcher has to manipulate conditions so that replicability can be assessed. Ordinarily, fieldworkers do not try to make things happen at all, but whatever the circumstances, we most certainly cannot make them happen twice. And if something does happen more than once, we never for a minute insist that the repetition be exact. (p. 159)

To that matter, another study on the adult education initiatives of BGLO graduate chapters using the same data collection techniques and strategies as this study may yield different results.

I used an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to address reliability concerns. I documented the methods of data collection used, the procedures of categorization, and the decision-making process throughout the inquiry. Similarly, peer reviews and ongoing discussions with committee members and other colleagues about the research process and emerging findings helped to ensure that my initial findings were reasonably based on the data.

Empirically speaking, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, this study had no intention of generalizing BGLO graduate chapters in other parts of the country. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), this study employed the term "transferability," which refers to inferences that can be made about populations given similar research contexts. They suggest "the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere" (p. 298). To allow others to determine the extent to which findings may apply to a different setting, I provided detailed descriptions of the phenomenon and context.

Merriam (2002) offers several strategies to enhance the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Table 3.4 summarizes those I used in this study.

Researcher's Identity

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). The perspectives that I assumed throughout the course of the study alternated. As a member of a BGLO, I assumed an emic perspective into their social and cultural activities. The emic perspective is the insider's or native's view of reality. While the emic perspective may have limited my objectivity, having an insider's point of view helped me understand and describe the dynamics of BGLOs. On the contrary, the etic perspective relies upon the researcher's perceptions as an outsider, indicating an "external, social scientific perspective" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 20). This view systemically analyzes the relationship between environmental factors and a culture based on its materials or artifacts. For example, because I selected a graduate chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, I was granted access because I am a member of the organization. However, having only been a member of the chapter for a short period of time made me an outsider to the idiosyncrasies of its membership.

Table 3.4 Research Design Summary

| Research Questions | Data Sources | Standards of Evaluation |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the adult education initiatives of Black Greek-Letter Organizations? ▪ How do these initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical context of African American adult education? ▪ How do the initiatives of graduate chapters of Black Greek-Letter Organizations embody the self-help tradition, if at all? | <p><i>Interviews</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chapter President ▪ Chapter members ▪ International officers <p><i>Artifacts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizational/chapter website ▪ Program advertisements ▪ Organizational documents ▪ Researcher journal | <p><i>Triangulation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviews ▪ Artifacts <p><i>Member Checks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants <p><i>Peer Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dissertation committee ▪ Adult Education colleagues <p><i>Researcher Reflexivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Researcher journal ▪ Audit Trail |

Ethical Concerns

Negotiating entry and informed consent are inherent ethical issues in qualitative research. To gain entrance to a particular site through key informants or gatekeepers, researchers must represent themselves and their study accurately. Marshall and Rossman (2006) caution that gaining access “requires time, patience, and sensitivity to the rhythms and norms of a group” (p. 77). I gained access to the local graduate chapters by sending an email to the presidents, as described above. My attendance at local functions and programs provided evidence of my membership in a BGLO. This membership validated my study and allowed the chapter presidents to view me as a credible person to conduct this study.

Although the participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and that of the chapter, some of the information shared regarding their initiatives may reveal to the reader the chapter they represent. To account for this, I changed the names of locations and programs mentioned.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I presented an overview of the methodological choices I made to investigate the adult education initiatives of BGLOs. I argued that a collective case study was well suited to explore this topic. I provided a discussion on the research site and participants selected for this study as well as the means by which data was collected and analyzed.

**Education is for improving the lives of others and for
leaving your community and world better than you found it.
-Marian Wright Edelman**

Chapter 4: Findings

The educational programs, community service, and philanthropic efforts of Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs) position members of their graduate chapters as adult educators. In this chapter, primarily using interview data, I examine the adult education initiatives of these organizations. Interwoven is a discussion of how the contemporary initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical tradition of African American adult education. I then discuss the ways BGLOs describe the notion of self-help, a tradition that has been a cornerstone of African American culture. Embedded within this discussion are examples of how this tradition is embodied within the adult education initiatives of BGLOs.

Adult Education Initiatives

During the course of the interviews, I asked 11 members of five BGLO graduate chapters to describe the adult education initiatives their chapter participates in and/or sponsors. As discussed in Chapter 2, BGLOs have historically sponsored or participated in adult education initiatives concerning politics, education, and international efforts. However, after speaking with participants, the following areas were also identified: health, economic development, and service and philanthropy.

Building Healthy Communities

The initiatives of BGLOs have changed over the years. Historically, BGLOs have focused on issues such as racism and discrimination fighting for the basic educational and civil rights of

African Americans. While many battles have been won, a war still ensues. Currently, a major concern affecting the Black community is health inequities or disparities.

Health disparities. Health disparities refer to “population-specific differences in the presence of disease, health outcomes, quality of health care and access to health care services that exist across racial and ethnic groups” (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2012, p. 1). Poverty, violence, and personal behaviors are a few factors that contribute to these disparities (NCLS, 2012), particularly in African American communities. According to the Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (2012), African Americans are at a higher risk for obesity, hypertension, and high cholesterol. Heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are among the top five causes of death. In addition, the average life expectancy is 73.6 years compared to that of 77.9 years for White Americans.

According to a 2007 study conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (2011), over 60% of adult women are overweight. The numbers are even more alarming for women of color. Four out of five African American women are overweight or obese (Office of Women’s Health, 2010). The local sororities have found creative and fun ways to get this target group of women invested in their physical well-being.

The current international administration of Delta Sigma Theta launched the Health Task Force. This initiative seeks to “educate and facilitate lifestyle change for the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of sorors and the communities that we serve” (Delta, 2012). In addition, the sorority is working “to combat the high incidence of obesity among women” by “challeng[ing] chapters to commit to achieve healthier weights” (Delta, 2012). The local chapter has accepted that challenge with their soul line dancing classes. Held every Tuesday for an hour

at the Boys & Girls Club, this program is free and open to community. Although several men and children attend, the majority of the participants are African American women. In exchange for using the venue, the chapter volunteers with implementing the programs and initiatives of the club.

The Deltas wanted to provide a space where women could exercise without paying a costly gym membership or searching for child care. Although line dancing is not a form of exercise, the chapter stresses the importance of moving. Debbie stated:

The majority of the women that come can't quite afford a gym membership. You know, they may have children or they may be overweight or something like that. And what we've done is, we've sort of showed them that you've gotta move, no matter what. You can't just sit and eat, but you've gotta get up and you gotta move. And you've gotta do it every day. Not just when you come here to Soul Line Dancing, but every day.

In addition to the line dancing class, the chapter started a "biggest loser" competition with some of the participants. The goal of the contest was to see who could lose more weight (body fat) than Team Delta, a team comprised of chapter members. Five teams participated in the six-week competition. The team that won was treated to a healthy meal at a local restaurant with Team Delta.

Along with line dancing, Zumba has become the new rave in the African American community. Sigma Gamma Rho's *H3: It's All About Me! Healthy Choices, Healthy Living for Healthy Generations* initiative uses Zumba to get high school students and community members active and engaged in their physical health. Community partners are solicited to discuss pertinent information of ways to make healthy choices in their daily lives. The workshops begin with a Zumba session to emphasize staying fit and exercising. Then participants break into small, age appropriate groups for discussion on such topics as credit

stability, self-esteem and empowerment issues (e.g., self-love, body image, healthy relationships), and legal implications (e.g., jail time or probation) of making bad choices, such as underage drinking, buying alcohol for minors, and DUI's. This particular workshop is facilitated by a chapter soror currently enrolled in law school. Project Cradle Care, one of SGRho's newest national initiatives, educates women of childbearing age about the importance of pre- and post-natal care. Proper prenatal care is crucial to helping control the number of early births, defects, and deaths in infants. According to the March of Dimes (2011) one in eight babies is born premature in America. Since the 1990s, this rate has increased by 20 percent. African American women experience the highest rates of pre-term births (18.5%) compared to the national rate of 12.8 percent (March of Dimes, 2011).

Project Cradle Care seeks to "improve pregnancy outcomes in high risk communities by increasing the number of women of childbearing age who receive adequate prenatal education and premature care and who better understand proper infant care and child development" (SGRho, 2012b, p. 43). This prenatal education and resource program addresses topics such as child pre-natal concerns (e.g., vitamins, immunizations, regular check-ups), mother post-natal concerns (e.g., emotional, mental, and physical changes and wellness), and potential health risks during pregnancy (SGRho 2012b). Events in support of this initiative are designed to assist women in making healthy choices about their unborn children.

Along the same lines of early intervention and detection, a stigma exists with men, particularly African Americans, with going to the doctor. Some cast blame on the health system and lack of access to medical resources and others may attribute this behavior to historical events leading to a distrust of medical professionals such as the Tuskegee experiments in the

early 1930s (Washington, 2006). An American Academy of Family Physicians (2007) survey found that 55% of all men had not seen their primary care provider in the past year. Fraternity members discussed how their chapters encourage participation in such programs concerning men's health.

The Kappa chapter is a strong advocate of prostate cancer awareness. Collaborating with the American Cancer Society and the local chapters of Omega Psi Phi and Alpha Phi Alpha, they sponsor a program that educates both chapter members and men in the community about symptoms, early detection signs, risk factors, and treatment of prostate cancer. Knowing the cultural importance of barber shops as a mecca for African American men, they use these venues as a means to advertise for this program. Ernest explained:

We usually send out something in the paper, put notices in the magazines, and post flyers in barber shops. We know men hang out in barbershops, so we use them as vehicles to get that information out.

Chapter members also encourage each other to participate by sharing information and modeling healthy behaviors.

For a lot of brothers, we're honest and we tell them, "Hey, if you think you want to be up and running with all that manliness that you possess, then you need to be diligent in monitoring your health early." They used to say you wait to 50. I said, that works for the majority population. For African-Americans, you should start about when you're 45. Having the PSA [prostate-specific antigen] blood test and DRE [digital rectal exam] done, and things of that nature...but because of the fact that some of us older men of the chapter went and did it, younger brothers, those that were in their 30s at that time, participated. Hopefully, next time, we're also gonna do some things involving the sororities, since we know women will make men come out.

Above, Ernest is expressing the importance of older members in the chapter setting positive examples for younger members to follow. He speaks of a "manliness" that should be focused on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Ernest also mentions getting sororities involved in the

chapter's health initiatives. In the African American community, it is common for women to take more of a lead role in matters concerning health. It is his hope that their efforts will encourage men to do the same.

For reasons unknown, African-American men are more likely to be diagnosed with and die from prostate cancer than their white counterparts. According to the Wexner Medical Center (2012), from 2003 to 2007, African-American men had substantially higher incidence rates than White men (234.6 versus 150.4 cases per 100,000, respectively). Researchers suggest that future studies examine factors such as dietary and lifestyle differences, occupational exposures, and hormonal and genetic differences (Wexner Medical Center, 2012).

Although prostate cancer affects the broader community, the Black Greek-Letter fraternities believe that by sponsoring such a program, they are creating an atmosphere for Black men to feel comfortable discussing these issues while accessing the necessary resources. Unfortunately, due to changes in leadership across all three chapters, the program was not sponsored in 2012. They are hoping to reintroduce the program in the next programmatic calendar.

Community partnerships. The AKAs have attempted to address some of these disparities by partnering with a community health center. The health center has provided both medical and dental care to community residents for over forty years. According to the Chief Executive Officer of the center, who is also a member of the chapter,

The center has significantly impacted the economic health of the community. In 2010 [the center] experienced unprecedented demand for all of its services, providing more than 67,000 medical and dental visits to more than 19,000 men, women and children and serving more than 6,500 women and children through the WIC program.

The collaboration between the AKAs and the health center is the longest standing partnership in the area of health in the community. In the early 1980s, the AKAs initiated the *Community Health Fair and Carnival*, which was held in the parking lot of the health center. The purpose of the fair was to raise funds for the center and to provide free health screenings for people in the community. Sallie stated this of the carnival's impact in the community:

The carnival certainly impacted the community in two ways. One, it provided an opportunity for our community to get the necessary health screenings that they might not otherwise get, because they don't necessarily take the time to go to the health facility. But it also provided an opportunity for the community to come out and have a community time of enjoyment. While their kids could be partaking of the various rides, the adults would be eating food from the various community and church food booths.

The chapter's work with the health center reflects the sorority's health efforts in the 1930s. In 1935, AKA launched the Mississippi Health Project (MHP) in Bolivar County, MS. MHP sought to provide health care services to Black children and adults living in the Mississippi Delta afflicted with disease and famine. Ida Jackson, national president at the time, challenged sorority members to expand their outreach to include the masses. The sorority responded by providing \$1000 to offset the cost of medical supplies and drugs needed (McNealey, 2006).

The All Saints School was chosen as the site and teachers were selected to assist in the clinic operations. Unfortunately, the sorority met great resistance in bringing this idea to fruition:

So here we were in Mississippi, with all the materials we had bought, the drugs we had bought, the things necessary for the health of young children [and adults], and couldn't use them because these plantation owners would not allow Negroes to come to us. So we had a little consultation, and we said, 'Well, if they can't come to us, we'll go to them.' (Ferebee, 1935, as cited in McNealy, 2006, p. 182)

Consequently, Dorothy Ferebee, medical director of the sorority and director of MHP, organized a convoy to transport staff and materials to the various plantations. This project

became known as the mobile health caravan. In a period of seven years, AKA rendered services to over 15,000 people in the Mississippi Delta (Ferebee, 1942). Dr. Ferebee stated this of the MHP's success:

I marvel at the undertaking. I marvel that 14,500 children were immunized against diphtheria, measles, and smallpox; that over 1,000 children received dental care...that every man and woman that came to the clinics were given tests for diphtheria and malaria; full and complete examinations for all expectant mothers, and the training for food use and preparation to counter the widespread malnutrition. (Ferebee, 1942, as cited in McNealy, 2006, p. 180).

A casualty of World War II, the MHP ended in 1942. However, the program called national attention to poverty and disease in the region. In addition, it provided "the opportunity for Negroes to become visible as benefactors, striking at a psyche of the Negro's dependence on whites for encouragement and assistance" (McNealy, 2006, p. 183).

Today, many of the local graduate chapters support health initiatives by independently and collectively participating in charity walks to raise awareness and provide financial support for their respective causes. Last year, the Alphas and AKAs participated in the Race For Diversity, a 5K run/walk that aims to raise awareness and funds to support efforts to eliminate racial injustices in the community. Such efforts include offering cultural trainings and workshops, engaging the community in racial justice projects, as well as providing counseling services to victims and perpetrators of racial injustices. Team ALPHA consisted of three members of Alpha Phi Alpha, two members of Alpha Kappa Alpha, and friends and family. While the two chapters did not raise money as a whole, individual members donated to the cause; those dollars were not tallied. Other walks local chapters participate in include a church prayer walk, Juvenile Diabetes Walk and the Arthritis Foundation Walk.

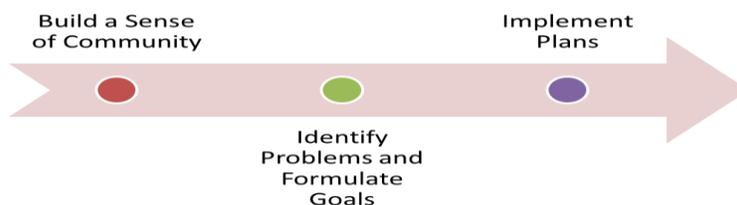
Sorority members from all three organizations participated in the Making Strides against Breast Cancer Walk. The AKAs chose to participate in this charity because many had close relatives or friends who either were survivors or died as a result of the disease. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of death (among all cancers) in African American women (American Cancer Society, 2012). Participating in these health walks spreads awareness of the issues, while celebrating the lives of those who survived.

Economic Development through Education

At its most basic level, economic development is the ability of an individual or group to improve their status in society (i.e., well-being and quality of life), usually through the accumulation of income, wealth, or educational attainment. Anderson and Stewart (2007) suggests that Black economic development “can only occur if African Americans acquire the professional, technical, and scientific training and skills to produce goods and services necessary for the sustenance of the Black community” (p. 282).

Frazier (1957) noted that BGLOs were created to develop “better and bigger enterprises” in the African American community (p. 84). These organizations sponsored programs, workshops, and forums to educate Blacks on strategies to achieve economic security and mobility. Aligning with Harris’ (1976) three-phase model of Black economic development, BGLOs (1) built a sense of community through their educational initiatives and programs, (2) identified the needs and problems affecting the communities they served, set goals, and developed strategies for eliminating barriers, and (3) tested their ideas to promote self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Figure 4.1 Black economic development and empowerment²²



The Deltas recently launched their Financial Fortitude program. In tune with the sorority's programmatic thrust of economic development, the chapter joined forces with the credit union to implement this initiative targeting high school students and adults from the community. The program seeks to educate young and seasoned adults on ways to secure their financial future, focusing on designing a budget and investing in a retirement or their college tuition.

Using information provided by the credit union, financial officers of the chapter made a proposal and presented it to the executive board and then the general body. The free workshop took place at the local library and was open to the public. Due to the large attendance and amount of information shared, Debbie encouraged the chapter to sponsor this workshop again later in the year. She believed more people needed the information,

...especially around the area of investment towards your retirement... I know when I was young and coming up, my parents never talked to me about investing money, or even saving it. And I think with the generation that is coming [up], we need to not only talk about it, but show them how to do it, so that when they reach a certain age, they will be comfortable.

Here we have another example of intergenerational teaching and learning through modeling.

²² Adapted from Harris' (1976) economic development model.

The initiatives sponsored by BGLOs not only benefit the communities they serve, members themselves walk away having learned something. Many participants spoke about the surprising and alarming realization of the number of people not aware of the variety of resources available to them. Debbie reflected on the basic day-to-day tasks that only seem natural to her:

I gained a better appreciation for community service by being able to provide basic information that we as professionals sometimes take for granted. For example, I do a monthly household/personal budget to help me stay on track financially.

The realization that many people in the community did not have a bank account or know how to balance a checkbook prompted the Deltas to continue with their financial workshop. Likewise, a financial workshop sponsored by the AKAs sought to educate the community on similar topics. What a mighty force the sororities could have been had they collaborated on this initiative. Brenda recognized this and noted, "As we collaborate we recognize how much more we have to contribute to others. Better relationships are built through planning and executing projects together."

In an effort to be cognizant of the amount of money chapter members are recycling back into the Black community, the AKA's Economics Committee established a program that allows chapter members to keep track of how much money they spend in Black-owned or operated businesses. Dollar amounts are recorded monthly on a ledger created by the committee chairman. The committee is also responsible for publishing literature that lists all of the Black-owned or operated businesses in the community. According to Anderson and Stewart (2007), Black business ownership is essential for the development of African American communities (p. 275). Sallie jokingly commented,

Long before there were the Black Pages that you now see published in multicolor and all those kinds of things, our chapter published the first Green Pages [a play on the organization's colors, pink and green] here, which was a directory of African-American businesses.

The chapter's energy education forum brings in people from utility companies and local governmental agencies to discuss energy conservation. The panel of experts discusses how to benefit the environment by reducing one's carbon footprint. From an economic standpoint, they explain how to reduce energy use so that electric and heating bills will be lower. Considering the recent increase in electricity rates as a result of deregulation, this program proved to be informative to chapter and community members. The experts also provided valuable information on the resources available to constituents who needed financial assistance to pay their heating and cooling bills. Joyce shared this of the success of the program:

[This has] been one of our most successful events. We usually have about 100 [people] in attendance. And one of the things that we [are] really excited about for the past several years, we've had the opportunity to have a sponsor who will actually provide to one person who can demonstrate a reduction in their use of natural gas, the payment of their December and January bills.

The Alphas also saw a need to know how to conserve energy. Members of the chapter attended the State Farm Show, visiting several booths to obtain information about some of the new technologies employed on farms in the state to conserve energy.

Kappa Alpha Psi's GLAD (Greeks Learning to Avoid Debt) Program is catered to their undergraduate brothers. This financial literacy program seeks to educate young men on the dangers of accumulating massive debt while in college. The program teaches smart financial practices so that upon graduation members will have a firm handle on their financial status. The fraternity partnered with the National Association of Bankruptcy Trustees and National

Foundation of Credit Counselors to promote this program on college campuses across the country. Although the nine undergraduate chapters in the area implement this program, the local graduate chapter oversees all programs and assists with sponsorship.

Advocating on Behalf of the Race

Historically, Blacks were excluded from or had limited involvement in the political arena. Walton (1996) argued that the level of association evolved from nonparticipation during slavery, limited-participation during segregation, to a steady increasing participation. He stated, “Those who moved to participate and involve themselves as elected officials, political leaders, or political activists were expected to use politics and the political arena as a devise, procedure, or technique to help the race and its community” (p. 5-6). The Black church is centrally located within this conversation.

Many scholars have documented the connection and role of the Black church with African American politics (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994; Calhoun Brown, 1996; Chaves & Higgins, 1992; Wilcox, 1990). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) stated,

the Black church leader...must have extraordinary bureaucratic and leadership skills as well as political ability. The opportunity to develop these skills wasn't necessarily to be learned on the job in the church, but they were skills which could be easily transferred outside the church should opportunity ever present itself. (p. 207)

Prior to slaves being brought to the Americas, there was no division between sacred and secular or religion and politics. African kings and queens served as both political and religious leaders (Anderson & Stewart, 2007). The Black church served as a political haven to groom Black leaders for activism. It has also been a tradition for clergy to allow those running for a political office time and space in the pulpit to voice their platforms, some seeking office themselves.

Examining the statistics of the 2008 presidential election, there was a large discrepancy between the number of eligible Black²³ voters and those who exercised that right. Of the 25,768,000 eligible voters, 17,960,000 were registered and only 16,674,000 voted (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). According to Anderson and Stewart (2007), political scientists attribute this phenomenon to political efficacy and trust.

Political efficacy is the sense or feeling that one can influence political outcomes through his/her participation. In relation, political trust is one's belief and confidence in the integrity of the governmental system. Calhoun Brown (1996) found that African Americans attending politically active churches had higher levels of political efficacy, which influenced higher levels of participation (e.g., voting, active civic engagement). With a 4.9 percent increase in voter turnout, it can be questioned whether or not the support of Barack Obama by several political and religious figures in the Black community explained these numbers. I now turn attention to the connection between BGLOs and politics. It should first be noted that BGLOs are nonpartisan and focus solely on educating members of the chapter and the communities they serve on the politics around them and how to interact with their political or elected officials.

BGLOs used their resources to ensure the full civic participation of Blacks at the local, state, and national stage. For example, *A Voteless People is a Hopeless People* is one of Alpha's oldest initiatives. There are three parts to this program: voter education, voter registration, and voter action. The fraternity has developed a detailed program guide for this initiative. Voter education is the organization's opportunity to introduce community members to the candidates, educate them on the candidates' platforms, and provide information critical for

²³ Those who identified as Black or a combination of Black and another race.

Election Day. No longer are the days when Blacks were prohibited from voting due to literacy laws. New strategies are being implemented at various levels to exclude them from the political process. Such strategies include but are not limited to new pieces of legislature requiring citizens to present photo identification (ID) cards at the polls. Laws such as the one recently signed in Pennsylvania directly affect residents without proper identification such as a drivers' license, college students without expiration dates listed on their IDs, and the elderly (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2012).

Voter registration is more than just getting people to fill out registration cards, it also includes making sure out-of-state residents are completing absentee ballots in a timely manner, informing those who have changed addresses of their new voting site, and helping students understand their rights and restrictions around voting across states. Voter action is turning registrations into counted votes. To date, the Alpha chapter is very involved with voter education and registration by strategically placing themselves in locations that minorities frequent. For example, tables and booths are set up by shopping malls, beauty and barber salons, and the farmers market where many shop for fresh produce. Chapter members are also involved in various community committees that are aligned with goals of this initiative.

On a state level, Alpha Day at the Capitol is an initiative in which members of the fraternity throughout the state lobby at the capitol to present their legislative platform to state officials. Last year the platform included concerns such as the rising cost of higher education, health care reform (reversal of President Obama's plan), voting machines on college campuses, cuts to housing for former inmates, and increased law enforcement presence in high-crime

areas, particularly inner-city neighborhoods. Participants shared that these issues were developed due to the expected cuts in the state's budget. Jackson commented:

We saw what was happening in the state with the decrease in education spending and the increase in prison spending... and that's what precipitated the need to have an advocacy day.

In terms of advocacy, the AKA chapter's Connection Committee is charged with keeping members informed of the bills that are moving in the legislature and trying to get background information concerning the reasons they were introduced. Always giving the pros and the cons of the issues, Joyce stated:

Sometimes the committee will give a recommendation and say [whether] we should support or oppose the type of legislation. And sometimes, because it is such a divisive type of issue, it's important enough to keep educating the members, but we don't bring a recommendation.

Working for the General Assembly, Joyce has direct access to elected officials and therefore spearheaded the chapter's AKA Day at the Capitol. Through Joyce's position, she was able to set up meetings with the chair of the Health and Welfare Committee to examine issues in terms of healthcare that was before the National Health Service Committee, and the Black Caucus to talk about minority-owned businesses. Members took a tour of the capital and were introduced on the floor of the Senate and the House. Last year, approximately 80 to 85 members from across the state participated in this event.

Uplifting the Community through Service

BGLOs were consistent with the service they provided to their local communities. Presented the Alumni Chapter of the Year Award by the organization's State Director, Jackson stated, "That says a lot to us, that we're on the right track. It validated some of the things we've been trying to do."

Alpha brothers, along with their Littles,²⁴ delivered approximately 20 bags of food to the community's Food Bank. The service that the Alpha chapter has rendered to the local Big Brother Big Sisters program has been so successful that the chapter has been granted a permanent seat on the Board of Directors. Jackson commented on how the aims of the fraternity embody the concept of service: "First of all, servants of all, we shall transcend all. That is the aim of our fraternity... It's about service." Sallie shared the same sentiment as Jackson, stating:

I think the whole focus of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. is service to all mankind [sic]. So, when we join Alpha Kappa Alpha, either on an undergraduate level or on a graduate level, that focus was on service. That was our main goal and objective. So that was really our motivation, because we're an organization that provides service. We're a sisterhood, and we enjoy the fellowship of each other, but our main goal of our organization is to provide service.

Some of the service efforts of the BGLO chapters included beautifying the local street market. The market was founded in 1860 and has the distinction of being the oldest continuously operated market house in the United States. In honor of Martin L. King, Jr. Day of Service, every year the Alphas and AKAs help to clean and tidy up various parts of the building. Also, to help reduce the number of Americans affected by hunger, the two chapters volunteer at a soup kitchen by preparing and serving food. This activity is sponsored by a local Methodist church. Both activities occur as part of the Day of Service.

Philanthropy. According to the January 2012 issue of the chapter's newsletter, AKA was able to award over \$233,000 in scholarships to undergraduate and graduate members, as well as community partners whose projects reflect the sorority's international platforms. Carolyn

²⁴ Littles refer to the young boys the Alphas mentor as part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program.

House Stewart, International President, stated this of the purpose of the scholarships awarded through the Educational Advancement Fund:

Our Undergraduate, Graduate, Youth P.A.C. (Partners Accessing Capital), Fellowships and Endowment scholarships will assist emerging leaders in academic preparation and character building, thus providing a sound foundation for them to achieve personal success. These awards will afford opportunities for students to enter graduate programs, and make the dreams of completing an education a reality for others. The Community Assistance Awards will fund programs which include health, global poverty, economic security, social justice and human right and leadership development. (AKA, 2010a)

In July 2005, Kappa Alpha Psi entered into a partnership with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The fraternity committed to support the hospital by raising \$500,000 in five years. The fraternity exceeded its commitment, totaling over \$1.5 million in that time frame. Chapters across the country joined forces with local Black churches in support of the hospital's Sunday of Hope program. This program "encourages churches across the country to unite as a body of believers to help children suffering from pediatric cancer, sickle cell disease and other catastrophic illnesses" (St. Jude, 2012).

Members of the local chapter encouraged their churches to participate. As with many Black churches, several special offerings are taken up during the course of the year. Just as Women's Day, Youth Sunday, Pastor's Anniversary, or for benevolence, a special offering was collected for Sunday of Hope. Several members also set canisters on their desks at work for those passing by to donate at their leisure. Pamphlets and flyers were distributed at chapter programs and events to educate members and the community on the importance of funding cancer research.

Now that this initiative is complete, the fraternity as a whole is shifting its focus to a more local cause. Located in Piney Woods, MS, the Piney Woods School is the oldest African

American boarding school that seeks to “provide excellence in education within a Christian community through creation of an exceptional academic model which supports the tenet that all students can learn, develop a strong work ethic, and lead extraordinary lives through academic achievement and responsible citizenship” (Piney Woods School, 2012). Ernest stated:

We’ve always sponsored students going to the Piney Woods School during the summer. It’s about leadership and education, and preparing for that next level. And so, even though we did such a good job with St. Jude’s, we want to put that same type of energy directly [into] something that is looking at the African-American community.

To date, the fraternity has not yet spelled out what this initiative will look like for the local chapters.

A Global Focus. The service of BGLOs extends beyond the borders of the United States. With many organizations chartering chapters across the globe, BGLOs have become international in scope and programming. Due to recent tragedies around the world such as the earthquake in Haiti, tsunami in Japan, and tornados in the Midwestern United State, Kappa Alpha Psi launched iKare (International Kappa Action Relief Effort). This initiative was the fraternity’s approach to raising monies to benefit the victims of natural disasters across the world. The graduate chapter participates in this effort by joining forces with local restaurants. The Social Action chair works with management at the eateries so that a percentage of sales for the day are earmarked for this effort.

As stated in Chapter 2, it is the mission and vision of the current AKA administration to assist in putting an end to world poverty and hunger. Partnering with Heifer International, the sorority plans to raise money and awareness for the programs and activities of the organization. Sorority members are encouraged to participate, if resources allow, in Heifer projects somewhere in the world to experience firsthand the families, the work, and the

transformation that take place when people are personally invested in their own progress and success.

The chapter supports Heifer International by electing not to provide refreshments at one of their chapter meetings, thereby donating the dollars saved to the organization. In addition, last year, a member of the chapter was planning a visit to Liberia with her husband (a native of the country). The chapter decided to take advantage of this trip by collecting school and health supplies to be delivered to the orphanages.

Challenges to Implementation

As with all of the chapters, contention often occurs when trying to implement various activities and programs. It is typically the voice of those financially active (dues paying) members who are personally invested in that particular topic whose voices prevail. When all else fails, Robert's Rules of Order comes into play and a vote is cast.

Joyce expressed her committee's concerns with implementing programs, discussing the uncertainty of community support:

I think the difference of opinion is whether or not to have it, and more of "do we think the community will come out to support?" The emphasis that the Connection Committee has tried to put on things is that it's not always a question of the number of people that you get out to a program or behind an idea. But it's whether you can actually help, [even if it's just] one person. And sometimes people just don't come because there's so many other things going on.

For example, in 2009, the Connections Committee partnered with the Republican and Democratic parties to sponsor a candidate workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to provide education and training for those interested in running for office. Although she did not state how many people attended, she indicated that the numbers were low. Out of those in attendance, two people did run for office. The results of those elections also were not shared.

Another example provided was that of a mortgage foreclosure program that only 15 people attended.

Tracey also shared that there were differing opinions in implementing SGRho's Project Cradle program:

So there was lots of discussion, initially, about who exactly are we targeting. Are we targeting girls in high school, because we make the assumption that they may be less likely to seek prenatal care? Are we targeting women who come from a lower socioeconomic status, because they may not have access and they need to know about resources, especially free or low-cost resources? Who exactly are we targeting? Where is this going to be? And how are we going to reach these women? ...The description that was given to us by [our] national [headquarters] was "women of childbearing age" — that's a very big age range... I'm a social worker, and so I'm always trying to move us into doing programs that reach out to the foster care system...Many agencies are non-profit, and they are very limited in what services and programs they can offer. So I'm like, we need to find a group home or a shelter, you know, that services mother/baby groups. We need to do this program there, because they need this information.

Although with good intentions, many BGLOs are unable to implement all of the programs they set out to do. Such was the case with Alpha Phi Alpha. Due to the small number of chapter members, the Alphas did not have the human resources or financial means to carry out all of their initiatives. Their primary philanthropic effort of providing scholarships to high school seniors was the first to be affected. Cory commented, "The hardest part was continuing to give out the scholarships even when the chapter was struggling and had a low number of members."

For the Alphas, the most prevalent challenge to implementing adult education initiatives to the local community involved the size of the chapter, more specifically, the number of active members in the chapter. The amount of resources available to the chapter (i.e., time commitment, financial support, manpower) is contingent upon the number of members

enthused about the program and willing to see it from fruition to completion. Jackson indicated:

...we assess our chapter, given the size, because we don't have a large chapter. Given the size, we have to look at what our resource capability is. And that's what really drives how much we can do. And sometimes we scope what we can do. So what we may do for this organization is give [them] a hand, we may have some physical presence, but [for another organization] we may only give a donation. So we do what we can do with the available resources that we have, because of the size of the organization.

The age of members also influenced the scope of sponsored programs. Prior to Cory joining the chapter in 2006, the average age of men was about 50. Since then, that number has dropped to about 40 years old. While that may not seem like a significant drop, Cory discussed how the younger men in the chapter have worked to bring a more social aspect to the chapter.

He stated:

Because the chapter has initiated a number of younger brothers one can begin to see the events starting to become a little more social. The focus is now on building relationships and camaraderie.

In the wake of all the negative attention being given to BGLOs (albeit from an undergraduate perspective), graduate members are starting to feel the repercussions. Ernest suggested a stronger need to advertise the mission statements of the nine organizations, thereby reassuring the Black community, and society at large, the continued relevance of BGLOs today.

Self-Help Embodied

Drawing heavily on the works of Carson (1993), Gaines (1996), and Martin and Martin (1985), I defined the self-help tradition as a communal effort, involving the mobilization and exchange of resources for the purpose of uplifting the African American community. More broadly, it represents a group's struggle for social advancement and racial solidarity. The

collective efforts (i.e., adult education initiatives) of BGLOs seek to uplift African Americans by providing educational programming, engaging in service, and making financial contributions to address the varying needs of the communities they serve.

The self-help tradition symbolizes the attitudes and activities of Blacks to ensure their survival for generations to come. Sallie, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, traced these attitudes and activities back to slavery. She stated:

...go back to slavery times. You know, we lived on the plantation. We worked together. We prayed together. We ate together. We shared. Whatever one had, the other had. If they could help someone, then they did that, and as we came out of slavery and we tried to make our way, we still had to share to work together as a people.

Gwen echoed Sallie's sentiments, stating that self-help is a part of African American culture:

I think it goes back to a culture as African Americans. We've always been there to help each other...because basically we lived in the same communities... And you had that village concept, where, you know, people looked out for each other's children. And people were involved, basically, in the same kinds of things, so there was more of a kind of family atmosphere. And if someone was hungry, you fed them. Somebody needed clothes, you gave them clothes. Someone needed some type of uplift, you provided that, if you were able to.

The notion of self-help is embedded in the African American tradition of uplift. The following section examines how this tradition is embodied in the initiatives of BGLOs.

A Responsibility to Give Back

The concept of "giving back," as described by Charles (2005), is "a distinctly adult turn of phrase exchanged verbally throughout African American community networks and associations as a way to relay a set of cultural habits, traditions, and expectations for the building and maintenance of African American community life" (p. 3). This phrase is "rooted in African American traditions of faith and spirituality and is connected to an historically African American perspective regarding the progress and success as a race" (p. 3). So what does "giving back"

mean to members of BGLOs? What does “giving back” look like in the initiatives they sponsor and participate in?

All of the participants shared their thoughts on what it meant to give back to the community and what role they played as individuals and members of Greek-letter organizations. BGLO members viewed “giving back” as their collective responsibility and personal obligation to return the acts of kindness and support given them. For example, Franklin recounted his own collegiate experiences:

A significant number of students were from poor families. We only made it to and through college because of the assistance of a number of sources and favors. We were expected to do the same for other students coming behind us as repayment for assistance provided to us. These sources were Sunday school teachers, high school teachers, friends of the family, alumni and others that, in many cases, did not have much money themselves. It was just an unwritten rule or expectation.

Holt (1990) referred to this system as a “chain letter of instruction” (p. 94) where people shared and passed on information. Debbie had similar sentiments about this idea:

[People] before us gave to us. So our obligation is to continue to give. And then the next generation will give. And it just keeps going—it never stops. That’s how you build a strong organization. And that’s how you build a strong community.

Brenda also commented:

All of us had somebody in our corner, no matter how small, or how much they were able to provide. Every one of us can probably point to somebody that helped us along the way...And we have to do the same thing. That’s a part of what Black Greeks do, is help each other. You know, we’re helping our communities. Because we have the recognition, as we get more, as I have more, it’s important that I share with others, that I try to help them.

Participants’ comments about giving back reflect the inherent responsibility of Blacks to not only educate themselves, but their communities as well. Holt (1990) expounded on this by stating the goal of education for Blacks was “social as well as personal improvement to uplift the people, to make conditions better” (p. 93 as cited in Fisher, 2009).

A Spiritual Connection

Attached to this notion of responsibility and obligation is a sense of spiritual connection. Participants often used spiritual metaphors to express their reasons for sponsoring educational, service, and philanthropic activities. Debbie stated:

What's that expression? To whom much is given, much is required... Someone had to help us get where we are. The majority of individuals that are in Black Greek Letter Organizations have been blessed enough to be able to go to college, have been blessed enough to be able to obtain graduate degrees. And so that has helped us to get better jobs and be in a position to help. And so, you know, we've been helped, and now we need to reach back and help others... And so, somebody instilled that in me, and I'm going to instill that in somebody else, because we have to think past our own generation and think about the generations that are going to come after.

The phrase "to whom much is given, much is required" is taken from a New Testament passage in the Bible, which says "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48, New Revised Standard Version). Religious doctrine teaches that everyone has God-given skills, talents, and abilities. Our responsibility (based upon the parable from which this verse derives) is to multiply and increase our lot so that we are making manifest the spirit of God in the way we bless others. In a secular sense, this phrase suggests that with privilege (such as being able to attend college) comes responsibility and that responsibility demands accountability for one another to educate each other.

Participants adamantly recounted BGLOs' responsibility to educate and uplift the communities they serve. Jackson stated this of a member of his fraternity:

Brother W.E.B. Dubois coined the phrase "Talented Tenth." Because we believe that college-trained men and women comprise this distinct group, we have a moral obligation to live before the youth and inspire them, through our words and exemplary living, to strain forward to their fullest potential.

The term "Talented Tenth" was used to describe the proportion of men who would become the leaders of the Black race by continuing their education and involving themselves in social

change. DuBois (1903) writes in his essay of the same name that African Americans must cultivate “the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst” (pp.1).

Ernest discussed the ways in which Kappa Alpha Psi accepts the responsibility Du Bois spoke of:

The fraternity often talks about achievement in every field of human endeavor, and in this case, [that’s] reaching back to communities and help[ing] prepare them for [their futures]. We are college-educated men. So, there’s certain responsibilities that come with being a college-educated man. And that should be about making a difference in the lives of other people and reaching back to help them get to where you are, and hopefully even beyond that. I think it’s about the transmission of knowledge and information, making African Americans aware of the variety of resources available to assist them in moving on to that next level. If you’ve had the opportunity to participate in a system that allows you to move forward, then part of that responsibility or obligation is to make it possible for others.

This system that Ernest speaks to aligns with Lee’s (1992) discussion of Independent Black Institutions (IBIs), in which communities seek to disseminate knowledge, create a shared vision, instill values, and provide a foundation for stability and advancement.

Highlighting the education piece, Sallie expressed:

I think we have a responsibility, first and foremost, because we are educated. And whether we were in Alpha Kappa Alpha or some other organization, we as college-trained women have a responsibility to give back to our community. We stand on the shoulders of giants, whether it’s our parents, whether it’s our forefathers who went on before us to fight the fight so that we would have a quality education and to be where we are at today. So we have a responsibility to give back, wherever we can. And we also have a responsibility to lift up and pull up someone else, and to give them a helping hand because that’s who we are as Alpha Kappa Alpha women. That is who our founders were, when they, in 1908, decided to establish Alpha Kappa Alpha and to make sure that this organization was perpetuated for 104 years, to make sure that we’re bringing up the next generation. But also making sure that those who are less fortunate than we are...that we are, then, providing a need, assisting them wherever we can. Whether it’s from an educational standpoint, whether it is providing them a meal, whether it’s providing them resources of where to go, whether it’s providing them

access; we as African-American women have a responsibility to ensure that we are helping others.

The notion of giving back suggests that if one person was successful and able to make a prosperous way for him or herself, the entire community is capable of success. This same notion is inherent in the adult education initiatives of BGLOs. By sponsoring workshops, forums, and activities to educate the communities they serve, BGLOs seek to forge a way for success.

Establishing Social Networks

In order to make conditions better and ensure the success of their communities, African Americans recognize and take advantage of their social networks and capital. Social capital is the “direct and indirect resources that are a by-product of social networks and support systems amongst family, friends, or community members” (Hawkins & Maurer, 2009, p.2). Further, it involves the allocation and transmission of said resources for the advancement of an individual or group. According to The Centre for Literacy in Montreal (2010) social capital refers broadly to “the social connections and understandings between people that enable them to work together, live together and learn from each other” (p. 1). All definitions combined, these resources are essential to the individual and collective well-being of a community.

Coleman (1988) examined how social capital facilitates learning by providing adults with access to the knowledge and skills (human capital) of others. Social capital and networking also play an important role in the self-help of African American adults. In the context of BGLOs, members pool necessary resources to assist their members and community residents. Members take advantage of the groups and organizations they are a part of, outside of their Greek affiliation, to ensure program participants are receiving the most beneficial information possible. For example, Gwen and Joyce utilized their places of employment (both governmental

agencies) to sponsor political workshops and forums to educate chapter and community members on legislature and candidates on the ballot for the upcoming elections.

Regarding personal matters, many chapters set aside funds (commonly called courtesies) to assist members as they experience major life events such as marriage, death of an immediate family member, or the birth or adoption of a child. AKA and SGRho participants, on several occasions, referenced their sorority's national hymn, "We help each other, for we know there's no other," and slogan "Greater Service, Greater Progress," respectively, to express their concern for each other and their community.

Tracey described her chapter president as a networker whose relationships with people from various organizations has allowed her to challenge the scope of the chapter since chartering almost five years ago and to look at Sigma Gamma Rho on a larger scale:

She thankfully is a networker. She is involved with lots of different organizations and has the opportunity to really think about what programs would meet the needs of the community, but that would also have the community be interested and actually come to an event. [She is] invested and looks at Sigma on the larger scope, always bringing us back to and making sure that we are lining up with our national initiatives.

The current Vice President of AKA is a marketing professional with a global company in the area. She used the skills she developed throughout her career to assist the chapter in creating a brand making themselves more business-minded in the way they advertise for programs and events as well as solicit feedback.

Mentoring. Many organizations have come to recognize the value of mentoring relationships, whether formal or informal (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992). Formal mentoring programs are structured and sanctioned by the organization, whereas informal programs are unstructured and voluntary. In the field of adult education, research on mentoring relationships

is limited, most of which describes programs that are designed to help professionals in academic or corporate environments share their knowledge and skills or support new employees. In these arenas mentors help their mentees navigate through the system or move up the tenure ladder. Hansman (2003a) acknowledges that these studies show that mentoring enhances the growth and development of both mentor and mentee. She states, “mentors have been unquestioningly and uncritically accepted as fundamental to foster learning in the workplace, advance careers, help new employees learn workplace culture, and provide developmental and psychological support” (Hansman, 2002, p. 39). Adults learn through these everyday activities and experiences as a result of engaging in mentoring relationships

Graduate members of BGLOs are in a unique position to mentor sorority sisters and fraternity brothers at the collegiate level as well as those joining through an alumni chapter. Opportunities exist to educate each other on the business of the organizations and to foster meaningful relationships. For example, Alpha Kappa Alpha implemented a formal mentoring program that sought to provide meaningful role modeling in terms of leadership, to foster sisterly relations between seasoned and younger members of the organization, and to enrich the membership experience of all members. The local chapter also wanted to ensure that newly initiated or transferred members felt connected to the chapter. A member stated, “It can be daunting coming into a chapter where you don’t know anyone.” When discussing why she chose to participate in this program, she stated:

It benefited me because it's about sisterhood...it's about embracing another soror and helping her to become reacclimated to the sorority and accustomed to our local chapter. I enjoyed meeting on a regular basis with my mentee whether it was for lunch, dinner, movies, road trip, shopping or just to vent over coffee. It was an opportunity for us to bond and to get to know one another on a deeper, personal level. Of course, I believe the best mentor/mentee relationships are ones where the sorors have

something in common, like marital status, age, occupation, school, church, outside interest or hobbies. It's easier to build a relationship when you believe you have at least one thing in common with another individual. At the end of the year, I hoped that my mentee had a better and stronger relationship with me, knew more about the chapter and was happy that she had reconnected with her sorority. If she didn't experience all three then I felt that I hadn't been successful as a mentor...or in doing my job.

Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) discuss the degree of match and motivation, as expressed in the quote above, by stating, "Mentors often select protégés with whom they can identify and with whom they are willing to develop and devote attention" (p. 3). Although not all chapters had a formal mentoring program in place, all participants discussed informal relationships that assisted with those transitioning into the chapter.

The Black Church. With similar goals of self-help and racial solidarity, the Black church has also supported and advanced the work of BGLOs. With many members and clergy affiliated with a BGLO, the connections were apparent. Billingsley (1992) found that churches which cooperated with social agencies (such as BGLOs) made their facilities available to implement outreach programs and services. The two institutions collaborated on various efforts such as civil rights and social justice issues, community development, education and health (Chaves & Higgins, 1992).

Unfortunately, due to the recent surge of negative attention being given to BGLOs as a result of undergraduate hazing (see Ruffin, 1999), the relationship between the Black Church and BGLOs has become strained. Jones (2004) goes as far as to label BGLOs as educated gangs, stating, "Very little difference is found in the gang practice of new members being 'beaten in' and the physical hazing that BGFs [Black Greek Fraternities] employ" (p. 81). Though these practices are mainly seen at the undergraduate level, several churches have chosen to stop supporting such associations. Concerning this relationship, Tracey shared:

I think that there used to be a closer connection between the two [BGLOs and the Black Church]. Thinking about people like Dr. Martin Luther King, who is Greek. But I think that a lot more negative connotations, hazing incidents and things, and the image of Black Greeks in the media has been portrayed much more negatively, and there hasn't been a highlight on community service, leadership initiatives, philanthropic actions, those types of things. I think that a lot of the religious leaders who are Greek-affiliated have had to take a step back from that because they wonder if it compromises or calls into question their commitment to their spirituality. And I can totally understand that.

Although this sentiment was of the majority expressed by participants, Brenda experienced something different at her church:

My pastor happens to be Greek, and is very supportive, and makes a point of pointing us out as being actively involved. And the people who are members of Greek-letter organizations in our church are not only active in the church, but they are active in the communities. So they're the kinds of people that are supportive both inside and outside the church. Our pastor welcomes our members to come. We've had various kinds of programs and workshops where the church has been opened to the members, not only of our organization, but other organizations as well. In the last eight years we've made a real special effort in our chapter to partner with various organizations, including the Black church. And space, of course, is one part of that. [We] advertise our programs and get people from the church to come to those programs. Like our Go Red Day or energy forum—all of those things are advertised in our church. We've made sure that people are aware of those programs.

Using the church as a venue to host programs was a common practice among all the participants. Several of the sororities attended church services together to celebrate the organization's founding day. On other occasions, the church was used to advertise the upcoming programs and events sponsored by these organizations. Whether through casual conversations among church members or announcements placed in the church's bulletin, members of BGLOs made certain that the church played some role in the implementation of their initiatives.

Table 4.1 below provides a visual of how BGLOs' contemporary programming addresses historical challenges. For example, whereas churches historically would open their doors to BGLOs as a venue to host and sponsor programs, today this collaboration is not as common. This in part is due to clergy members' choices to disassociate with Greek-Letter organizations. In addition, the audience that BGLOs targeted typically were centrally located where the chapter resided. Due to a shift in leadership across all nine organizations, members have broadened their focus to include an international audience.

Table 4.1 Thematic Map

| Theme | Issue | Historical Challenges | Contemporary Practices |
|--|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Building Healthy Communities | Health disparities (e.g., obesity) | Access to quality health care | Zumba/Line Dancing |
| | Community partners | Mississippi Health Project | Community health center |
| Economic Development through Education | Economic security and mobility | Black entrepreneurship | Financial Fortitude; G.L.A.D. |
| Advocating on Behalf of the Race | Political advocacy | Lack of involvement; legal restrictions | Advocacy days at the capitol |
| | Black church | Use of venue | Disassociation |
| Uplifting the Community through Service | Educational programming | Local communities | Global focus |
| | Philanthropic efforts | | Scholarships; St. Jude's |
| A Responsibility to Give Back | Paying it forward | Self-help | Future generations |

Chapter Summary

The initiatives of BGLOs positions members as adult educators, even if they do not identify as such. In this chapter I described the adult education initiatives that graduate chapters participated in and sponsored. Initiatives addressed the varying needs and concerns of African American adults concerning health, economics, politics, community service, and philanthropy. I examined the shifts in purpose of programs and target audiences, if one existed, as it related to the historical tradition of African American adult education. In addition, I provided an analysis of how the self-help tradition is embodied in these initiatives.

**Our first priority...is to make clear that ours is a caring community,
and to inspire others, particularly our young, to press on in various ways,
both to advance themselves and to further the larger struggle of our people.
-Dorothy Height**

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the adult education initiatives of Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs) represented by five graduate chapters in a peri-urban community in Pennsylvania. This study sought to address three questions: 1) What are the adult education initiatives of Black Greek-Letter Organizations? 2) How do these initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical context of African American adult education? and 3) How do the initiatives of graduate chapters of Black Greek-Letter Organizations embody the self-help tradition, if at all?

This study attempted to answer Brown, Phillips, and Parks' (2005) call to critically examine whether or not BGLOs continue to engage in the uplift of the communities they serve. The notion that Blacks created, implemented, and participated in adult education activities is evident within the initiatives of BGLOs. Likewise, situating these organizations as producers of adult education helped examine how their initiatives reflected or diverged from the historical context of African American adult education.

As outlined in Chapter Two, limited scholarship exists on the educational work of BGLOs. Although scholars have examined the work of a few prominent African American figures and organizations, fraternal organizations such as historically Black fraternities and sororities have been overlooked. The same educational activities of African American individuals, the Black Church, and organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, and NACW were manifested in the adult education initiatives of BGLOs. More than 100 years since the establishment of the first Black

Greek-letter fraternity, members of BGLOs have produced creative responses to the needs (e.g., health, education, employment, training, cultural enrichment, historical preservation, and social and political advancements) of the Black community via adult education initiatives.

In this study, I framed the programs and practices of BGLOs within the self-help tradition, a tradition of racial uplift, solidarity, and social advancement. Graduate members of BGLOs reflected this tradition by individually and collectively enacting their inherent responsibility to enrich and give back to the communities they serve. On the contrary, these organizations have diverged from the once common practice of educating primarily adults, for example, through literacy education. Currently, the educational initiatives of BGLOs reflect a commitment to future generations. Programs are targeted toward youth to ensure they are fully equipped to assume their responsibilities as active citizens in this society.

The Black church has historically promoted the educational activities of BGLOs. The two institutions have collaborated on advancing the African American community economically, politically, socially, and culturally. However, due to the recent trends in hazing, the church has reluctantly removed themselves from the relationship.

Themes identified through this research suggest that BGLOs have had to adjust their focus to address the varying needs of African Americans. Although the literature revealed three broad categories—educating the masses, social and political agendas, and a global focus—the research data illuminated more specific categories, specifically, health, economics, politics, mentoring, service, and philanthropy. By sponsoring organized activities that fostered learning among adults, called for voluntary participation, offered immediate usefulness for personal and

collective enhancement, and helped improve the quality of life for an individual and a community, I situate members of BGLOs as adult educators.

Limitations of the Study

I embarked on this journey aware of several limitations. This study was bounded by graduate chapters of BGLOs in the state of Pennsylvania. The particularities of each BGLO vary by chapter, region, district, and province. As such, researchers studying BGLOs in other parts of the country, or using a different analytical lens may reach dissimilar conclusions. This study was also limited by time constraints. The programmatic schedules of BGLOs restricted the study as many organizations recess during the summer months. In addition, this study examined *what* adult education initiatives graduate chapters of BGLOs participate in or sponsor. Investigating *how* adults learned as a result of this participation was beyond the scope of this study. Lastly, this study was limited by the type of initiatives examined. The very essence of BGLOs deals with programming for youth because they are seen as the future. Due to this study's adult education focus, those initiatives were not included.

Implications

This study was an effort to examine an under-explored area in the adult education literature: the adult education initiatives of BGLOs. A reason for this absence may be that many members of BGLOs do not see themselves as adult educators, yet they sponsor and participate in adult education activities. This study gives impetus to further research other organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and National Urban League, whose intrinsic purpose and mission are to educate adults.

African American adults directly and indirectly involved with the initiatives discussed in this study were educated outside of a formal classroom. It was through various nonformal education programs (e.g., charity walks, line dance classes, workshops, forums) that BGLO members and community participants gained information about the health care resources available to them, became aware of and more involved in the political system, and took advantage of the social networks they were a part of. Nonformal activities provided African American adults with the necessary tools, knowledge, and skills to become productive citizens in the communities where they reside. Due to this phenomenon, non-formal education should be utilized more often to not only educate Black adults, but also to understand how they learn.

In addition, this study demonstrates that greater understanding of the post-collegiate experiences of BGLO members could be useful to student affairs professionals who can foster more productive experiences for undergraduate Greeks. Although these students are confined to the four walls of an institution, they in fact assume and fulfill the roles of an adult. Collegiate chapters, just as their alumni counterparts, seek to educate and uplift the campus community and surrounding areas on issues affecting them as college students and people of color.

For too long the stories of BGLOs have not been analyzed through an academic lens. Members of these organizations have made substantial contributions not only to African American history, but to American history. Founded upon principles of racial uplift and service, BGLOs continue to work to improve and advance the status of African Americans in this society. Collectively, these organizations have paved the way for progress for future generations to come.

Yet for all the good BGLOs have accomplished, they have not been able to escape the negative associations of hazing. Although this is primarily an undergraduate phenomenon, graduate chapters are then forced to restructure the image of the organization. As discussed in chapter one, several literary and cinematic works have brought attention to the social and cultural aspects of these organizations. However, a “balanced and scholarly treatment” is lacking (Brown, Parks, and Phillips, 2005, p. 465).

Following the lead of scholars representing BGLOs such as Gregory Parks, Walter Kimbrough, Lawrence Ross (all of Alpha Phi Alpha), and Tamara Brown (Delta Sigma Theta), this study represents another step for exploring the scholarship of BGLOs. This research focused on the initiatives of graduate chapters; that is not to say though, that the initiatives of undergraduate chapters should be excluded from a scholarly assessment. This study should be followed by research that examines the initiatives from both an undergraduate and graduate perspective, chapters in various geographic locations (e.g., west coast, south, midwest), and with varying chapter sizes (small chapters with fewer than 20 members and large chapters with more than 100), to test the limits of the findings of this study, in particular the notion of racial uplift.

Is the notion of racial uplift central to the experiences of BGLO chapters in both the northern and southern U.S.? What does racial uplift look like in BGLOs at historically Black colleges and universities versus predominantly White institutions? These and other looming questions can all be addressed by future researchers.

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Appendix A: BGLO Adult Education Program Questionnaire

Name: _____ Organization: _____

Chapter: _____ Position: _____

Inter/national Initiative(s): _____

Chapter Program: _____

Program Objective: _____

Target Audience/Population Served: _____

Program Chairperson: _____

Discuss this program in greater detail (i.e. How long has it been in existence? What were the intended and unintended outcomes? What were the successes and failures?).

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Background Information:

- Discuss why you chose to join a BGLO.
- When and where did you become a member of your organization?
- How long have you been a member of your current chapter?
- Discuss the role you play in your chapter.
- Tell me about your organization's inter/national initiatives.
- What role does your organization play in educating African American adults?
- How have the initiatives changed over the course of your organization's history?

RQ1: What are the adult education initiatives of Black Greek-Letter Organizations?

- Tell me about your chapter's involvement in the African American community.
- Tell me about your chapter's initiatives to educate African American adults in the community you serve.
- Give an example of a program or initiative which seeks to educate African American adults.

RQ2: How do these initiatives reflect or diverge from the historical context of African American adult education?

- Have your chapter's initiatives changed over the years? If so, why and how? If not, why is this the case?

RQ3: How do the initiatives of graduate chapters of Black Greek-Letter Organizations embody the self-help tradition, if at all?

- What role does your chapter play in uplifting the African American community you serve?
- Give an example of a program or initiative which seeks to uplift the African American community.

Appendix C: Consent Form

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Black Greek-Letter Organizations:
A Legacy of African American Adult Education

Principal Investigator: **Keiwana Jones**, 314 Keller Building,
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Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not the initiatives of BGLOs, more specifically their graduate chapters, are examples of African American adult education. It also seeks to examine whether and how BGLOs embody the self-help tradition.

Procedures to be Followed: As a participant, you will be asked participate in a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Should any further questions or concerns arise, a follow-up interview will be required. Depending upon time and scheduling constraints, a face-to-face interview or electronic communication will be requested.

After interviews have been transcribed, you will be asked to review the PI's initial interpretations to ensure that what you shared has been captured accurately.

Interviews will be conducted in a nearby community setting which is conducive to audio recordings. The recorded interviews will be transcribed, verbatim, by a contracted stenographer. The PI will analyze the digital recordings, transcripts, and electronic communications, presenting the findings in the final research paper.

Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort.

Benefits: (a) Participating in this study gives you an opportunity to highlight the initiatives of your chapter in terms of the educational programming, community service, and philanthropic efforts sponsored. (b) Your involvement in this study will also draw attention to the social and cultural practices employed by your chapter in order to educate and uplift the African American community.

Statement of Confidentiality: Your responses to any questions are confidential. Only the PI listed above will know your identity. Pseudonyms will be used in the final report to protect your identity as well as that of the chapter. Only the PI of this study will have

access to the digital interview recordings and transcripts. The digital recordings and transcripts will be destroyed in December 2014. Until the digital recordings and transcripts are destroyed, they will be kept in a locked safety box in my home. The Office for Research Protections and the Social Science Institutional Review Board may review records related to this study. If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be written.

Right to Ask Questions: You have the right to ask questions about the research. Contact Keiwana Jones, (216) 287-3409, koj102@psu.edu with your questions. You may also call Penn State's Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775 if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in the study. If you decide to participate, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer and are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you do not consent to participate in this study, no further action is needed on your behalf. However, if you do consent to participating in this research study and to the terms above, please sign this informed consent form. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Principle Investigator Signature

Date

Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

Dear [insert Chapter President name here]:

My name is Keiwana Jones and I am a graduate student in the Adult Education program at the Pennsylvania State University in University Park, PA. I am looking for graduate/alumni members of Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs) to participate in my dissertation study which explores the adult education initiatives sponsored by these organizations. More specifically, I am interested in conducting interviews with you, as the chapter president, and any other member of the chapter who has institutional and historical knowledge of the breadth and depth of programs in which your chapter participates.

Findings from this study will add to the limited yet growing body of research on BGLOs. This study will help to highlight the initiatives of BGLOs within the broader field of adult education. Finally, the study can provide an impetus for further research on the contributions of other civic organizations to the education of African American adults.

The only requirement to participate in this study is that participants must have been members of the chapter for at least 5 years.

Confidentiality will be maintained to protect the identity of each participant and the chapter.

If you have any questions about the nature of this research please contact me at (216) 287-3409 or koj102@psu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Esther Prins at esp150@psu.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Keiwana Jones

VITA
Keiwana O'Neal Jones

- Education:** Doctorate of Education, Adult Education December, 2012
Pennsylvania State University
- Master of Education, Adult Education December, 2007
Cleveland State University
- Bachelor of Science, Human Ecology June, 2003
The Ohio State University
- Experience:** Assistant Director, Fraternity & Sorority Life June, 2012 - Present
Pennsylvania State University
- Advise the National Pan-Hellenic and Multicultural Greek Councils
 - Lead and assess efforts to engage minority students in meaningful and intentional out of classroom learning experiences
 - Foster a collaborative environment which promotes the success of minority students in the Greek community
 - Assist in the development and implementation of educational programming
 - Promote leadership development through philanthropic and community service efforts
- Graduate Assistant, Adult Education August 2008 - May, 2012
The Pennsylvania State University
- Coordinated program recruitment efforts at the national and local levels
 - Maintained student information in program databases
 - Assisted faculty in the design, implementation, and administration of World Campus courses
 - ✓ ADTED 460 - Introduction to Adult Education
 - ✓ ADTED 550 – Qualitative Research in Adult Education
 - Assisted faculty with individual research agendas
 - Administrative duties as assigned
- Affiliations:** Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Epsilon Sigma Omega Chapter
American Association for Adult and Continuing Education
American College Personnel Association
Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors