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Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.: A Phenomenological Study of Alumnae Reflections on Leadership Enhancement During and After College

Kyana M. Gordon
St. John Fisher College, kyana.mgordon@gmail.com

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Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.: A Phenomenological Study of Alumnae Reflections on Leadership Enhancement During and After College

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to provide empirical research on Black Greek sorority membership as a vehicle to positive student outcomes and, specifically, the facilitation of leadership enhancement of its members. Despite over 100 years of service, commitment to academic achievement and community uplifting the impact of historically Black fraternities and sororities, Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) remain an understudied research area. Specifically, there exists little empirical research exploring the membership experiences of women belonging to a historically Black sorority. This phenomenological study explored the ways in which a one chapter, Pi Delta Chapter of BGLO Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. assisted its members in enhancing leadership skills during and after college. This study utilized a purposeful sample technique to identify and select 12 women who became members of the sorority through the Pi Delta Chapter at Stony Brook University during their undergraduate years. Through structured, open-ended interviews with 12 alumnae participants, five major themes emerged: (a) the importance of sisterhood, (b) networking benefits specifically available to members, (c) mentorship with fellow members, (d) involvement in the sorority and other cocurricular activities, and (e) leadership in the sorority and also in other cocurricular activities. Membership in historically Black sororities has thus far proven to provide positive impacts and positive college experiences for its members. It is recommended that colleges and universities continue to explore ways they can enroll and retain minority women.

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Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.: A Phenomenological Study of Alumnae Reflections on Leadership Enhancement During and After College

By

Kyana M. Gordon

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Janice Kelly, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Byron Hargrove, Ph.D.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

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Dedication

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

First and foremost, all praise and glory to God for giving me the vision to pursue this degree and for guiding me through this challenging process. I submit to You, Lord God, understanding that without your grace and many blessings, this would not be possible. Lord, You are indeed mighty, and I say thank You. I will continue to walk the path You have laid out for me. I also thank You for strategically placing the following people in my life who were all critical components in my success.

To my strong Panamanian Queen, my mother, Berta A. Malcolm, I say thank you for your endless support, unconditional love, and constant push towards fulfilling my purpose in life. Thank you for believing in me, giving so selflessly, and not allowing me to waste a single talent. You are a phenomenal woman. I love you.

To my Dad, Jeffrey L. Wright, I will never forget the memories we share because you constantly remind me (smile). From teaching me to ride a bike without training wheels, all the way up to insisting I continue to pursue degree after degree, I say thank you. Thank you for believing in my potential and reminding me every single day to keep pushing. You are an inspiration. I love you always.

To the Yin to my Yang, the peanut butter to my jelly, my partner in “crime,” Lisa O’Connor, I say thank you for keeping me grounded, holding my hand every step of the
way, taking interest in my study, and modeling greatness every single day. You are amazing. I love you.

To Dr. Janice Kelly and Dr. Byron Hargrove, I know that I was blessed from the very beginning to have you on my team. The both of you gave yourselves and your time so effortlessly. Thank you for the many conversations, meetings, your individual dedication to my journey and assisting me in producing this document of which I am very proud. Thank you for approaching this journey with life and passion and helping me to see the value in myself as a scholar. You both have so much to offer, and I consider you my mentors. Thank you for being real, down to earth, and allowing laughter into a challenging process.

To Dr. Josephine Moffett, I say thank you for giving me the opportunity to assist you during my journey and teaching me so many important lessons. Thank you for our genuine conversations and providing me with the foresight to imagine the possibilities. You allowed me to express myself honestly and freely, and I will treasure our connection always.

To Dr. Joseph Cordero, I doubt strongly that I would have been able to get through this journey without your guidance. Thank you for your contribution to the field of study with your incomparable dissertation, which I have memorized from beginning to end (smile). Thank you for making yourself available and encouraging me to dig deeper into my potential.

Natalia Louis, how can I ever repay you for your dedication, support, constant check ins, curiosity, and overall being my personal cheerleader? Tanalia, you are beyond a sister, a Soror, you are my dear friend. You never cease to amaze me in your giving
ways. Your confidence in yourself and in me is admirable. Thank you for your encouragement and reminding me that I am great.

To my dear friend, Rahmel Huffman, I say thank you for your dedication to my pursuits, for making yourself available whenever possible to give your honest (brutality honest) feedback, holding me accountable, and never allowing me to fall short of my goals. I say thank you for believing in me and assisting me through this journey. You are a Godsend and truly an amazing human being.

To Bryan, I say thank you for believing in me. You are a great man and far more than what I could ever ask for throughout this process. Thank you for your support and stern insistence that I put myself, my goals, my dreams, and this pursuit first.

Sterling, you have demonstrated your selflessness a million times over. Your strength and perseverance held me accountable to my own efforts and possibilities and reminded me that laziness is not an option. Thank you, Sdot.

Da’Nashja Davis, wow! What a strong and fierce woman. You pushed and pushed and reminded me of my value and that this contribution to the field as well as the sorority is important. Thank you for greeting me daily with support, affection, smiles and warmth. I appreciate you.

To my team C-Suite, I say thank you for your dedication, the memories we shared, and your individual greatness. You remind me that what I have to say is important and it is never too late to accomplish all that I wish. Tony, Allyson, Phil, Lisa; you guys truly held me down. Thank you.

Cohort 6, I could not have asked to be part of a better group of intelligent, innovative, hilarious, kind people. You all have taught me so much. A special thanks to
Diane, Paola and Nikki for showing me so much love and giving yourselves in an effort to assist others. You ladies are strong and amazing.

To the women of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., I can never thank you enough for the foundation of leadership and greatness you have provided. Thank you to the participants of this study, thank you for sharing your personal stories with me; it was an honor. Thank you to my linesisters, Vitality.

Thank you to all women of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Our founders would be proud of our dedication to the mission and our goal to make this world better through our service. OO-OOP my Sorors! Continue to be great; continue to shine. You are a force to be reckoned with!

To all those who paved the way before me and chose to study BGLOs, I say thank you for your bravery and providing me a foundation to build upon.
Biographical Sketch

Kyana M. Gordon is currently a professor of The Audrey Cohen School for Human Services and Education at Metropolitan College of New York. She has facilitated numerous courses in the fields of communication, philosophy, history, psychology, professional empowerment, and public speaking. Ms. Gordon attended the State University of New York at Stony Brook from 2006 to 2010 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism. Ms. Gordon attended Metropolitan College of New York from 2012-2013 and graduated with a Master’s degree in Public Administration. She entered St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2014 and began the doctoral program of Education and Executive Leadership (Ed.D.). Under the direction of Dr. Janice Kelly and Dr. Byron Hargrove, Ms. Gordon pursued her research entitled Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.: A Phenomenological Study of Alumnae Reflections on Leadership Enhancement During and After College. Ms. Gordon successfully attained her Ed.D. degree in 2016.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide empirical research on Black Greek sorority membership as a vehicle to positive student outcomes and, specifically, the facilitation of leadership enhancement of its members.

Despite over 100 years of service, commitment to academic achievement and community uplifting the impact of historically Black fraternities and sororities, Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) remain an understudied research area. Specifically, there exists little empirical research exploring the membership experiences of women belonging to a historically Black sorority. This phenomenological study explored the ways in which a one chapter, Pi Delta Chapter of BGLO Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. assisted its members in enhancing leadership skills during and after college.

This study utilized a purposeful sample technique to identify and select 12 women who became members of the sorority through the Pi Delta Chapter at Stony Brook University during their undergraduate years. Through structured, open-ended interviews with 12 alumnae participants, five major themes emerged: (a) the importance of sisterhood, (b) networking benefits specifically available to members, (c) mentorship with fellow members, (d) involvement in the sorority and other cocurricular activities, and (e) leadership in the sorority and also in other cocurricular activities.

Membership in historically Black sororities has thus far proven to provide positive impacts and positive college experiences for its members. It is recommended
that colleges and universities continue to explore ways they can enroll and retain minority women.
Pi Delta Chapter Spoken Word

The spark that ignited the flame!

Upon first look I was in awe
  How strong
  How committed
Everything she did was with purpose
  She was simply captivating
Words could not describe how much I loved thee dear old Delta
I don't know how she made you feel but just thinking about her gave me chills
  See she made me want to act better
  Do better
  Just be better
I mean she had standards...which made me work harder and strive for more
  Had me feeling like...just give me a chance and I'll make something of myself
  Just give me a chance and I'll make you proud
  Just give me a chance and I'll uphold your legacy
  Just give me a chance and I'll uphold your people
She sparked something in me that lit a flame for me to do more and want more for myself
  and my community
  Mediocrity was no longer an option
  She stood for change and that is exactly what happened
  A change began to happen
  It was a call to service with a purpose that most couldn't fathom
  I wanted to prove to her that her journey wasn't in vein
  It was for girls like me
  See she ignited the fire and now I carry a flame!

Ayana Butler, Spring 2003, Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

There has never been, nor will there ever be, a more significant, meaningful moment in this researcher’s life than when she decided to pursue membership into Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (hereafter referred to as Delta). The way in which it has impacted this young woman is unparalleled to any other experience. The foundation Delta provided has propelled her forward academically, personally, and even spiritually. She credits Delta for her many accomplishments and, more importantly, for her passion and hunger to succeed and to continue to grow as a dynamic leader.

Initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter, located at Stony Brook University, the researcher shares this unwavering love and respect for the sorority with 131 chapter members. To date, 132 members have been initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter, one member is deceased, Walani T. Stephens. The decision to pursue membership in the sorority was made prior to attending college. The researcher learned about Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) through a television program that showcased talent from each of the nine historically Black fraternities and sororities. She was immediately drawn to the Deltas. As a result of the passion in their movement and conviction in their words, the researcher decided she would become a Delta once she entered college.

Unfortunately, the college she originally attended, Hartford University, did not have an established chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. Attending BGLOs’ events with friends at surrounding colleges and universities at which Deltas were present further increased her interest. She had never seen any young women represent anything with
such intensity and love. The bonds between the young Deltas were evident—palpable even. Upon further research, she learned that these young women did not just perform in shows representing the organization, they also produced a wide range of programs for fellow college students and the surrounding community, as well as participating in community service and national/global awareness initiatives. The researcher felt committed to her pursuit of membership and decided to transfer to a different university. She transferred in the fall of 2006 to Stony Brook University, which had an established and active Delta chapter. She was initiated in the Pi Delta Chapter in the spring of 2007.

The researcher’s experience as a member of the organization has far exceeded her expectations. Hoping to make positive impacts on her campus community and create bonds with like-minded women, she did not factor in how much membership in the organization would assist her in her personal and academic growth as well as in helping to sharpen her leadership skills. Delta provided her with the inspiration and support to pursue leadership positions within organizations on campus. With encouragement from her chapter sorors a name that women who are members of the same sorority affectionately call one another) and practice creating and facilitating programs presented to the entire campus community, she felt confident to take on more leadership roles and responsibilities. Mentorship was another positive aspect of membership. Building strong relationships with prophytes, a term used by younger members to refer to an older member, brother, or sister from the chapter in which one is initiated (University of Nevada, 2015), afforded the researcher with internship and job opportunities as she persisted toward graduation. Upon graduation, the researcher entered her first full-time job opportunity with the help of a prophyte who had mentored her since her initiation and
who continues to do so at the time of this writing. Membership in the organization has
held a large, meaningful part of the researcher’s life.

Through intense conversations and reminiscing with chapter sorors, the researcher
discovered that she was not the only one who gave credit to the organization for their
growth in a multitude of areas, specifically leadership. Ultimately, the relationship with
the Deltas was the spark of interest that propelled this research study.

**Black Greek letter organizations.** BGLOs emerged during a tumultuous time
for African Americans and for African American students attending college in America
(Kimbrough, 1995). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the number of African
Americans entering college slowly increased (Binder, 2003). The college climate
experienced by these young Black students was quite stressful, as they endured racism,
segregation, and hostility inflicted by White students, faculty, and staff (Binder, 2003).
African American college students were excluded from many opportunities of self-
advancement or equal treatment enjoyed by their White counterparts including
participating in any student clubs or organizations, especially fraternities (Kimbrough,
1996). A direct result of this marginalization was the inspiration for African American
college students to create and establish their own fraternal organization (Kimbrough,
1996).

Of the nine BGLOs established, seven were founded at colleges/universities in the
Northeast. The remaining two were founded in the Midwest. The founders of each
BGLO sought to create organizations with meaning for its members (Ross, 2000). Not
only did they strive to attain post-secondary degrees, they also worked to enrich their
college experience with social bonding by way of Greek lettered organizations (Hurdle,
2012). “The process of creating new fraternities was in itself an act of leadership which may have influenced the role these organizations have on modern day campuses” (Kimbrough, 1996, p. 39).

According to Kimbrough (1995), Black college students attending many of the nation’s larger institutions felt the need for some kind of organization to protect their interests and assist in their growth and development. While Black college students were afforded educational opportunities at these predominantly White institutions (PWIs), they were still excluded from recreational organizations and activities that White students were able to take advantage of. Additionally, Black students were met with hostility, abuse, and frequent harassment. These students yearned for a safe haven of their own. “Thus, the genesis of the nine national BGLOs signals the onset of a legacy of leadership that in many ways typifies the cognitive qualities possessed by their student founders” (Kimbrough, 1995, p. 66). Although each of the BGLOs were founded with unique principles and missions, the common-core purposes of the organizations were, and continues to be, service to the community, academic achievement, and brotherhood/sisterhood (Mitchell, 2012). The profiles of the founders of each BGLO range from doctors, educators, and university officials, yet each individual has shared in a common goal in the establishment of their organization to provide unique multifaceted opportunities for people of color who will continue to be beneficial and impactful beyond their college years (Kimbrough, 1996).

African American economist, author, professor, and, liberal social political commenter, Julianne Malveaux (2008), noted the dominance of BGLO membership
amongst some of the nation’s most influential African American change agents, especially those belonging to the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority:

If you were to call the roll of prominent African American people, the prevalence of sorority or fraternity affiliations would underscore the importance of Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) in African American life. The father of African American intellectuals, W. E. B. DuBois, was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, as was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in economics was also the first national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Delta’s political footprint is well documented, with the civil rights work of its 10th president, Dorothy Irene Height; the pioneering legal work of 14th president and attorney, Franke Muse Freeman; the phenomenal and historical leadership of Texas congresswoman, Barbara Jordan; the educational leadership of its 17th president, Mona Humphries Bailey; and the social action and civic participation of 21st president, Marcia Fudge. (Malveaux, 2008, p. xi)

With the establishment of the first successful Black fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, in 1906, it was inevitable that Black female students would follow suit and establish their own organization, which would cater to their many needs and interests (Kimbrough, 1995). Table 1.1 lists the founding dates, location, and numbers of founders of the BGLOs (Ross, 2000).

**The establishment of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.** Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., founded in 1908 at Howard University, was the first Black sorority established. While many of the young women on campus were eager to take part
in what was then considered a social club, in the years to follow, members would seek a more meaningful purpose to the organization. This desire for “leadership and a focus on collegiate, community, national, and global service and politics” (Kimbrough, 1995, p. 67) led some members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (AKAs) to push for change. Subsequently, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was founded.

Delta Sigma Theta was founded on January 13, 1913 at Howard University in Washington, DC by 22 collegiate women. It is currently the largest BGLO, with 1,000 established chapters located in the United States, England, Japan (Tokyo and Okinawa),
Germany, the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the Republic of Korea (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., 2013). There are over 250,000 members worldwide.

Former members of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the 22 collegiate founders felt that there was a great responsibility of educated Black students to come together and affect positive change within their communities (Giddings, 1988). Initially, the young members sought to refine and make changes to AKA. An older member of AKA, Nellie Quander, gathered support from former graduate members to put a stop to the changes the 22 women wanted to establish such as color, name, and purpose. The young women felt the organization needed to expand nationally and become politically involved. Undeterred by the graduate members, the illustrious 22 pushed forward in the establishment of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (Giddings, 1988).

“Despite over 100 years of public service, contributions of these highly influential groups outside of the Black community have garnered limited attention” (Floyd, 2009, p. 50). Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. is an organization that has been recognized by several researchers for its accomplishments and contributions (Floyd, 2009; Giddings, 1988; Harper, 2007; Hurdle, 2012; Kimbrough, 1996; Mitchell, 2012). Since its inception, members of the organization have demonstrated their commitment to political awareness and involvement, economic and financial literacy, educational advancement, physical and mental health, and international awareness and involvement through donations, programs, and events (Harding, 2007).

In 1937, Delta created its first national program entitled *The National Library Project*. The purpose of this program was to provide a traveling library to serve areas of the South. To follow, Delta created an employment counseling and career-development
program for Black women in 1941. In an effort to address international needs, Delta established and financed the Thika Maternity Hospital in Thika, Kenya in 1963. Now called Mary Help of the Sick Mission Hospital, the health organization provides services to over 200 women each day. The Dr. Betty Shabazz Delta Academy has functioned as an educational entity of the organization for more than 30 years. Its purpose is to serve young females ages 11-14 in numerous areas of development (Harding, 2007). “Specifically, we [Deltas] augment their scholarship in math, science, and technology, their opportunities to provide service in the form of leadership through service learning as the cultivation and maintenance of relationship” (Delta Sigma Theta, 2013, para 1).

More recently, Delta “became the first Black Greek letter organization to be named a Non Government Organization at the United Nations” in 2003 (Harding, 2007, p. 2). This responsibility and privilege grants members of the organization with a special consultative status in matters regarding international child hunger, women’s issues, and sexual and work exploitation (Harding, 2007).

Individual members of Delta have made their own impact throughout history, breaking glass ceilings, becoming trail blazers, and more importantly, becoming leaders within a multitude of fields (Giddings, 1988). Notable members of the organization credit Delta for opportunities to practice useful skills and demonstrate growth. MSNBC Weekend News and television host, Melissa Harris-Perry (2013), reflected on her undergraduate experience as a member of Delta:

Delta is the organization that first introduced me to the accomplishments of many Black women in American politics. Patricia Roberts Harris, the first African American woman to be appointed to a Presidential cabinet. Shirley Chisholm, the
first African American woman elected to the U.S. House and the first to run for President. Barbara Jordan, the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House from the South. Carol Moseley Braun, the only African American woman U.S. senator. (Harris-Perry, 2013, para 5)

Some of the most powerful change agents and trailblazers who have emerged throughout history were/still are members of the sorority. Examples of brilliant women leaders who were initiated into Delta are: Shirley Chisholm (the first Black woman member of the U.S. Congress was the first African American and the first woman to run as a major party candidate for the presidency); Dorothy Irene Height (appointed by President Carter to the Presidential Commission on a national agenda for the 1980s and served as president of the National Council of Negro Women for over 40 years); Dr. Nikki Giovanni (Grammy-nominated poet, American writer, commentator, activist, and educator); Lena Horne (American singer, dancer, actress, and civil rights activist); and Elaine R. Jones (the first woman to serve as Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the first African American woman graduate of the University of Virginia Law School, and the first African American woman elected to the American Bar Association Board of Governors). This list of notable Deltas continues with dozens of other members who have contributed to the advancement of African Americans, women, and the overall American society (Delta Sigma Theta, 2013; Giddings, 1988).

There exists a salient need to continue to examine the organizations’ continuous impact on its members. This study focuses on leadership enhancement as a result of membership affiliation.
Leadership development and enhancement. Exposure to leadership opportunities within college/university settings proves to be instrumental in building a foundation for growth and success both in and beyond college (Cordero, 2012).

According to Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998), research remains lacking in exploring the ways in which leadership skills of college students of color are developed. Additionally, there exists little research examining the ways in which BGLOs help to advance student leadership capabilities. Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) stated:

> Early leadership experiences provide individuals with the tools they need to succeed academically, in the workforce, and in other social arenas. Leadership development during the collegiate years has been widely studied to determine the best methods of enhancing students' leadership skills, and the differential processes by which those skills are developed or impeded within various types of student groups. (p. 96)

While leadership development has been studied by various researchers, this study sought to examine the enhancement of leadership skills as it pertains to membership in a historically Black sorority. The researcher selected alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. as participants. It is important to note that the Pi Delta Chapter seeks prospective members who demonstrate leadership skills prior to seeking membership in the organization. Therefore, this study sought to explore the ways in which membership affiliation enhances leadership skills that already exist. Additionally, the researcher sought to discover the differences of membership experiences during and after college through the retrospective accounts of the alumnae participants.
In a study conducted by Lazaro (2011), the researcher sought to discover the relationship between performance and leadership practices amongst teachers. The researcher used a quantitative method to determine the enhancement of leadership skills of teachers by comparing student classroom performance during two individual academic school years. Lazaro (2011) posited that while leaders may have different experiences that have sharpened their ability to lead, there exists general practices that, when implemented, give leaders the tools to be impactful and encouraging to others to mobilize them toward shared aspirations. The practices are referred to as *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). They include:

*Model the Way* – Leaders must stand for something, believe in something, and care about something. They must clarify their values and then express those values in their own style, but good leaders don’t force their own style.

*Inspire a Shared Vision* – Leaders must enlist others in their dreams by appealing to shared aspirations. Leaders get people to see how their own dreams can be realized through a common vision.

*Challenge the Process* – Leaders search for opportunities by seizing the initiatives and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve. Leaders also experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

*Enable Others to Act* – Leaders acknowledge that they cannot do it alone. Leaders foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. Leaders promote a sense of reciprocity and a feeling that everyone is in this together. Leaders also strengthen others by developing competence.
Encourage the Heart – Leaders encourage the heart of their constituents to carry on. Leaders recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. (Lazaro, 2011, pp. 7-8)

Lazaro (2011) considered the participants’ ability to express and implement their own values, encourage others to share in a common vision, seek opportunities, enable others, and recognize individual success as a measurement for leadership enhancement. Increased performance in these areas determined the ability of the participants to enhance their individual leadership skills (Lazaro, 2011).

According to Rosenbaum (2003), who studied leadership for improved public management, leadership enhancement as a leadership concept has been an evasive term, because there exists no specific universal definition that gives meaning and understanding to its use. While Lazaro’s (2011) study gave a precise explanation and outline of how leadership enhancement can be measured, he did not provide, explicitly, a definition of the term. However, Lazaro created a program to evaluate the enhancement of leadership skills that can be utilized and applied in various fields (Lazaro, 2011).

This current study examined leadership enhancement similar to Lazaro’s (2011) study. While little empirical research exists on leadership enhancement among sorority members, the concept of improving on a skill set that already exists, as explained in the aforementioned studies, was the focal point and premise of this study. The researcher utilized reflections from alumnae to uncover each member’s individual ability to enhance her leadership skills during her time spent as an undergraduate student as a member of Delta and beyond graduation.
Problem Statement

Historically, BGLOs have provided many opportunities of growth and development for students of color at both historically Black colleges and universities and at predominantly White institutions (Kimbrough, 1996). However, most of the existing empirical studies that have examined BGLOs members’ experiences have mixed samples of sorority and fraternity members (Allen, 2013; Kimbrough, 1996; Malone, 1999; Mitchell, 2012). While more recent research studies exist that explore the Black male fraternal experiences (Cordero, 2012; Ford, 2014; Williams-Scurlock, 2005), there continues to be limited empirical research that explores the unique impact of participation in a historically Black sorority on female students of color.

Leadership is an important component of the college experience and the growth of the individual. The research that includes Greek affiliation and its impacts on its members leaves little to no focus on the Black female and her sorority affiliation. While most of the existing empirical studies have examined mixed samples of sorority and fraternity members (Allen, 2013; Kimbrough, 1996; Malone, 1999; Mitchell, 2012), this current study sought to uncover the experiences of alumnae of one BGLO (Delta) at a predominantly White institution.

There exists a salient need to uncover the ways in which sorority membership helps to enhance leadership skills, which is an important determining factor in student success (Astin, 1984). Historically, Black sororities have proven to have a multitude of positive impacts on their members (Kimbrough, 1995). While limited studies have supported persistence toward graduation, adversity in hostile racial environments, hazing, and student/staff relationships, this current study documents how sororities can act as a
vehicle for leadership enhancement. According to Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) the subject of student leadership continues to be an understudied area regarding the college population. It has not been made clear to what degree the experiences in membership of a BGLO has on undergraduate student advances or the impact membership may have had on students’ leadership capabilities. Leadership development and student involvement are subjects that have been researched and analyzed to determine in what ways student skills can be enhanced. As college educators continue to explore methods to retain and graduate students, in particular students of color at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), one underexplored area of research is the ways in which BGLOs can positively impact the leadership development and student involvement of affiliated members. According to Kimbrough (1996), leadership and involvement are key components regarding student retention. “An important attribute of the studies on student involvement is that they include very few students of color. The same important attribute, a lack of participation by students of color, exists for the research on Greek lettered organizations” (Kimbrough, 1996, p. 4). Additionally, Kimbrough (1996) postulated that there are gender differences in the leadership experience, and this should also be considered for future studies.

When students are involved in extracurricular activities, including clubs and organizations, they increase their ability to develop leadership skills that, in turn, increase the likelihood they will persist toward graduation (MacKay & Kuh, 1994). Additionally, student involvement and leadership development are important factors in student satisfaction of students of color both at historically Black colleges/universities and PWIs (Kimbrough, 1995).
Moreover, studies conducted with historically Black sororities (Floyd, 2009; Hurdle, 2012; Lee-Olukoya, 2010) focused a great deal on race as a determining factor of student development and leadership. Additionally, each study (Floyd, 2009; Hurdle, 2012; Lee-Olukoya, 2010) did not examine the impact of Black sorority membership on the leadership enhancement of members. While the studies were all qualitative, collectively, these researchers focused on various sorority topics including hazing, persistence, race as an obstacle of achievement, and university responsibility. The anchor studies utilized qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology, with smaller samples to explore members’ experiences. This current study also utilized a qualitative method as existing studies substantiated the need to give a narrative of personal experience. Additionally, this study presents a reflective account of the individual experiences of the alumnae. The researcher utilized a phenomenological approach as a research method to collect and analyze the data. The researcher chose this sorority chapter because of her familiarity with the functions of the Pi Delta Chapter as an alumna. Additionally, the researcher selected the Pi Delta Chapter based on the members’ persistence in leadership roles on the college campus. The researcher sought to explore the impact that involvement had on members to increase existing leadership skills.

**Theoretical Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of the Pi Delta Chapter as it relates to the leadership enhancement of its members. The study utilized Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement. This theoretical framework serves a critical purpose in understanding the complex responses the researcher uncovered from the participants.
Regarded perhaps as one of the most cited and comprehensive theories in engagement and involvement of higher education, Astin’s 1984 student involvement theory was developed as a result of studies of college dropouts in the 1970s (Kimbrough, 1996). Astin (1984) defined student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 518).

Astin (1984) described student involvement by using action words that he believed demonstrated the behavioral sense of involvement. Astin placed emphasis on the students’ ability and determination toward achieving excellence. Astin (1984) asserted that students learn by becoming involved, and college administrators can build efficient programming using his theory of student involvement. Additionally, Astin postulated that there is a distinct correlation between the effectiveness of educational policy or practice and its impact to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984).

Kimbrough (1996) used Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement as a framework for his quantitative study to determine the impact of membership in a historically Black fraternity or sorority on involvement and leadership skill development for Black students. The researcher also sought to determine if the campus environment had an impact on how students developed. The researcher used predominantly White colleges and compared them to that of a historically Black colleges/universities (HBCU). The researcher found that student involvement through BGLOs not only increased involvement outside of the BGLO, but involvement also had implications for affiliated members to persist toward graduation. Kimbrough (1996) asserted that further study was needed to determine the impact of BGLOs regarding student leadership and involvement.
His study was an indication that while BGLOSs play a significant role in involvement and leadership, further research can assist in identifying the impact of BGLOSs, specifically Black sororities, have on member affiliation and the total college experience of the student.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact that membership in the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority had on enhancing leadership skills during and after college from the retrospective accounts of a small sample of female college alumnae who graduated from Stony Brook University (Pi Delta Chapter) between the years of 1984 and 2012. Although sororities have the potential to provide an important form of support, social/profession networking, and a foundation for student engagement and leadership (Patton, Flowers, & Bridges, 2011), more research is needed to empirically verify how leadership skills are enhanced and to what extent. Patton et al., 2011, posited that:

As a result of their Greek affiliation, African American students at both historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have been exposed to various leadership roles, opportunities for civic responsibility within and beyond the collegiate environment, and a network of men and women who promote and encourage academic achievement and community service. (p. 113)

Membership in BGLOSs increases classroom engagement, student activity involvement, and the development of leadership skills (Harper, 2007). African American students, overall, become actively involved in their campus community through their BGLO affiliation, and they may be more likely to graduate considering the positive
correlation of student engagement and involvement with graduation (Patton et al., 2011). Moreover, Black women enrolled in post-secondary institutions benefit from these organizations in a multitude of ways. This group, unique in its marginalization by sex and race, utilizes these organizations to network, increase social and human capital, and sharpen their abilities to lead. This current study evaluated the impact of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta on the leadership of Black college women.

**Research Questions**

In order to answer the following research questions, the researcher interviewed alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter who attended Stony Brook University (a PWI) during their undergraduate years:

1. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ prerequisite leadership skills during their time as undergraduate students?

2. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills since graduating from college?

3. How did membership in the sorority enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills above and beyond membership in other college activities?

4. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants during their undergraduate years?

5. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants after graduation?
The Significance of the Study

The researcher intended to uncover solutions that addressed the lack of opportunities within the college experience for Black women to exercise their leadership capabilities and to find solutions for retention of Black women in universities. There is a significant research deficiency on the leadership experiences of women of color and the ways in which their respective Greek affiliation provide a foundation and/or the tools for them to become involved within other organizations at their respective schools and, in turn, stay engaged in their education and become leaders.

Definitions of Terms

AKA – member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Alumna – (singular) a woman who is a graduate or former student of a specific school, college, or university (Dictionary.com, n.d.), or an alumnus/alumnae can also be a former member, employee, contributor, or inmate, as well as a former student.

Alumnae – (plural) women who are graduates or former students of a specific school, college, or organization (Dictionary.com, n.d.), or former members, employees, contributor, inmates, as well as former students.

Delta – (a) a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and (b) a short reference to the organization itself, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

BGLO – Black Greek Letter Organization

Black Fraternities – Alpha Phi Alpha; Kappa Alpha Psi; Omega Psi Phi; Phi Beta Sigma; and Iota Phi Theta.

Black Sororities – Alpha Kappa Alpha; Delta Sigma Theta; Zeta Phi Beta; and Sigma Gamma Rho.
Chapter – division within the fraternity affiliated with a school or geographic area.

Divine Nine – pseudonym for the nine historically Black fraternities and sororities.

Fraternity – local or national organization of male students, primarily for social purposes, usually with secret initiations and rites and a name composed of two or three Greek letters.

Greeks – term meant to describe members of a Greek letter organization. Historical Black Greek letter organizations are predominately Black-populated fraternities and sororities originating in the early 20th century.

Leadership Enhancement – Process of increasing, improving, and/or adding to existing leadership skills (Lazaro, 2011).

LMOC – Leader of Minerva Circle, a Delta woman in charge of the initiation process.

Leadership Skills – abilities developed that provide one with the tools necessary to act in a governance capacity.

PWI – Predominantly White Institution.

Sorority – local or national organization of female students, primarily for social purposes, usually with secret initiations and rites and a name composed of two or three Greek letters.

Soror – fellow member of a sorority, one member may call only another member of the same organization a soror.

Women of Color – females who represent races other than White (Cordero, 2012).
Chapter Summary

This chapter functions as an overview of the Black Greek Sorority movement, the importance of leadership, and a brief insight into the experience of the Black female. It lays a foundation for the driving force behind the purpose of the study and its intentions. It also demonstrated the need for research that explores the Black female college experience as it relates to her membership in a historically Black sorority regarding leadership enhancement/development.

Chapter 2 demonstrates an in-depth review of literature that further informs the current study. It gives a synthesized analysis of existing studies on student involvement as well as BGLOs and the impact that each have on college students, specifically Black female students.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used to conduct the study, and there is a discussion of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the research questions and the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 details the implications of the findings, limitations, and the recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of membership in a historically Black sorority at a predominantly White institution as it relates specifically to leadership enhancement and student involvement. The researcher focused on the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., which was chartered at Stony Brook University. Founded on May 12, 1984, the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. seeks prospective members who demonstrate leadership skills by way of involvement in extracurricular activities, clubs, and organizations on campus. Additionally, prospective members must have a propensity toward academic achievement in their respective fields. While several researchers (Allen, 2013; Cordero, 2012; Floyd, 2009; Ford, 2014; Hurdle, 2012; Kimbrough, 1996; Lee-Olukoya, 2010; Malone, 1999; Mitchell, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005) have studied the many impacts of membership in BGLOs, there still exists limited research that explores the impact of sorority membership on the ability of Black college women to enhance their leadership skills and the potential of lasting impact beyond their undergraduate graduation.

Review of Literature

Student involvement and leadership. MacKay and Kuh’s (1994) study noted that a vast amount of research regarding the outcomes of the college experience was based on White students. The researchers found that student learning and development are based on the effort of students, and those students that are involved in multiple
activities saw a similar expanded growth. These findings were a result of their study involving patterns of involvement for White and Black students at PWIs as well as the relationship between involvement on campus and educational gains (MacKay & Kuh, 1994). The authors postulated:

It is reasonable to assume that if African-American undergraduates became involved in various aspects of campus life, their graduation rates would improve, thus enabling them to reap additional benefits from attending college. Increased involvement also is a way for African-American students to cope successfully with the barriers to graduation reported in the literature such as lack of encouragement and support from faculty, administrators and peers. (MacKay & Kuh, 1994, p. 217)

MacKay and Kuh’s (1994) assertions, as a result of their study, reinforce Astin’s (1984) student development theory. The researchers affirm that students’ involvement positively impacts their ability to succeed toward graduation and results in greater student satisfaction regarding the college experience. Additionally, MacKay and Kuh (1994) indicated that further research is necessary to explore the ways in which students are involved as well as how they develop as leaders.

Sutton and Kimbrough’s (2001) study addressed the cocurricular experience for members of BGLOs as well as non-members at PWIs. The researchers’ review of previous studies led them to conclude that an institutional environment had no bearing on the involvement of Black students, and that Black students utilized campus facilities as well as participated in clubs and organizations. Sutton and Kimbrough used the Student Involvement and Leadership Scale as well as the Likert type scale for the Student
Involvement and Leadership Scale. The study sought to determine the types of activities or organizations in which Black students are involved.

Similarly, to the assertions of MacKay and Kuh (1994), Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that Black students demonstrated a sense of pride and security when describing their involvement in extracurricular activities. Additionally, Black students considered their ability to provide services to others as a representation of their leadership skills. Black students felt their involvement was critical to their college experience, and it helped to shape them as leaders. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) concluded that further research must be done to determine the ways in which institutions can help to increase Black student participation.

Studies have shown that students who devote their time to socially and educationally rich activities increase their cognitive and personal development. Additionally, the researchers have explained that “institutional practices, such as inclusive and affirming learning environments, where performances expectations are clearly communicated and reasonably set, are associated with high levels of student engagement” (Patton et al., 2011). According to Yearwood & Jones (2012), the impact of the college experience is largely determined by the students’ desire and effort to actively involve themselves in both academic and non-academic activities. The correlation between student engagement and success is critical in determining graduation rates (Yearwood & Jones, 2012).

Black Greek letter organizations. The inception of Greek letter organizations is identified with the establishment of Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in 1776. Phi Beta Kappa was the first organization to call itself a fraternity and create
many of the characteristics that we presently associate with fraternal organizations, such as secret rituals, the motto, shield/coat of arms, secret grip or handshake, and the establishment of principles and values for its members to follow and uphold. During its early years, membership in Phi Beta Kappa was only afforded to undergraduate students at its specific institution (Binder, 2003).

The majority of Phi Beta Kappa’s earliest members was practicing Masons, an organization of which much of its characteristics had derived. Being associated with the Masons, eventually exposed the rituals of Phi Beta Kappa in the 1830s. Phi Beta Kappa, along with other secret organizations, experienced scrutiny with the anti-Masonic scare, and they were forced to reveal their rituals and secrets. As a result, Phi Beta Kappa became an honor society. Today membership in Phi Beta Kappa is recognized as a top honor for students within the arts and sciences (Binder, 2003).

According to Binder (2003), race played a major role in membership in Greek letter organizations. The number of African American college students in the United States slowly increased in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The presence of African American students was not significant during the establishment of the earlier fraternities. Additionally, the fraternities forbade African American males from becoming members by enacting exclusionary clauses. Although these clauses were eliminated in the 1960s, traditional fraternities refused African American males. The Black fraternity movement was sparked by the exclusionary practices of traditional organizations (Binder, 2003).

Black fraternities and sororities emerged on college campuses during a time of racism, segregation, and adversity that was experienced by their founders. These organizations became vehicles of advocacy, as they rose to power and importance
quickly. According to Mitchell (2012), a major difference between White Greek organizations and BGLOs, was that BGLOs found importance in including service as a core element in their organizations.

There are nine BGLOs, referred to as the Divine Nine. The Divine Nine exist under one umbrella organization called the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), which consist of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1906); Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1908); Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1911); Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1911); Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1913); Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1914); Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1920); Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1922); and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1963). Since their existence, BGLOs have provided minority students with an outlet to become engaged on and off campus and emerge as leaders (Cordero, 2012). “Historically, Black fraternities and sororities have provided opportunities and access to leadership development. College student leadership has been shown to positively affect academic success, retention and eventually graduation” (Williams-Scurlock, 2005, p. 59).

According to Bonner (2006), the impact of BGLOs cannot fully be appreciated without first understanding the circumstances surrounding their birth. The political and social climate in the United States upheld racial injustice, inequality, and separate but unequal doctrines that marginalized the existence of the African American. During the early 1900s, African Americans who attempted to break barriers and boundaries, which had been historically upheld by Whites, were met with hostility. Specifically, African American students enrolled in PWIs experienced unfair and unwelcome treatment by
their academic peers (Bonner, 2006). It was the formation of BGLOs that provided these minority students with stable connections to organizations that “served to provide safe havens in terms of refuge from hostile institutional climates experienced on campuses” (Binder, 2003, p. 17).

Bonner (2003) posited that through their affiliation with BGLOs, African American students were able to create meaningful relationships. BGLOs served as vehicles for enriching the Black student experience. Contrary to traditional Greek Organizations, BGLOs served a more complex purpose—not only for the individual members, but also for the Black community as a whole. According to NPHC’s 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. (O'Neal Jones, 2012, p. 21)

According to Baker (2008), sources of support during students’ transition into college is essential to growth and development. In her research study, Baker examined the effect of involvement in different types of student organizations. Baker identified under-represented college students as being African American and Latino. Baker argued
that under-represented college students are more likely than other students to feel isolated and disconnected from the college environment. In her study, she examined the effects of involvement in different types of extracurricular activities on the academic performance of Black and Latino students (Baker, 2008).

Baker’s (2008) research built upon Tinto’s (1993) theory of student departure. Often cited in similar research studies concerning student integration, Tinto’s theory asserts that students who involve themselves in the aspects of the college experience are less likely to drop out and are more likely to persist toward graduation. Baker (2008) applied this to her study, arguing that a student’s academic performance is the direct indicator of the extent to which the student is successfully integrated into the campus life (Baker, 2008).

Within her research study, Baker (2008) discussed the significance of BGLOs as important organizations for the development and integration of African American and Latino affiliated members. Baker asserted that, compared to non-Greek members, BGLO affiliated members had higher levels of involvement and gains in cognitive development as a result of Greek involvement. Additionally, the researcher explained that the impact of BGLOs is an area of research that has not been extensively studied (Baker, 2008).

To determine the relationship between extracurricular involvement and academic performance, Baker (2008) used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen. The researcher explained that the survey design allowed for an analysis of the change in academic performance over time, based on various types of extracurricular involvement during college. Baker’s study focused on the first 2 years of college, which she identified as a critical transitional time for students (Baker, 2008).
Baker’s (2008) findings suggest that the type of student organizations should be considered in terms of the way the minority student is involved. Baker asserted that while involvement in any student organization positively impacts the academic performance of Black and Latino students, there are some organizations that negatively affect academic performance. Baker suggested that her research warrants further research on minority involvement in extracurricular activities and the differences in gender on participation (Baker, 2008).

Walter M. Kimbrough is regarded as an expert and scholar within the research of Black fraternities and sororities. His work is not limited to that of his dissertation in which he studied the impact of historical Black Greek organizations on student involvement and leadership development (Kimbrough, 1996). Kimbrough (1995, 1996, 2005, 2009) conducted a number of studies measuring various variables to determine the BGLO membership movement and their roles on college campuses.

In one such study conducted in 1995, Kimbrough used a qualitative approach to determine the experiences of members in BGLOs. He was particularly interested in the way students of color perceived themselves regarding leadership skills, participation within campus activities, and self-value. Kimbrough (1995) asserted

If Black college students need to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships and if membership in a fraternity or sorority leads these students to develop stronger bonds with their peers and families, then it seems likely that these organizations would play a crucial role in facilitating and improving Black students’ perceptions of the college environment, especially at PWIs.

(Kimbrough, 1995, p. 2)
Kimbrough’s (1995) study revealed that BGLOs are a significant source of leadership development opportunities for students of color. Additionally, both affiliated and non-affiliated Black students shared similar beliefs of their leadership status and the way they valued leadership. Kimbrough stated that future studies should seek to discover gender differences and attitudes as well as the effects of membership on students’ interpretation of leadership.

While Kimbrough (1995, 1996, 1998, 2009) has claimed, in various studies, that BGLOs are vehicles for Black student success in college, he did not ignore the precarious predicament that currently plagues the reputations of these organizations. Hazing continues to be a buzzword and an issue of concern regarding BGLOs. In fact, a substantial amount of literature concerning BGLOs is immersed in the topic of hazing. With the media reporting injuries and deaths as a result of pledging, Kimbrough (1995) explained that it is the reputation of the organizations’ service to the nation as well as the prominent figures that are affiliated members (Bill Cosby, Lena Horne, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Shirley Chisholm) that continue to validate the existence of BGLOs (Kimbrough, 1995).

Kimbrough and Hutcheson’s (1998) study examined the impact of membership in BGLOs on Black students’ involvement in collegiate activities and their development of leadership skills. According to the authors, conclusive evidence has not been uncovered regarding how or if organizations, such as student government, fraternities and sororities, produce leaders. It has not been made clear which of the college experience advances the leadership development of students. Although the authors asserted that BGLOs traditionally have had an impact on the development skills among students. For students
of color, BGLOs provide affiliated members with leadership experiences unique to their cultures (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998).

Kimbrough and Hutcheson’s (1988) quantitative study included a target sample of 1,400 Black, both Greek and non-Greeks students from a PWI and HBCU. The students were asked a series of questions to indicate their level of involvement and participation. A key component of the study was to identify among the target sample, which students held a leadership position in an organization on campus. The Leadership Assessment Scale was created for the study to measure students’ perceptions of the ability of different student organizations and student leadership positions to offer opportunities for the development of leadership skills (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). The researchers found that students who joined BGLOs increased their overall involvement to a significant degree. The findings suggest that further research is necessary to determine the impact of BGLOs on student involvement and leadership.

In his research study, Kimbrough (2009) reviewed archival data and other research studies on the history of pledging and the recent movements for reform in BGLOs. Kimbrough (2009) gave a clear and concise view of this population that has drawn attention recently due to media coverage on hazing. Since the establishment of the first Black fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., these organizations have worked to provide students of color with opportunities that they were not otherwise afforded due to racism and segregation (Kimbrough, 2009).

The era of pledging existed from the period of 1920-1990. Little is known about how the rituals and practices came to be because BGLOs are private organizations. Kimbrough (2009) noted that some practices may have emerged from the commonalities
that students enrolled in college would inflict on incoming freshmen in the late 1800s. The era of membership intake, however, had a great deal more literature in comparison. Studies have examined the way BGLOs have moved away from hazardous hazing rituals and NPHC, as the umbrella organization of the nine BGLOs, outlawed pledging and hazing. Still, Kimbrough (2009) insisted that there remains a research gap on various topics concerning these organizations.

Malone’s (1999) study sought to determine if Black Greeks made up the dominant culture amongst middle-class African Americans. Similar to the aforementioned studies, Malone (1999) declared that through his research, he found that BGLOs played a significant role in the Black student experience. Additionally, the researcher asserted that Black fraternity and sorority membership is a direct indicator of influence over the goal setting and the establishment of values and behavior. Further, Malone (1999) stated that BGLOs offer a unique cultural experience for affiliated members as noted in Kimbrough and Hutcheson’s (1998) study. Few studies have been conducted on the Black Greek experience for the undergraduate students and the impact of affiliation beyond the undergraduate years.

Malone (1999) collected data for the study by using a combination of ethnographic interviews and survey research. Malone concluded that BGLOs are organizations perceived by both Black Greeks and non-Greeks as a source of influence, privilege, and power, and they are beneficial for Blacks. Additionally, there are perceptions of cultural enrichment regarding BGLOs that are meaningful and powerful to African Americans.
McClure’s (2006) qualitative research study sought to explore the influence and function of membership in a fraternity relating to the college experiences of its members at a PWI. McClure justified the need for the research by reviewing the Black male college student attrition rates at colleges and universities and, more specifically, at PWIs, citing that Black male graduation rates were significantly lower than their race/gender counterparts. McClure suggested that more must be known as to what enables Black students to succeed in college both personally and academically. Moreover, the researcher sought to discover how, specifically, minority-serving organizations’ unique functions facilitate the success of minority students (McClure, 2006).

McClure’s (2006) study began with an overview of Greek culture. Similar to the aforementioned studies, McClure explained that there is a significant difference between the functions of White Greek letter organizations and BGLOs. The researcher found that the attitudes and priorities of affiliated members also differed by race. Black Greek members were likely to be committed to leadership and student involvement as opposed to their White counterparts. This may be the result of greater need among minority students in support groups than White students (McClure, 2006).

According to McClure (2006), Black Greek fraternities can be considered a mechanism of social integration. McClure also used Tinto’s (1993) theory of student departure as a foundation for her study, noting the correlation between student attrition and academic integration of the students on campus. This was an important part of the study as participation in extracurricular activities are more significant predictors of Black success (McClure, 2006).
McClure (2006) went on to describe fraternities as voluntary associations, explaining that members of these organizations are not financially compensated for their participation. However, social capital is gained, giving members access to beneficial resources, such as networking opportunities, that are exclusive to its members. Additionally, BGLOs connect its members to social networks, the campus community, and society (McClure, 2006).

The research study McClure (2006) conducted included the process of interviewing 20 members of one historically Black fraternity at a PWI that was racially integrated in the 1960s. McClure asked a series of questions to gauge the experience of each member within the fraternity, and he used more of a conversational technique to inspire candid responses. McClure’s findings suggest that the fraternity is a critical component of personal and academic success for its members. Further, the members expressed that their connection to the fraternity increased their campus experiences. Additionally, the members felt that the fraternity assisted them with networking after graduation, and it created a sense of closeness within the brotherhood as well as a reverence for Black history. McClure concluded by emphasizing the need of programming for minority students at PWIs, asserting that there is value and purpose found in affiliation with BGLOs (McClure, 2006).

Similar to the study conducted by McClure (2006), Severtis, Jr. and Christie-Mizell (2007) used social capital as a basis relating to BGLOs and its affiliated members. Researchers assessed membership in Greek social organizations as a factor that increases college graduation rates for African Americans. In this quantitative study, Severtis, Jr. and Christie-Mizell used data to determine to relationships between educational
attainment, race, and membership in Greek letter organizations. The researchers sought to improve upon previous research by investigating racial differences that may be associated with fraternity and sorority life (Severtis, Jr. & Christie-Mizell, 2007).

Severtis, Jr. and Christie-Mizell (2007) argued that Greek letter organizations are sources of social capital that is useful for cognitive and social development. The researchers argued that because Greek letter organizations are voluntary, operating and maintaining membership builds on collectively-owned social capital, and the benefits received are both intrinsic to the member and the organization. While the individual members may gain resources through affiliation, the organization is, in turn, strengthened by its members’ accomplishments and ability to provide fellow members with opportunities (Severtis, Jr. & Christie-Mizell, 2007).

Severtis, Jr. and Christie-Mizell (2007) hypothesized that membership in Greek letter organizations is positively related to the probability of college graduation. Additionally, considering the economic disadvantage experienced by African Americans, they tend to benefit more from their organizations than European Americans. The researchers asserted that European Americans have greater resources at their disposal to guarantee their educational progress, contrary to African Americans who achieve as a result of the social capital generated by Greek letter organizations (Severtis, Jr. & Christie-Mizell, 2007).

Severtis, Jr. and Christie-Mizell (2007) completed an analytic strategy for the data collected from a diverse set of respondents. The respondents were ages 24 through 40 and were made up from numerous racial backgrounds. Logistic regression models were used to estimate the probability of college graduation. Further, Greek letter membership
was used in the model to assess the relationship between the probability of college graduation and control variables, which included race, gender, age, family structure, and region of origin (Severtis, Jr. & Christie-Mizell, 2007).

Parallel to the aforementioned research studies, Severtis, Jr. and Christie-Mizell (2007) concluded that Greek letter membership is positively related to college graduation. Membership in these organizations was found to be an important predictor of whether an individual graduated from college. The researchers asserted that their findings support a social capital framework in which membership in voluntary organizations provides interpersonal resources that assist affiliated members in achievement. Further, African Americans stood to gain more from their membership than their European counterparts. The researchers suggested that further research should focus on other races, such as Asian and Latino, to grasp race differences from a broader spectrum as it relates to Greek letter membership. Also, the researchers suggested further research should seek to explore the influences of Greek letter organizations on other educational outcomes such as the choice of a major or decisions to attend graduate school (Severtis, Jr. & Christie-Mizell, 2007).

Kimbrough’s (2005) article examines the impact of pledging BGLOs. The researcher presents a timeline of hazing incidences and lawsuits that have occurred since pledging was outlawed in 1990. This article, as well as literature concerning the effects of hazing, are critical to understanding the argument that BGLOs do more harm than good, especially within undergraduate chapters. Kimbrough (2005) produced this article after his lecture tour on Black fraternities and sororities, and speaking with undergraduate chapter members at several universities. Kimbrough (2005) noted that “every year,
students are injured both mentally and physically by their peers as they attempt to gain membership in one of these fraternal organization” (Kimbrough, 2005, p. 28).

After collecting responses from interviews with BGLO members from the colleges Kimbrough (2005) visited, the researcher came to the conclusion that the harm hazing had caused, not only to those involved but to the reputation of the organizations was substantial. Kimbrough (2005) suggested that instead of abolishing undergraduate chapters permanently, that NPHC should collectively impose a moratorium on all BGLOs for at least 5 years. Within this time, Kimbrough proposed that a number of experts be employed as a task force to battle hazing and illegal pledging.

The purpose of Harper’s (2007) study was to determine the relationship between BGLO membership and an African American students’ engagement in White college classrooms. Harper’s study was conducted in response to Kimbrough’s (2005) article Should Black Fraternities and Sororities Abolish Undergraduate Chapters? Harper (2007) posited that Kimbrough’s (2005) prescription to quell the negative effects of hazing ignores the educational benefits BGLOs offer. Harper (2007) used interviews to engage 131 members for undergraduate chapters at PWIs in the Midwest, posing questions that focused on factors that affected participants’ engagement in White classrooms.

The findings of the study indicated that students belonging to a BGLO participated in classrooms for the following reasons: (a) they felt the need to positively represent their Greek organization, (b) they felt the need to positively represent themselves as the only Black student in the classroom, and (c) they found importance in being a role model. Other insightful themes emerged, such as the feeling of obligation to
uphold the academic standards of the chapter the students belonged to, as well as
upholding their personal academic goals. Harper (2007) concluded that his findings built
a case for undergraduate chapters of BGLOs’ importance. Harper (2007) suggested that
BGLOs should not be abolished at the undergraduate level. He proposed that should
undergraduate chapters be eliminated from the Black student experience, that the amount
of African American students who willingly participated in the classroom would likely
decrease.

According to Harper (2007), a vast amount of research surrounding BGLOs was
devoted to exploring the topic of hazing and the negative outcomes of these organizations
for their undergraduate members. Little research has been conducted exploring
classroom behaviors, academic engagement, and student success. While emphasis has
been placed on the core principles of the BGLOs, such as scholarship,
brotherhood/sisterhood, achievement, and community service, little data have been
collected demonstrating the positive impacts BGLOs have on African American students’
persistence. “Likewise, existing literature on BGLOs focuses disproportionately on
socially-produced outcomes and the non-academic experiences of members, thus
furnishing a one-sided rationale for their continued existence” (Harper, 2007, p. 95).
However, Harper sited that African American students who are involved in campus
activities, specifically BGLOs, are more likely to experience higher degrees of leadership
development, and they perceived the value of leadership skills more positively than
unaffiliated students (Harper, 2007).

In the thesis written by Allen (2013), the researcher sought to study how
membership in Black fraternities and sororities shaped the college experience and
perception of its members. Focus groups made up of affiliated members were used in the qualitative study. According to Allen (2013), research is lacking concerning the influence of BGLOs on the college experience compared to the overwhelming literature that explores the negative aspects of BGLOs such as pledging and hazing rituals. Similar to Harper (2007), Allen’s (2013) study placed more emphasis on the positive aspects and beneficial outcomes from being a member of a BGLO. In addition, Allen (2013) sought to determine if racial climate had an influence in the college experience of BGLO members.

Four focus groups were conducted, two at PWIs, and two at HBCUs. Perhaps the most dominant result of Allen’s (2013) study was the emerging theme that while Black Greek life caused division at HBCUs, on PWIs, Black Greeks were unified as the minority group on campus. Allen (2013) found that BGLOs served as a social distraction at HBCUs, while at PWIs, the organizations promoted academic excellence and prepared students for leadership positions beyond college.

**Impact of membership in historically Black sororities.** The purpose of Floyd’s (2009) study was to examine the impact of membership in historically Black sororities as it pertained to the ability of Black women students to persist toward graduation at PWIs. Similar to the aforementioned studies focused on BGLOs, Floyd explained the need for literature that explores membership experiences on BGLOs, as they provide vehicles of growth and development for their members (Floyd, 2009).

Floyd (2009) utilized the qualitative method of phenomenology to collect the data. The researcher selected 15 participants who were Black women enrolled at three
PWIs and who were all members of a historically Black sorority. The researcher conducted in-depth, in-person individual interviews with the participants (Floyd, 2009).

Through the responses collected from interviews with the participants, Floyd (2009) found that “Black Greek sorority members credited their organizations with increasing and enriching self-estees, self-beliefs, and self-efficacy” (Floyd, 2009, p. 212). The researcher determined that involvement in their respective sororities allowed the participants to gain a sense of community, to network, increase/maintain academic performance, build relationships, and bond with fellow sorority sisters (Floyd, 2009). Additionally, the Floyd postulated that the existence of Black Greek sororities on college campuses assisted in providing the campus community with “relevant programming for students of color on campus” (Floyd, 2009, p. 220).

In Hurdle’s (2012) qualitative study, the researcher focused on the leadership development of African American college women and the university’s responsibility to this population. The researcher utilized a sample of women who were members of historically Black sororities and explored the ways their membership experiences impacted their student involvement and ability to gain leadership opportunities. Additionally, the researcher utilized student life practitioners to give insight into the university’s strategy in interacting with Black women students. Hurdle (2012) sought to answer research questions that (a) addressed the way Black women develop as leaders at PWIs, (b) impacted membership in Black sororities on Black women to develop as leaders, and (c) Hurdle wanted to determine if the services and programs the university provided assisted the Black women students in their leadership development and what the institution’s responsibility was to the Black women students (Hurdle, 2012).
Hurdle (2012) collected data through demographic surveys and then, one on one, conducted interviews with 19 respondents who met the established criteria. The participant sample was made up of students and staff to address the research questions. The researcher postulated that involvement in historically Black sororities provided multiple positive impacts for their members including support, social action, and unity among Black women (Hurdle, 2012). Hurdle substantiated the need for academic institutions to establish student organizations that provide leadership opportunities unique to Black women.

Similar to the aforementioned studies conducted by Floyd (2009) and Hurdle (2012), the purpose of Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr.’s (2014) study was to examine the influence of historically Black sororities on the experiences of Black college women at a PWIs. The researchers utilized an intersectional social capital framework. The study was conducted based on the need to continue to explore the experiences of African American college women at PWIs, because this particular group has been marginalized by their gender and race. While Black women “tend to enroll in institutions of higher education at far greater rates than their male counterparts,” there still exists an achievement gap “between African American women and their racial/ethnic counterparts” (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, Jr., 2014, p. 282). Additionally, Black students report higher levels of dissatisfaction at PWIs as well as overall negative college experiences.

Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, Jr. (2014) noted that existing studies that focused on student success suggest that students who are involved and engaged both in the classroom and in campus activities increase their ability to persist toward graduation and become
successful beyond graduation. The researchers discussed that existing studies focused on
BGLOs have determined that these organizations “have positive effects on student-
faculty relationship, student involvement, and engagement, leadership development,
social support and integration and academic achievement” (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr.,
2014, p. 283).

Similar to McClure’s (2006) research, as it pertains to the Black student
experience at PWIs, Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, Jr. (2014) contended that an achievement
gap exists between race/ethnicities due to the unwelcoming experience of African
Americans at PWIs. Also, much like McClure’s study, the researcher explored the
functionality of BGLOs in the lives of its members at PWIs and the organization’s ability
to positively influence college outcomes of affiliated members. Researchers argue that
without proper support, African Americans will continue to face obstacles within PWIs
that often lead to attrition. Additionally, Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, Jr. (2014) suggested
that student involvement and engagement is critical to college persistence and graduation.

Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, Jr. (2014) conducted their phenomenological case study
utilizing the purposeful sampling technique of criterion sampling. Seven women were
selected to participate in the study, identifying as African American or Black, a member
of a historically Black sorority, and enrolled at a PWI (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr., 2014).
Through focus groups and one-on-one interviews, the researchers sought to answer: (a)
What are the experiences of African American women who joined historically Black
sororities at PWIs? and (b) How does the intersection of race and gender shape their
experiences within historically Black sororities at a PWI? (Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, Jr.,
Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, Jr. (2014) found that although the participants were members of other minority organizations, their participation in historically Black sororities offered unique social support. The most important findings highlighted by the researchers were that: (a) the participants felt they had access to networks and communities solely accessible through their membership, (b) the support from their membership influenced the participants to achieve academic success and to exceed their perceived capabilities as a student, and (c) participants sought ways to maintain the high standards set by the sorority and maintain positive reputations of themselves and their respective sororities (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, Jr., 2014). The Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr. (2014) study helped to uncover the many positive impact of membership in historically Black sororities.

Chapter Summary

The literature review points to a gap in the research exploring the ways Black college women members of historically Black sororities become engaged and emerge as leaders in an environment that is generally unwelcoming to Black students. A great deal of attention has been given to how the members perceived the impact of their Greek affiliation as well as the way they measure their engagement and motivation. Additionally, existing research has focused a great deal on the Black male college experience. Existing studies have not explored the membership experiences of BGLO alumnae and presented a comparison of the effects of membership during and after college. This current study sought to explore membership experiences in college and beyond, utilizing retrospective accounts of the participants who were initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
Chapter 3 details the research methodology of the study and the steps taken to collect and analyze the data.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact of how membership in one historically Black sorority chapter, at a predominantly White institution, facilitated the enhancement of leadership skills both during and after college for a small group of BGLO alumnae. This chapter discusses how utilizing in-depth interviews was the one way of exploring and discovering sorority members’ perceptions of the impact of membership in one historically Black sorority on enhancing leadership skills of affiliated members both during and after their undergraduate years.

BGLOs were established to provide a multitude of opportunities for members (Kimbrough, 1996). Although members of these organizations have anecdotally experienced growth and development personally, academically, and professionally, there continues to be limited empirical research that systematically explores the sorority/fraternity leadership development experiences of members (Cordero, 2012). Previous studies focused on BGLOs have used mixed samples of sorority and fraternity members, disregarding the unique gender experiences (Allen, 2013; Kimbrough, 1996; Malone, 1999; Mitchell, 2012). Additionally, in studies that have focused on one gender, the researchers chose to explore the Black male experience (Cordero, 2012; Ford, Jr., 2014; McClure, 2006; Singleton, 2010). According to Cordero (2012), an explanation for the Black male focus is needed to uncover ways to retain young Black men at colleges and universities and have them graduate at lower rates than their White and female
counterparts. As a result, there exists limited empirical research that explores the unique impact of participation in a historically Black sorority on female students of color. Furthermore, the studies that have explored Black sorority involvement have not determined the impact membership has on leadership development or enhancement, nor have the researchers utilized a group of participants, such as BGLO alumnae who have the ability to compare membership experiences during and after college.

This study sought to present a reflective account of the individual experiences of BGLO alumnae. Once initiated into the organization, the individual is forever a member and therefore expected to uphold the principles and expectations of the organization. “Membership in Delta Sigma Theta is a lifetime commitment” (O’Neil McGintis, 2008, p. 4). Members are expected to remain actively involved, participating in programs, paying national dues to the organization, attending national and regional conventions and conferences, performing acts of community service, and overall upholding the mission of the organization. If members are expected to be active from college initiation to alumnae status, then it is plausible that empirical data should be collected exploring alumnae experiences during and after college. Thus, the following research questions were examined in the present study:

1. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ prerequisite leadership skills during their time as undergraduate students?
2. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills since graduating from college?
3. How did membership in the sorority enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills above and beyond membership in other college activities?

4. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants during their undergraduate years?

5. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants after graduation?

**Qualitative design.** In order to address the research questions, the researcher utilized a qualitative inquiry in an effort to give voice to the participants and examine the storied history of the impact of the Pi Delta Chapter on leadership enhancement. While some existing empirical studies that discussed the impact of BGLOs on student leadership utilized a quantitative research method (Harper, 2007; Kimbrough, 1996; Patton et al., 2011) this study attempted to use a qualitative design due to the size of the sorority chapter, with 132 women being initiated since its establishment in 1984. The Pi Delta Chapter is considered relatively small in comparison to chapters that were established before its inception, and they have initiated a larger number of women each year. A comparative example is the Alpha Chapter located at Howard University that is known to initiate lines as large as 50 initiates. Pi Delta’s largest line was initiated in 1984 with 11 women. Additionally, the study sought to uncover the reflective experiences of members who have since graduated.

Qualitative inquiry seeks in-depth comprehension of a phenomenon and strives to identify what influences human behavior (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is an approach focused on individuals and groups in which the researcher collects data within the participants’ setting. The researcher uses data analysis that is both inductive and
deductive in order to establish patterns and themes. “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This method assists the researcher in obtaining culturally specific data concerning values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of a culture-sharing group, assessing the meaning of the data collected (Yin, 2011).

**Phenomenology.** The researcher employed the use of phenomenology to collect and analyze the data. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that concerns the phenomenon of common human experiences (Lin, 2013). This method enabled the researcher to gain in-depth insight into the membership experiences of the participants. The experiences of the participants were analyzed through responses based on the research questions developed:

A phenomenological study focuses on describing and analyzing the meaning(s) of the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Through dialogue and reflection, an in-depth meaning of the experiences is revealed. Within this qualitative inquiry, the researcher sought to comprehend the experiences, finding commonalities from a first-person account by those experiencing the phenomenon (Floyd, 2009). Additionally, the researcher sought to understand how the experiences were interpreted by the participants of the study. Phenomenology was selected as a research approach to study the leadership enhancement as well as the overall impact of membership in the Pi Delta Chapter. Comparing individual experiences across the decades of initiation gave meaning and understanding of the retrospective accounts delivered by the participants during and after college. Interviewing was selected as an approach to collect the qualitative data based on
the process outlined by Creswell (2013). Interviews have often been used in studies in which the researcher expressed the need to give voice to the participant (Cordero, 2012; Floyd, 2009; Hurdle, 2012; Mitchell, 2012).

Research Context

Stony Brook University. Founded in 1957 as a teacher’s college with less than 200 students, Stony Brook University is now a public institution, and it is part of the State University of New York system (SUNY). Located in Stony Brook, New York, the university currently has over 24,000 students. At the time of this writing, men represent the larger demographic making up 54% of the student body, women make up 46%. Stony Brook is a predominantly White institution with a population of 42.4% White students followed by 27.3% Asian, 11.9% Hispanic/Latino, and 7.2% Black/African American students (Stony Brook University, 2015).

Stony Brook University currently recognizes over 425 clubs and organizations on campus. This includes the BGLOs that are recognized on campus. While there exists nine BGLOs, the following have active chartered chapters at Stony Brook University: Delta Sigma Theta Sorority; Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity; Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity; Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity; Zeta Phi Beta Sorority; and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority. The University created a Statement of Community in order to promote campus involvement and respect for all:

As members of Stony Brook University, we acknowledge that the primary purpose of this community is education, including academic achievement, social development, and personal growth.
In committing ourselves to study and work at Stony Brook, we agree to promote equality, civility, caring, responsibility, accountability, and respect. We also recognize the importance of understanding and appreciating our differences and similarities. (Stony Brook University, n.d.)

While the participant interviews were not conducted on campus, it was critical to the study to give a clear background and description of the environment in which the participants were active members of the undergraduate chapter and how they each fit in as a student at Stony Brook University.

**Pi Delta Chapter.** The Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was established at Stony Brook University on May 12, 1984. It is the 735th chapter of the 1,000 collegiate and alumnae chapters of the organization to be established. At the time of this writing, a total of 132 women have been initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter during the spring and fall semesters. The chapter seeks prospective members who demonstrate leadership skills prior to pursuing membership in the organization. Each interested young woman must provide letters of recommendation and verification explaining her participation in community service and her involvement in other organizations. Her involvement is considered an act of leadership because the organization is committed to serving others.

The Pi Delta Sorority Chapter operates under the policies and procedures of the international organization and produces programs and community service events to remain in compliance with the national board and the overall mission of the organization: “Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. is an organization of college educated women
committed to constructive development of its members and to public service with a primary focus on the Black community” (Delta Sigma Theta, 2013, para. 1).

The young women of the Pi Delta Chapter work to uphold the mission of the organization by creating innovative programs for the campus community to address existing issues that fall under the organization’s programmatic thrusts. The programmatic thrusts were created to maintain Delta’s commitment to serve communities nationally and internationally (Delta Sigma Theta, 2013). It is a guide for members of the organization to create innovative programs that address and bring awareness to meaningful issues that impact communities of color as well as the greater surrounding community of which the sorority chapter exists. Each chapter must submit outlines for programs and events to Delta’s National Headquarters, that they intend to produce, explaining in detail how it meets the standards of the selected thrust. The programmatic thrusts are listed below accompanied by their respective national programs that address each thrust. Members of the sorority often host these national programs on their college campuses and/or in their local communities. The programmatic thrusts are listed with the associated programs listed beneath each thrust.

- Economic Development
  Financial Fortitude: helps program participants to set and define goals, develop a plan to achieve them, and to put the plan into action. The process serves as a blueprint to address all aspects of personal finances.

- Educational Development
  Delta G.E.M.S. Growing & Empowering Myself Successfully: Delta Gems was created to catch the dreams of African American at-risk, adolescent girls
Delta GEMS provides the framework to actualize those dreams through the performance of specific tasks that develop a CAN DO attitude.

- **International Awareness and Involvement**

  Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Elementary School: In collaboration with Water in Education International opened the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Elementary School, The Cynthia M.A. Butler-McIntyre Campus in Chérette, Haiti, June 15, 2013. The project was established to provide an adequate school facility to include clean water for school children in Haiti.

- **Physical and Mental Health**

  The initiative addresses the challenges of living holistic and health lives. The three-pronged approach to Journey to Wellness includes: A refocused Lose to Win! To include Physical Activity and Healthy Eating, Physical Health: Chronic Diseases and Mental Health

- **Political Awareness and Involvement**

  In 1989, the National Social Action Commission instituted Delta Days in the Nation’s Capital, an annual legislative conference to increase members’ involvement in the national public policy-making process. The annual conference includes legislative briefings, issue forums, and advocacy skills development. (Delta Sigma Theta, 2013)

  Although the mission of the organization does not explicitly state leadership as a prerequisite and expectation for its members, it is implied and understood by sorors through the functionality of the programmatic thrusts and active membership within the sorority. Generally, the young women of the Pi Delta Chapter collaborate with one
another to create an event, program, and/or community service that would bring attention and awareness to issues under each thrust. For example, the Pi Delta Chapter hosts a financial literacy program that addresses the economic development thrust, each semester for the student body in which the young women discuss student loans, the ways that students can save money, and how to make investments. Students often attend programs so that they can get to know the young women and gain an understanding as to what being a Delta entails.

Prerequisite of leadership to pursue membership in Delta. The process by which the Pi Delta Chapter selects prospective members is guided by the national requirements. There are several characteristics the organization seeks in a prospective member including a 2.75 grade-point average, demonstration of community involvement, on-campus leadership, and student engagement. While the Pi Delta Chapter seeks leadership in its prospective members prior to joining the chapter, once the young women become members, there is an increase in likelihood for the individual affiliate member to rise to a leadership position on campus as well as become more involved. For example, a young woman seeking membership in the organization must provide evidence that she is involved on campus, this can be through a club or organization or perhaps volunteering her time for community service. Once this young woman becomes a Delta through the Pi Delta Chapter, there exists some foundation or push for that young woman to take on a greater leadership role within a vehicle of her choice. It is unknown whether this push toward leadership roles is unique to the Pi Delta Chapter, however, the expectation of the women of the Pi Delta Chapter is that new initiated maintain leadership standards
through affiliation in a multitude of influential on-campus organizations and eventually attain a role that will allow them to grow and enhance their leadership skills.

**Research Participants**

Through the process of criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy, this study focused on 12 alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Purposeful sampling is selected when a researcher is examining a particular setting or a particular group of participants who have the ability to provide information relevant to the research topic of interest (Creswell, 2013). “Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” Palinkas et al., 2013, p. 1). Criterion sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy used in implementation research, and it was applied for this study. Employing criterion sampling, the inquirer creates specific criteria for selecting participants. Based on this sampling, participants are selected considering the timeframe in which they were involved in the social aspect of that which the researcher is studying as well as the circumstances that may determine the different forms of behavior (Creswell, 2013).

The criteria for participants of this study was: Alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter who were initiated into the chapter during their sophomore or junior year while attending Stony Brook University. In order to examine the differences in membership experiences during and after college, the researcher utilized a sample of 12 alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter. Further, the researcher sought to investigate the differences of the membership experiences over the four decades of initiation, for example, were there distinct membership differences between a member initiated in the 1980s, compared to a member
initiated in the early 2000s. In order to discover these differences, three participants were selected from each decade of initiation (three participants initiated in the 1980s; three participants initiated in the 1990s; three participants initiated in the 2000s; and three participants initiated in 2010s). The rationale for this criteria was that Stony Brook University does not allow freshmen students to join any Greek letter organization. Additionally, members of the Pi Delta Chapter who were initiated during their senior year graduated either one semester or within the same semester of initiation and, therefore, they could not provide a substantial comparison of the impact that membership within the organization had on their ability to enhance their leadership skills. The researcher sought to develop a comparison prior to initiation and the impact of initiation during and after college.

For the purpose of the study, the researcher utilized the Pi Delta Chapter listserv to contact the members. The Pi Delta listserv is an email address list created through Google mail and Google docs, and it lists contact information for all members who have been initiated in the Pi Delta Chapter. All members initiated into the sorority chapter have the ability to send emails to all women of the chapter. It is the responsibility of the current chapter president to store and update the contact information of each member, including name, current mailing address, telephone number, current email, date of birth, year of initiation, line number, and line name. This information is password protected and accessed only by the current chapter president. As an alumna of the Pi Delta Chapter, the researcher was able to access the alumnae of the sorority chapter by sending an email seeking participants for the study. However, the researcher did not have access to the individual updated information of all Pi Delta alumnae, therefore, the researcher
first drafted an email to send to the listserv explaining the study and its intention. Within the email, the researcher stated the criteria of the participants as well as the purpose of the study (Appendix A). The email was adapted from Cordero’s (2012) study, altered to fit the needs of the study, and presented accurate and pertinent information to the prospective participants.

The email was sent to the Pi Delta listserv requesting that all women, who met the criteria and were interested in participating in the study, respond to the researcher. The researcher allowed 2 weeks for responses. Individuals responded almost instantaneously to the request through email and personal text. Within 1 week of the email being sent, the researcher received correspondence from 36 alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter. Although the number of responses exceeded the number of individuals necessary for the study, the researcher verified that the respondents met the criteria for the study. The majority of the responses came from women who were initiated between 2000 and 2009. Three participants were required from each decade. The names of the women representing the 2000s decade were drawn from a hat because the number of women who responded exceeded the number of participants necessary for that decade. The researcher had exactly three responses from the women initiated in the 2010s. The researcher had two respondents who represented the 1980s and two who represented the 1990s. The researcher included her personal contact information to reach out to the women from each decade through telephone calls, requesting their participation. The final two participants, one from the 1980s and one from the 1990s were selected through their immediate response to the researcher. The researcher was able to create a sample of women that met the desired criteria, three participants from each decade of initiation. It
was important to the study to identify the participants by era to distinguish differences in membership experiences, if any, and to determine the way those membership experiences impacted the participants’ leadership enhancement. The profiles of the participants are outlined in Table 3.1. The identities of the participants were created to reflect the Pi Table 3.1

Demographic Profiles of 12 Pi Delta Chapter Alumnae Participants (1984-2012) from Stony Brook University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Year Initiated</th>
<th>Undergrad Position(s) Held in Pi Delta</th>
<th>Undergrad Degree</th>
<th>Current Professional Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD 84.4</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Immediate advisor</td>
<td>BS Physician Assistant</td>
<td>Division Manager/Registered Investment for Primerica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 84.10</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>BA Liberal Arts</td>
<td>Elementary School Teacher (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 85</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Secretary, Vice President, LMOC</td>
<td>BSW in Social Work</td>
<td>Director of Academic Advisement &amp; New Student Orientation, Baruch College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 93</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Vice President, Corresponding Secretary, LMOC</td>
<td>BA Africana Studies, BA Political Science</td>
<td>HR Director for Dual Sister Companies: Creative Workforce and CWS Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 96</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>BA Sociology</td>
<td>Superintendent NYC DOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 99</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Secretary, Chaplain</td>
<td>BA Sociology</td>
<td>Social Worker for Lamar County School System &amp; Homeless and Migrant Education Program Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Immediate advisor</td>
<td>BA Political Science</td>
<td>Program Analyst DC DOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 05</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>BA Psychology</td>
<td>Product Manager, Magnetic Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 07</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Public Relations Chair</td>
<td>BA Health Science and Sociology</td>
<td>Residence Life Coordinator, Rutgers University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 11.1</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>President, Vice President</td>
<td>BA Science in Healthcare Management</td>
<td>Senior Consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 11.6</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>President, Vice President</td>
<td>BA Psychology</td>
<td>Insurance Agent, Geico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 12</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>President, Vice President, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary</td>
<td>BA Sociology</td>
<td>Site Coordinator After School All Stars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Delta Chapter (PD) and the year in which the participant was initiated. There were two participants who represented the initiation year of 1984 and two participants who represented the initiation year of 2011. In order to distinguish between those participants, the researcher utilized the line number given to the participant upon initiation (e.g., PD 84.4, PD 84.10, PD 11.1, PD 11.6).

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

Upon selecting the participants, the researcher emailed each individual a consent form (Appendix B) as well as the demographic survey (Appendix C). One week prior to the in-person interview, the researcher sent a reminder email and called/texted the participant to confirm the date, time, and location of the interview. Of the 12 interviews, four interviews were conducted over the phone, and eight interviews were conducted in person. Prior to each interview, all participants were required to complete the demographic survey. The participants who were interviewed over the phone were required to print, sign, scan, and email the researcher the consent form prior to the start of the interview. The participants who were interviewed in person were asked to sign the consent form prior to start of the interview. On the day of each interview, the researcher arrived promptly, prepared with the typed interview questions (Appendix D), a pen, notebook, and a recording device.

The protocol implemented was an adaptation of Cordero’s (2012) interview protocol. Cordero (2012), who conducted his study on the persistence of members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., sought to uncover the experiences of members of the organization. The researcher worked to examine the ways in which membership in BGLO Kappa Alpha Psi impacted members’ ability to persist toward graduation as well
as help the men develop personally. Considering the similarities of this study, compared to Cordero’s (2012) study, the researcher recognized the usefulness of his interview questions to inform this study. Detailed, specific, and thought-provoking, the interview questions were designed explicitly to examine each participant’s individual experience and develop themes by coding to provide a narrative.

Cordero (2012) adapted his interview protocol from Williams-Scurlock’s (2005) study that examined BGLO Alpha Phi Alpha and the servant leadership abilities of its members. Cordero (2012) explained that his questions were identical to that of Williams-Scurlock (2005) with the exception of the organization’s name. Cordero (2012) changed the organization’s name to Kappa Alpha Psi, the organization he focused on in his study.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher adapted four of the 10 interview questions used in Cordero’s (2012) study, changing the organization’s name. The researcher also utilized existing research questions to create additional interview questions that were unique to this study to ensure the prospective participants’ responses were well-rounded and rich. While Williams-Scurlock’s (2005) study focused on servant leadership, and Cordero’s (2012) study focused on personal development and persistence, this study focused on the reflections of the participants’ membership experiences as they pertained to leadership enhancement. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ prerequisite leadership skills during their time as undergraduate students?
2. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills since graduating from college?

3. How did membership in the participants’ sorority enhance or not enhance their leadership skills above and beyond membership in other college activities?

4. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants during their undergraduate years?

5. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants after graduation?

The researcher utilized a Sony digital voice recorder to capture the participant responses. During the interviews, the researcher took notes by hand, which allowed the researcher to record the hand gestures and facial expressions of the participants. Note-taking also allowed the researcher to note preliminary concepts and themes through the responses, permitting the researcher to delve deeper into the participants’ responses.

Upon the completion of each interview, the researcher utilized the Sony digital voice recorder to upload the interviews to the researcher’s private laptop. Each interview was saved under the participants’ code name and converted into a MP3 file. The researcher transcribed the five interviews that were the shortest in length and sent seven interviews to a transcription service, rev.com. Once all of interviews were transcribed, they were saved in a file on the researcher’s private laptop. All data collected, including interviews, handwritten notes, demographic surveys, and consent forms, were collected,
organized, and stored on the password-protected laptop, and locked in a file drawer in the researcher’s home.

**Procedures for Data Collection Analysis**

Once the researcher collected all of the data, the next step was to make sense of what had been collected. This process required a strategy and procedure that assisted the researcher in staying organized. Creswell (2013) stated:

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, table, or a discussion. (p. 180)

The process of determining the meaning of the data collected within a phenomenological study begins with the researcher immersing her/himself in the data by rereading the narratives, rereading the notes, and listening to the interviews. “The emphasis by phenomenological studies on capturing and interpreting participants’ words and language readily leads to the arraying of participants’ original words side by side with a researcher’s interpretations and even transformations of these words” (Yin, 2011, p. 15).

**Coding.** Coding is a form of data analyses that is useful to qualitative researchers. Coding is a process that involves sorting and organizing data in an effort to develop meaning and concepts. Codes are labels that assist the researcher in organizing the data. Additionally, the researcher can summarize and synthesize the data through interpretation and developing a basis for analyzing the data (Yin, 2011). Coding involves assigning a word, phrase, number, or symbol to each category. The researcher reviews
the data (e.g., interview transcripts) in a systematic process and develops ideas, concepts, and themes to represent the data. The researcher should interpret what the data is saying, representing, and what thoughts are being conveyed. Initial codes are recorded and then should be refined as the researcher continues to review the data, developing themes that represent larger codes or meanings (Yin, 2011).

The researcher began data analysis by first printing all interview transcripts and demographic surveys. The transcripts were read one by one while the researcher also listened to the recorded interviews. During each review of the transcripts, the researcher took notes in the margins of the transcripts. The researcher began to code the interviews, developing themes, and interpreting the meaning of the participant responses. The researcher created a code book by hand that represented the recorded themes discovered in each of the participants’ responses under each interview question. The researcher then established five major codes: involvement, leadership/leadership development, networking, sisterhood, and mentorship. Under these codes, the researcher found several themes that were common amongst the participant responses across the eras of initiation. The researcher placed the themes and subthemes into tables and labeled the respondents to determine patterns and similarities within the responses. For example, interview question 5 was coded to represent the term “networking.” Participant responses to interview question 5 revealed the reemerging theme of “sisterhood.”

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed outline of the research method utilized for the completion of this study. This chapter discussed the research context, the demographic
characteristics of the participants as well as the criteria for selecting the participants, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed overview of the data collected through interview responses. Additionally, Chapter 4 provides an in-depth analysis of the data and the emerging themes and subthemes of the retrospective accounts of alumnae of Pi Delta Chapter. Lastly, the chapter presents the retrospective accounts of membership experiences of the participants of Pi Delta Chapter.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discusses the research questions that informed the study and provided the results of each research question as evidenced by the data collected. This chapter presents the data analysis and findings, utilizing and interpreting participant responses to the interview questions. Finally, a summary of the results is presented.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. during and after college. The study sought to explore whether or not the participants recalled examples and stories of how their personal membership in the Pi Delta Sorority Chapter, enhanced their leadership skills both while in college and after college. As mentioned before, the present study collected qualitative empirical data to answer the following research questions:

1. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ prerequisite leadership skills during their time as undergraduate students?
2. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills since graduating from college?
3. How did membership in the sorority enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills above and beyond membership in other college activities?
4. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants during their undergraduate years?

5. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants after graduation?

In order to answer research question 1, the 12 Pi Delta Chapter alumnae were asked four interview questions:

1. What organizations did you hold membership in while in college? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

2. What leadership positions did you hold prior to becoming a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.?

3. What leadership positions (i.e., president, vice president, team captain, etc.) did you hold on campus and/or within sorority after becoming initiated? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

4. What do you think were the determining factors to propel you toward leadership roles?

Based on the data collected from the four interview questions, it appears that membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhanced the leadership skills for all 12 Pi Delta Chapter members during their time as undergraduate students.

In order to address research question 2, the 12 Pi Delta Chapter alumnae were asked three interview questions during the semi-structured interviews:
5. How has being a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. opened doors for you that you may not have otherwise had access? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

6. What experiences have you had since graduating that you attribute directly to your membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.?

7. How have you remained active in the sorority since graduating from Stony Brook University?

Based on the data collected from the three interview questions, it appears that membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhanced the leadership skills for all 12 Pi Delta Chapter members since graduating from college.

In order to address research question 3, the 12 Pi Delta Chapter alumnae were asked three questions during the semi-structured interviews:

8. What specifically do you believe contributed to your leadership enhancement?

9. What influenced your decision to become a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

10. What were the distinct differences between the Pi Delta Chapter and other organizations that existed on campus?

Based on the data collected from the three interview questions, it appears that membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhanced the leadership skills for all 12 Pi Delta Chapter members above and beyond membership in other college activities.

In order to address research question 4, the 12 Pi Delta Chapter alumnae were asked two questions during the semi-structured interviews:
11. During your undergraduate years as a member of Pi Delta Chapter, how did your fellow sorors assist you in enhancing your leadership (skills)?

12. How has mentorship with fellow members of Delta Sigma Theta played a role in your life during your undergraduate years?

Based on the data collected from the two interview questions, it appears that the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members positively impacted the 12 Pi Delta Chapter members during their undergraduate years.

In order to address research question 5, the 12 the Pi Delta Chapter alumnae were asked one question during the semi-structured interviews:

13. Since graduating, how has membership in Delta Sigma Theta assisted you in enhancing leadership/professional development (skills)?

Based on the data collected from the interview question, it appears that the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members positively impacted the 12 Pi Delta Chapter members after graduation.

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. The researcher recorded each interview. All interviews were uploaded to the researcher’s personal laptop and then transcribed into individual Microsoft Word documents. The data were saved on the researcher’s password-protected profile on the researcher’s personal laptop.

The researcher reviewed each transcript developing initial codes. Phenomenological research necessitates the researcher to select a process of making sense of the data by interpreting the meaning of the participant responses collected through the interviews. Coding is the process of organizing data that assists the
researcher in interpreting the meaning of the data and helps to organize and compile the data (Yin, 2011). Themes are categories that emerge during the coding process. Themes allow the researcher to organize data systematically, make comparisons, note differences, and finally draw conclusions (Yin, 2011). The researcher developed codes for the interview questions (Table 4.1). Through participant responses, the researcher developed themes. The researcher noted the frequency in themes that emerged throughout participant responses (Table 4.2).

The responses from each interview question were separated and then analyzed for themes. The first question, was identified under the code of involvement. It allowed the participants to reflect on their participation in organizations on campus prior to becoming initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter.

Interview questions 2, 3, 4, 8, and 13 were related to the code of leadership. These questions allowed the participants to discuss not only their involvement in organizations but also their experiences and influences as it related to taking on a leadership role both outside of the chapter and within the chapter.
Table 4.1

Codes Developed Representing Each Interview Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>1. What organizations did you hold a membership in while in college? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2. What leadership positions did you hold prior to becoming a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What leadership positions (i.e., president, vice president, team captain, etc.) did you hold on campus and/or within sorority after becoming initiated? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. What do you think were the determining factors to propel you toward leadership roles?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. What specifically do you believe contributed to your leadership enhancement?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13. Since graduating, how has membership in Delta Sigma Theta assisted you in enhancing leadership/professional development (skills)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>5. How has being a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. opened doors for you that you may not have otherwise had access? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisterhood</td>
<td>6. What experiences have you had since graduating that you attribute directly to your membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What influenced your decision to become a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. What were the distinct differences between the Pi Delta Chapter and other organizations that existed on campus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>7. How have you remained active in the sorority since graduating from Stony Brook University?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. During your undergraduate years as a member of Pi Delta Chapter, how did your fellow sorors assist you in enhancing your leadership skills?</td>
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<td>12. How has mentorship with fellow members of Delta Sigma Theta played a role in your life during your undergraduate years?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

Sample of Participant Responses to Interview Question 3 and Emerging Themes in Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>PD 9.3</th>
<th>PD 04</th>
<th>PD 11.6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ3: What leadership positions (i.e., president, vice president, team captain, etc.) did you hold on campus and/or within sorority after becoming initiated?</td>
<td>I was a Delta for 1 year, and that was the year that I was student government treasurer and, at the same time, vice president of the chapter and Leader of Minerva Circle in '95 and secretary.</td>
<td>I was vice president for the chapter.</td>
<td>I served as President and Vice President of the Pi Delta Chapter. I was a Residence Assistant my senior year and a Peer Advisor for EOP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Treasurer Student Government Vice President Leader of Minerva Circle (LMOC)</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>President Vice President Resident Assistant Peer Advisor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the theme networking is found throughout the responses of several interview questions, it is also the code representing interview question 5. This interview question allowed the participants to discuss the benefits of membership in the Pi Delta Chapter, and membership in a historically Black Greek letter organization.

Interview questions 6, 9, and 10 were identified under the code of sisterhood. These questions gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their relationships with fellow sorors and the impact those relationships had on their personal development, professional development, growth, and more.

Finally, the interview questions 7, 11, and 12 were identified under the code of mentorship. These interview questions allowed participants to reflect on their understanding of mentorship and explain how they had been mentored and how they mentor younger sorors today.
**Data Analysis and Findings**

The following sections include the participant responses recorded during the semi-structured interviews. The responses are presented according to the codes identified, beginning with *involvement* followed by *leadership development, networking, sisterhood,* and *mentorship.* These themes relate specifically to the experiences outlined by the participants.

**Code 1: involvement.** The involvement code refers to the participants’ membership in cocurricular activities/organizations prior to being initiated into Pi Delta Chapter. The first interview question sought to investigate the organizations each participant was involved in.

Each participant was involved in an organization prior to being initiated into the sorority and maintained membership in organizations outside of the sorority after initiation. Participants were drawn to organizations that focused on the inclusion and equality of marginalized groups such as women and minority students.

In addition the participants sought membership in organizations that gave them an opportunity to grow in multiple facets of their lives including, but not limited to, leadership, personal development, and spirituality. Four participants were members of Black Women’s Weekend, an organization dedicated to minority women in the arts.

Four participants were members of the Student Activities Board, the highest funded student organization on campus. Three participants were members of the Gospel Choir. Most participants were involved in multiple organizations prior to becoming initiated into Delta Sigma Theta (Table 4.3). Upon initiation, participants held leadership
Table 4.3

*Cocurricular Undergraduate Activities Prior to Initiation Into the Pi Delta Chapter for the 12 Pi Delta Alumnae*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Organization</th>
<th>84.4</th>
<th>84.10</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>11.1</th>
<th>11.6</th>
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<td>Academic Honors</td>
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<td>African American Student Organization</td>
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<td>Black History Month</td>
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<td>Black Women’s Weekend</td>
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<td>Building Legislation</td>
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<td>C-Cert Campus Community</td>
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<td>Community Emergency Response Team</td>
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<td>De Ja Vu Dance Troupe</td>
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<td>Educational Opportunity Program</td>
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<td>Gospel Choir</td>
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<td>Undergraduate Student Government</td>
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Positions within the chapter (Table 4.4). Participation in multiple organizations was a trend identifiable across the four decades of initiation.
Table 4.4

*Leadership Positions Held Within the Pi Delta Chapter During Undergraduate Years*

*Among the 12 Pi Delta Alumnae (1984-2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Positions within Pi Delta Chapter</th>
<th>84 4</th>
<th>84 1</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>9 9</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>11 1</th>
<th>11 6</th>
<th>12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
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<td>Secretary</td>
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<td>Chaplain</td>
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<td>Public Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader of the Minerva Circle</td>
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**Code 2: leadership.** The next series of interview questions were developed to investigate the participants’ membership experiences as it related to their existing leadership skills and the ways their leadership was enhanced through their active participation in the sorority. Considering that all interested prospective members of Delta Sigma Theta must first exhibit existing leadership skills through their involvement in organizations on campus as well as community service, these interview questions sought to examine how their prerequisite leadership skills were impacted by their membership in Pi Delta Chapter.

The first question of the series, question 2, allowed participants to consider what positions of leadership they held before being initiated, followed by question 3, which allowed participants to reflect on what leadership positions they held within and outside the sorority once they were initiated.

The questions allowed the participant and the researcher to compare their involvement and leadership roles before and after initiation. Finally, the last three
interview questions fell under the code of leadership and sought to allow participants to reflect on the factors that impacted their ability to enhance their leadership skills.

Key themes were identified from the responses of the participants including support, encouragement, change agent, growth, and family. Considering the determining factors that propelled the participants toward leadership roles, a respondent representing the 1990s era of initiation, PD 93, stated:

Just for me to put myself back 25 years ago, I think I just have this sense of wanting to be engaged and being a change agent. Anything that's on the cusp of building a brand of excellence and being engaged in making people feel not passively involved but really a part of it. Because of my background of where I grew up, kind of reliving this college thing, a “different world” type of experience for me. That was one of the motivating factors as to why I wanted to go to college. I think also I was trying to recreate that life that I saw on TV but then at the same time really be engaged because where I grew up, there really wasn't a sense of being engaged. People just were very apathetic and so they would let the negativity run rampant within the community. I was in a prototype community where there were positive things and negative things. We could sit and complain about things or we can really make change. Even from with me being on the yard, from the beginning it was like, in this 4 years let's just make this happen, let's just try to make Black people take over. I hate to say it like it was a racist sort of thing, but at that time Stony Brook was very, very, we'll give you a little piece of the pie but we're not giving you too much. That was how they did everything from admissions ... It was like everybody who was a minority had to
come from EOP and anything that had to do with any sort of programming for us was held on a Thursday night at 9 o'clock and it was just, they were showing us that this is really not your campus, we allow you to have this. It was like, okay we're going to try to change this because we're just as much a part of this community as they are. It wasn't really from a racist, Black lives matter sort of thing, but it was putting our imprint on the school, we can program and we can program for everyone, give us a chance. (PD 93)

Respondent PD 05 stated:

I guess [I was propelled towards leadership for] some of the same reason that I wanted to become a member of the chapter in the first place is that I wanted to be involved. I wanted to feel like I was contributing and not just as a general body member who went to meetings and sat down, I wanted responsibility. I wanted to be in charge of doing something that I could say I did this.

That I could say I had . . . . This was an impact or an effect to something that I was in charge of and whether it be I’d put on a great event as a campus lifetime chair or within the chapter.

I think, also, in my household I grew up seeing both of my parents involved in other things. That kind of played into me feeling like okay I need to do something else with my life in general, not just go to work and come home, but . . . . That needed to start in college. I felt like that should start then. I shouldn’t wait to get involved and do things in my community around me. At the time, it was the Stony Brook community around me. (PD 05)

PD 11.6 fed back with:
I wanted to have an impact on the campus community. While being a Delta I knew I had to uphold an image of being a member of the chapter and holding those same roles and more importantly after becoming a Delta. Beforehand, I wanted to prove to myself that I could do them and show the women of the chapter that I could hold a leadership role. It was important for me to show my leadership skills to the women of the chapter because I knew that was something that was being looked for in new initiates to carry out any chapter business. (PD 11.6)

PD 11.1 stated:

I think what propelled me towards leadership roles is the fact that I wanted to see more of a change on Stony Brook’s campus. Also I felt that in particular undergraduate student government at the time there was a lack of minority voice. I thought it was important to try become a part of that as the majority of the people in USG were White males. Also, I wanted to do what I wanted to do. Being a part of leadership and having the ability to utilize some of the government funds I became a person that could throw events, fundraisers, and help work on charities that I thought were important or I guess my demographic would see was important as well. (PD 11.1)

The respondents felt strongly that they wanted to be change agents on campus. Being involved did not satisfy their goals to effect positive change within the Stony Brook community. It was important to these individual to leave an imprint during their time as undergraduate students through their leadership and involvement in organizations
on campus. Additionally, the respondents demonstrated a desire to play important roles prior to becoming initiated into the sorority.

Once it was determined that the respondents purposely sought leadership roles, it was critical to then explore the specific ways each respondent felt their existing leadership skills were enhanced during and after college. PD 85 responded with:

We saw these fabulous women, thinking you want to grow up to be those women. Seeing that image, especially for me as first generation, the first in my family to go to college, I wasn’t familiar with sororities. I think just watching sorors and the organization and the alumni chapter did for the community, I think it kind of pushed you. I think when someone tells you that you can do it and it is the expectation that you will do it. That’s a big piece. It’s the expectation that you were expected to do a, b, and c, so you rose to the occasion. Looking at my leadership today, these are the expectations and I don’t think about not hitting the mark and I think Delta really instilled that in me, that this is what we need to do. Because people did this is 1913 where they had barrier in front of barrier. If they could do it in 1913, I certainly could do it in 1987. (PD 85)

PD 96 stated:

I feel like Delta was one of the many leadership opportunities that I've had. I don't think you can walk away from any leadership experience and say that you didn't learn anything because that wouldn't be true. Within Delta in particular, I think you're challenged to think outside of the box. You're challenged to work under pressure. You're challenged to build a consensus. You're challenged to do the impossible. I think that those experiences hone your skills in a way that you
probably would not experience in any other context. I think also personalities. I see the same Pi Delta personalities over and over again in my professional life, in my personal life and because I learned how to deal with that kind of person in Pi Delta it has helped me to learn how to deal with that kind of person professionally. (PD 96)

PD 07 expressed:

When you have the responsibility of educating others and people automatically assume or entrust that you have knowledge to lead, that develops confidence. As a 21-year-old student who just became a Delta and I now have to, along with my linesisters, create programs that are based in economic development, physical and mental health, it's now my responsibility to share this information. I'm assuming that the people who are going to attend these programs trust and believe that we know what we're talking about and so to be able to stand in front of my peers once, twice, a million different times, developed a level of confidence in terms of speaking in front of people and providing information in a way that was effective but still helpful. I think once I started to develop that confidence, that automatically shunted my leadership. I don't think anyone can lead without confidence and that's what I think was strengthened when I became a member of the organization. (PD 07)

PD 84.4 stated:

I would attribute much of my foundation in leadership, and development, and all of those, I would give much of that to my experiences, my foundation was definitely from Delta Sigma Theta. Definitely without a doubt. Pi Delta is the
foundation because it brought in God, it brought in vision, it brought in consistency, in brought in management, chapter management, community, the action. All of those things those were like, I would say if you were looking at school, like graduate school as a continuum, I would say Pi Delta was the bachelors solid Ivy league bachelor’s degree. (PD 84.4)

PD 85 stated:

Patience, responsibility, empathy, kindness, in many ways the things you’re taught that makes a good Delta, in many ways makes you a good leader in terms of meeting people where they are. Being empathetic. Looking at the entire organization and not just your one role within the group. The biggest thing for me was self-confidence. I think all of that enhanced my leadership skills moving forward. Even seeing what other Deltas out in the world and what they are doing. Attorney General Loretta Lynch. Just watching these dynamic women and what they can do, I see them and I say, “I’m a Delta too.” It all enhances what helps me lead my organization today. (PD 85)

The respondents felt their leadership enhancement was, in large part, the result of the support, encouragement, and expectations of the sorors of the Pi Delta Chapter. Having prophytes who consistently pushed the respondents past their perceived potential worked to enhance their leadership skills in a multitude of ways. Confidence was a key component in strengthening existing leadership skills. Table 4.5 displays all of the themes that emerged from the questions representing the code of leadership.
Table 4.5

*Themes Identified Under Code: Leadership*

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<thead>
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<td>Sisterhood</td>
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<td>Expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-Ethic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting Leadership Style</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Code 3: networking.** The next interview question, question 5: How has being a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. opened doors for you that you may not have otherwise had access? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005) was developed specifically to explore what, if any, were the benefits of membership in the organizations. Participants reflected on the ways membership had granted them unique opportunities including career development and building connections. Themes were identified under the code of networking including relationship building, growth, guidance, and confidence. PD 93 stated:

> How do I frame it? I think the confidence; it hasn't ever got me a job or gotten me a seat on the board of anything. It may have gotten my kids better access to teachers because those sorors knew who was a better teachers and would
recommend, so more side item things but it never really impacted my life professionally. What I do think happened was as a result of me being a member, I have this confidence and assurance and cockiness that I belong to the baddest group of Black women in the world. I didn't really need it to open doors for me, just by me knowing that I belong to this made me go in and interview knowing that I already had to job even before they offered it to me. It's the weirdest thing but it's so true because I'm not really one to name drop things but it's like when you go in there, "Yes I'm a Delta." It might be the last line on my resume but we are dynamic and I do have this. (PD 93)

PD 04 reflected with:

I think the access was there. I think being a member of Delta pushed me to doors that I otherwise wouldn’t have walked up to. The doors were there. I would have had access to them, but I may not have gone through those doors had it not been for my sorors encouraging me or set an example. Or me feeling like, okay if I’m amongst women who are of a certain stature whether it be success, educational success, career success, that that environment pushed me to want to do the same. (PD 04)

The responses, thus far, illustrate similar sentiments; membership in the organization did not necessarily open doors, rather, it gave a backing or a sense of validation in the participants’ potential that afforded them the confidence and inspiration to pursue opportunities they may not have otherwise attempted to pursue. PD 85 stated:
The networking piece of it. Even among simply Pi Delta, having that connection. I may not know the soror directly, but that soror is friendly with other sorors. The networking connections opened up doors. (PD 85)

PD 84.1 stated that, “I could see how it could open other doors because the networking is just phenomenal.” PD 99 reflected with:

I would say it definitely builds your character. I think it really develops you. I think any leader has specific character traits that need to be formed and a level of confidence and communication being assertive and aggressive at the same time. I think the experience of being initiated bonding, being a viable resource and in a service capacity on campus to others, all those things kind of shape you so when other opportunities present themselves I think your level of confidence is enhanced because you have dealt with some opportunities that the sorority has provided you with. I think you are who you are but it enhances you. I don’t know if I wasn’t not a Delta I would be concerned with still being a leader, I think you gravitate towards the things that will help you. (PD 99)

PD 96 stated:

I think that it's certainly provided an opportunity for me to network with women of color. Women of color who are college graduates. Who are established in their careers. Who will provide you with support and guidance, solicited or unsolicited. I know that because I've been exposed to these women in social circles, professional if we're talking about employment opportunities or what I'm doing, there's always been a, “Well forward me your resume.” I've found that to
be helpful as well. I'm trying to think about my different transitions and now they have helped me. (PD 96)

PD 12 stated:

The job that I have now, my supervisor is a Delta and when she called me for the interview she was talking to me about my qualifications and she noticed I was a member of Delta Sigma Theta. From there we started talking about things. I went on the interview, I know I did well on the interview but I feel that me being about of the organization she already knows, we are all Deltas we kind of have the same work ethic and she saw my interviewing skills that kind of led me to be hired and that really helped a lot. And now she sees my work ethic, she sees I am about business. I am a Delta. (PD 12)

PD 11.1 said:

I got to meet a lot more people. I did a lot more networking, talked to people about career development and not only just members of DST but across the NPHC council that I probably wouldn’t be able to talk to. I guess that goes for some professional experience as well. Just getting to meet people. That’s pretty much where I saw the bulk of my opportunities and experiences. (PD 11.1)

Table 4.6 reflects the themes identified under the code of networking.
Table 4.6

Themes Identified Under Code: Networking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># of Times Mentioned in Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Encouragement</td>
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<td>Mentorship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
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<td>Opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits of Mentorship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Elitism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Experience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set an Example</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Code 4: sisterhood.** The code *sisterhood* was most prevalent in the responses to the next set of interview questions. The questions were developed to determine experiences the participants had since graduating based solely on their membership in the organization.

Additionally, the questions sought to investigate the motivating factors that led each woman to pursue membership in Delta Sigma Theta, Pi Delta Chapter. Lastly, considering that each participant was involved in other organizations that allowed them to exercise their leadership skills, the final question under this theme asked the participants to reflect on the differences between the Pi Delta Chapter and other organizations. PD 85 stated:

Certainly for me it was a level of self-confidence. Going to Stony Brook was a culture shock. It was my second day on campus freshmen year. The freshmen had to arrive about 3 or 4 days before classes started for orientation but the
cafeteria wasn’t open. So I guess most of the students of color, Black students seemed to find each other. It was about four or five of us and we decided to walk into town to a Chinese restaurant to find something to eat. We were walking on the side of the street and these White guys in a truck threw beer on us and screamed “Niggers go home.” And that was my welcome to college. And I’m not sure what the racial make-up of Stony Brook is now. But then it was about 8% students of color and we pretty much knew each other. That was very hard to get used to. We even had an experience with the RA, it was back in the day when we wore pink curlers in our hair. We had a fire drill and the RA approached us asking why do you people wear those things in your hair all the time? So in many ways Delta kind of gave you a safe place. I can remember being in a classroom and there were three Black students in a room of 250. Delta gave you a place to shine and a place where you didn’t feel like you were being stared at as being different or the other person. Everyone belonged to the AIM program (now EOP). It was even that they didn’t think that we could get in on our own merit. I wasn’t EOP but I wanted to be because they got all the goodies.

Delta really helped for me in terms of self-confidence, in terms of safety. Also I was 6 toot tall and size 10 when I entered Stony Brook so I was very awkward, very shy. Delta really helped me get out of that shell. Certainly, I must say we had a very positive pledge process. Especially the ceremonies where we really bonded. I am not a person who shares a lot of my personal life or my feelings, I am not a hugger. It really helped to open me up and helped me believe that what I wanted to do in life, I could do. (PD 85)
PD 84.10 stated:

[Membership in Pi Delta] gave me confidence that I didn't previously have. I didn't think I did. Then there was a network of people who had my back, that's a confidence builder in itself. You knew people were there to support you, check you if need be. That all helps with being a leader. You have somebody to push you forward, but then to yank your coattail. (PD 84.10)

PD 99 reflected with:

I think for me the notable experiences would be the personal experiences because I think the leadership piece was already there. I think the bond that I gained with eight women that I had never met before until Delta has been tremendous, lifelong friends, lifelong sisters. Learning how to be transparent and engaged with other women that’s the biggest take away. So even when I encourage other women to pledge whether it’s Delta or not, that’s the take away that works for me. Not the networking, not the partying, not all of that. Once you get older there’s a level of wisdom and maturity, those things don’t make you. It’s the relationships you benefit from. I would say the sisterhood aspect is what I take away from the sorority. (PD 99)

PD 96 stated:

I certainly believe that Pi Delta Chapter has provided a supportive family oriented setting and that if you need something from these women, you can go to them and they'll be helpful. In particular, after graduation, the chapter was extremely supportive when we had the fire in our family. Immediately, we stayed with my grandmother. My family went to stay with my grandmother and a chapter
member was offended by it. It was like, “You guys can just come here and stay with me. You don't have to stay with your grandmother.” I'm like, “What? That's my grandmother.” That was just so sweet and we actually did. We stayed with them for a night. (PD 96)

PD 12:

Interviewing. When I had my interview I was very scared. Now when I go on interviews, I’m still nervous but I shake it off. My whole experience as a Delta you go through uncomfortable situations, you have to meet deadlines. I transfer that to work. I was speaking to my supervisor and saying I have not held a supervisor position or other positions that require supervisor roles. But I feel that I can do it because I have been doing it as a member of Pi Delta, meeting deadlines, planning events. Meeting people, I am never scared. I am more confident. (PD 12)

It was interesting to collect the responses of the participants as they reflected on the reasons why they felt drawn to the organization and the current chapter members. The motivation to become Deltas ranged from having family who were members of historically Black Greek letter organizations to wanting to mirror characteristics of the existing members. PD 99 said that:

As a young Black woman having family members who have gone to college, none that I can note, that were Deltas, I had relatives that were AKA’s. I wanted to experience sisterhood. I am the oldest of four children, three brothers, I’m the oldest and the only girl. I thought hey that would be nice. I went to college with friends so it wasn’t an issue of gaining friends or popularity, I just thought it
would be a good way to enhance my college experience and like I said having family members who went to school and did things like that I wanted to have that experience as well. Television and high school and having different fairs was my first exposure to Greek Life, (PD 99)

PD 96 stated:
After researching the various sororities, I knew that I wanted to embark upon community oriented work with like-minded women. I had an opportunity to be exposed to the work of Delta Sigma Theta at an early age and I had one of the chapter's charter members worked in my elementary school. (PD 96)

PD 11.6 reflected:
Before I got to Stony Brook I always knew I wanted to be in a Black sorority. My senior year in high school I went on a college tour of 13 different HBCUs within a week. We went to Morgan State, Florida A&M, Alabama A&M, Tuskegee, North Carolina, Central, Elizabeth State, Morehouse, Spellmen, Clark, Atlanta. It was a lot of fun. Before the tour I googled sororities, I used to watch TV, and movies like Drumline from when I was younger and I wanted to do that. That was my only image of Greek life beforehand, I didn’t know much. We watched movies like School Daze and A Different World. I just knew it was a different culture. I wanted to go there because I was Black and that is what I should know and if I wasn’t going to go to a school down South at least I need to find a Black sorority that I had seen before. (PD 11.6)

PD 05 answered:
Both of my parents were involved in their own respective organizations. I knew I wanted to be involved in something as well. I wanted something that would enhance my life and that would give me greater purpose and that’s what made me want to join an organization such as this. I wanted to be involved in something. I wanted to be involved with something not just a campus organization but something that existed in the greater landscape of the country, of the world, and something that also didn’t just start two years ago. I wanted to be a part of something that had a lot of history, that had a lot of influence and that was impactful and that just saying the organization’s name would come with the pride and respect. (PD 05)

PD 11.1 stated:

The first thing that influenced me were specific people that I met. Specific people that made me want to be a Delta because I felt that she was very poised well put together, charismastic, someone I wanted to talk to or be like in my future life. I just felt that the women on campus, in general, that I had interaction with were always positive and they always seemed like they were doing things on campus that was really important for me to be active and they were too.

Also I worked for a doctor who also happens to be a member of the Pi Delta Chapter for about 3 years. Being a Delta seemed like it had a good sisterhood aspect, everyone seemed like they were like besties, hanging out all the time. All they all did community service. I was a girl scout, graduated girl scout, so I did a lot of community service. I received the highest honor. The Deltas went out they had fun, they knew a lot of people. (PD 11.1)
The respondents noted the differences between the Pi Delta Chapter and other organizations that existed on campus during their time of initiation. From the 1980s to 2012, participants shared the same sentiments about the women of the chapter, the way they carried themselves, the programming that was produced, and an indescribable aura. PD 84.4 reflected with:

The long standing things and when some organizations like Black World or something was going down the tube, it was via Delta that would be there to pick the thing back up. We weren't the organization that was just competing with other organizations for stuff. We were the movers and the shakers. Even if there were three sorors on that campus, they still would be the movers and the shakers of what was going on that campus. We lead it more than followed it. We had specific programming to do and it was sorors that were behind it to remind the young sorors of this is what we do.

The other organizations were pretty much whoever came in whatever they felt like doing that's what they'd be doing. I think our structure of the national organization lend itself to undergraduate chapters being responsible. Then to have sorors who were behind that, continue to facilitate and support that. I think that is probably when you separate out other organizations on the campus and Pi Delta, the fact that Pi Delta had a national focus and local sorors that continue to help drive and facilitate that, that's I think part of the success of the chapter. (PD 84.4)

PD 96 said:
It’s the sisterhood. I think that's key. You can do this work with anyone. The work that we do in Delta is not revolutionary. You can't find this level of service anywhere else. I don't think it's our service that sets us apart. You can get that but you're not going to be able to join with sisters to do the work and I think the difference is you bring a human face to the sisterhood when you do the work. You bring a level of passion and compassion to the work. (PD 96)

PD 04 stated:

I didn’t see the other organizations doing what the Deltas were doing. I still saw their programs that were coming up and their events that were coming up. I started to attend them more in my sophomore year, but I just saw them doing much more than I saw anybody else doing. Then the members of the chapter weren’t just Deltas, they were also in student government, they were . . . . Well, at the time, it was undergraduate student government, I don’t know what it’s called now, USG, but they were like leaders on campus. They were movers and shakers and they were also very well put together women. They were very graceful. None of them I saw looking crazy on campus, none of them I saw acting crazy on campus. They were the type of women that you would look and say, “I would want to be like her,” and I did. I did want to be like them. I respected them. I respected how they carried themselves, I respected the . . . I want to use the word aura, that they had about them. (PD 04)

PD 85 fed back with:

The Deltas were always together. You could see that bond. You would see them in the Student Union, you would see them hanging out in Roth quad or Kelly.
They just seem to be a very connected group. And for me not having any sisters, I have one younger brother. I had the chance to get a whole group of sisters. And I have always been involved, I was a girl scout, I was a part of other organizations like Black women’s weekend. I was always interested in being a part of those organizations around women’s issues and public service. I did volunteer work; I was a candy striper. The fact that they were doing these things on campus, I wanted to be a part of that as well. (PD 85).

PD 11.6 stated:

For one, I saw them all the time. From the moment I got out of the EOP program and I was able to speak to people who went to Stony Brook already. People I worked with in the Dean of Students suite, seeing pictures on the wall for best employees (members of Pi Delta), and I saw them at a lot of the on campus events, and during campus lifetime. Everywhere I went I saw members of Pi Delta. I would see other people; I didn’t know if they were in Greek organizations. But I would always see the Deltas in places that I knew I needed to get into like the Dean of Students suite. I knew that anyone who worked there, worked closely with the Dean of Students, they were pretty important and there was a reason why they were there. I didn’t know too much about programming but I knew there were messages that the whole campus community should hear or a way to speak about or just start a conversation and they had programs that did that. They looked great on campus, they held themselves very well, and I looked up to that. (PD 11.6)

PD 12 stated:
Deltas were about their business. Other organizations can throw any programs they want to and it may not always be a program that’s informative or bring awareness to situations that are going on in society. We take our programs serious. You are going to come and you are going to learn something. It’s also the way the women carry themselves. I always hear from my prophytes, “you can’t just do what you want because it reflects as the Deltas not just individually.” All of my prophytes all look good, carry themselves well. You have to hold the Delta name high because you aren’t the only one who is a Delta. You represent all Deltas. (PD 12)

PD 11.1 stated:

There were other organizations who gave off that they weren’t who they claimed to be. For me I could see through some of that kind of stuff. Pi Delta was the best. Pi Delta and Delta. Everything I wanted to do, or every avenue I wanted to go down, I felt that Pi Delta either was in it, has been in it or created it. From the old USG, I know Deltas had a part in that old thing. Community service, career, doing programs that actually mattered, fundraising, donating money to organizations, Senior rep, all those things people have done it before. The Deltas had done it. I could not say that for every organization and I feel like that applies to Deltas in general. When I read *In Search of Sisterhood*, I realized, just like with SBU history, what goes on with history coincides with Delta. *In Search of Sisterhood* is the same thing, like Black history. I could see that almost every monumental event that has happened in Black history or the civil rights, they all had some relation to some Delta helping in some kind of way. No offense to
other organizations, but they don’t have the same impact and why is that. For me, I see myself as someone trying to make big moves in my life and they always say surround yourself with people that are as elevated or more elevated than you so that you can achieve your goals. (PD 11.1)

Table 4.7 displays all of the themes that emerged in participant responses to the interview questions that represented the code of sisterhood.

Table 4.7

Themes Identified Under Code: Sisterhood

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**Code 5: mentorship.** The final set of interview questions were structured to examine the connectedness with fellow sorors during and after college and the ways in which these relationships impacted the participants’ leadership enhancement. The first question, question 7, addressed how the participants remained active in the organization post-graduation.

The next question, question 11, addressed the relationship with sorors while participants were matriculated at Stony Brook University and the impact of those relationships on leadership enhancement.

Finally, the last question, question 12, focused on mentorship and what that meant to the participants during their undergraduate years.

PD 93 stated:

> There was one time, probably from the time that I graduated from maybe '95 to 2005 where my entire life was all about Pi Delta and Delta. I would say a good 10 years from right after I graduated to maybe starting my family. I was very, very involved because I was the advisor. That’s not an easy task when you come from a chapter and you are always trying to see it grow and evolve, not just maintained. My entire 10 years after graduation was all Pi Delta mixed in with a little bit of the alumni chapter that I was involved in. I was on the executive board for North Manhattan after I left New York alumni. Yes, I definitely maintained mentorships. (PD 93)

PD 04 stated:

> Let’s talk about Pi Delta first. I’ve remained active with Pi Delta by going back to support programs, going back to assist where I can. Like I said with the
stepping role, I’ve been step mistress for step shows after and helped the chapter because that’s a major fundraiser for the chapter. Helping them come up with ideas, create costumes.

I think I’ve also tried to support the chapter by being as much of a mentor as I can be and really taking the role as a “big sister” to heart and really trying to be there for sororities when they need it and guide sororities when they need it and trying to do that as much as possible. I think that’s how I’ve stayed involved and stayed connected to Pi Delta.

[Currently, I am a member of] East Kings County Alumnae Chapter. It’s a chapter in Brooklyn Right now I’m on the information, technology and communications committee. (PD 04)

PD 07 said:

I think by being specifically and closely related to my undergraduate chapter and by working specifically with my undergraduate chapter and its new members as they have come along. The older I seem to get, it feels like the more people ask questions about my thoughts on things and I'm able to give more than, oh, hey, hi. So how are you? But also just generally being able to guide young women and give them consistent mentorship. (PD 07)

The respondents went on to reflect on their relationships with fellow sorors once they became initiated. A common theme that arose from the responses were expectations of the sorors and being held to a certain standard. It seemed that the respondents held a great respect for the sorors who came before them, the chapter, the organization as a whole, and most importantly, the respondents had respect for themselves. Additionally,
the respondents took great pride in their capabilities to hold leadership roles, especially since they were immediately thrust into those roles after becoming initiated. There was no training period, no time to learn the role, however, they did have the support and guidance of their sorors. PD 84 stated, “I think part of that is expectations. You were not let off the hook. There was an expectation that you would do certain things and you couldn’t be a member and just sit in the crowd.” PD 85 said:

They were some tough sisters. They were down to business; they were not playing. You needed to be on point. You had to step up your game. You also didn’t want to disappoint your big sisters. In terms of the big sisters, in terms of pushing us they helped to enhance our leadership skills. They set an example. Then my linesisters, we just had a very strong bond. Also knowing that sorors had my back to catch you if you made a mistake also helped you to be more confident in terms of your leadership skills. (PD 85)

PD 84.1 stated:

Well, they were certainly cheerleaders. They were certainly, “yeah we can do this. Yeah, you can do this. Yeah, you all can do this.” It wasn't so much as, because we all worked together as a team, very good working team. We had our differences but not a lot. We really were, we really, really meshed well together. (PD 84.1)

PD 99 responded with:

I think the tangible support, people believing in you, people encouraging you, even being chosen as the chaplain, people telling me that I wear my heart on my sleeve, and being a Christian and being bold about that as an undergrad, people
felt I would make a great chaplain. It wasn’t like I volunteered. I think the support of your skills, even when we had programs, making the dean's list, things surrounding your academic achievement, having your Soros there to support you and be proud of you and members of the chapter as well as far as big sisters it was always embedded. Normally when you’re on line, your grades plummet, but for us academics [we] were a priority through the process and the support was there.

(PD 99)

PD 96 stated:

The chapter adviser was very helpful, I felt was the most helpful for me because when I worked with her, I feel like I learned a different level of organization that I apply to my work style today. She taught me how to organize myself for success and that was impactful. I think I had more opportunities to practice when I knew about leading in terms of program planning. I felt that sometimes the older sorors, the immediately older sorors or prophytes right who brought you in. I felt like they would challenge me in different ways. Not always in a positive way. I think you can learn in positive and not so positive situations as well. (PD 96)

PD 04 said:

Specifically, they would help me by challenging me to be even more thorough than I was challenging me to think of details that I may have missed. Then not just challenging me but also showing me, well this is how you can be organized. This is how you can keep yourself on track (PD 04).
PD 07 stated:

I think one of the things that my older sorority sisters were really good at was identifying what I was good at, not what I liked to do, but helped me realize you're actually good in this or you seem to have some potential in this. Maybe you should pay attention to this thing. (PD 07)

While most respondents who were interviewed did not identify a specific mentor in their prophytes, certainly all respondents agreed that the mentorship aspect was prevalent during their undergraduate years. Mentorship existed within the encouragement and support felt by the respondents. Mentorship was discussed in terms of guidance and the older sorors modeling leadership, setting an example. PD 84.4 stated:

Very vital. I didn't know it at the time, but I found out later on in life that you only need one person to believe in you to be successful. They guide you, they direct you, sometimes they feed you. They're honest. If they're truly a mentor to you. (PD 84.4).

PD 99 said:

I would say tremendously. There was one point even big sisters and having those relationships, when I was still in New York finishing up, and I can only really attest to the chapter sorors, because I hadn’t really facilitated relationships outside of the chapter, but I think they were really like family, like sisters and giving us advice and not just school related more personal because they had been there, done that and having enough wisdom to say, “hey let’s teach you guys something.” We had to be willing to receive it because they had conquered things
that we hadn’t at the time just being women and women of color. I think the mentorship was certainly there and certainly helpful and it still it. (PD 99)

PD 12 stated:

But the mentorship, I would say from my immediate pro fights, the mentorship was a lot of what I mentioned before about how they challenged me to be better, how they helped me be more organized, how they showed me an example of how to improve (PD 05). There’s one person, a soror named Amber. She is also an athletic trainer, there aren’t a lot of Black women who are athletic trainers. She has her BS and her MS. I reached out to her, asked her so many questions. She is currently an athletic trainer at a physical therapy place. Even though she’s not my mentor, I look up to her in the aspect that she did it and I should not give up on my dreams. I am always reaching out to talking to her and she is always giving me advice and offering her help. It’s great that she is an athletic trainer and she is my soror. (PD 12)

PD 11.1 reflected with:

I think there are a lot of people that could be my mentor but I need to reach out to them. People I consider a spiritual mentor; I would say MF. We share affirmations, or daily word or we will share good books to read. Also [Soror A] is like a motivation for me as I move forward and try to get my masters. I think they were probably my mentors in undergrad. Also [Soror B], we talk about everything spiritual and professional, she sent me a whole bunch of graduate loans. (PD 11.1)
Table 4.8 displays all themes that emerged in participant responses to the interview questions that represented the code of mentorship.

Table 4.8

*Themes Identified Under Code: Mentorship*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># of Times Mentioned in Responses</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># of Times Mentioned in Responses</th>
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**Summary of Results**

The results of the study were determined utilizing semi-structured interviews with 12 participants who were initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. during their undergraduate years at Stony Brook University. There was a total of 13 interview questions, representing five research questions. The themes demonstrated the critical components of the membership experiences of the participants.
as it related to leadership enhancement. Five major codes emerged from the responses of the participants. There were several common themes that were identified under each code.

The first code was involvement. All participants demonstrated their involvement during their undergraduate years by becoming active members of organizations on campus prior to being initiated into Pi Delta. In most cases, participants maintained membership within organizations after being initiated. Involvement was an important piece to becoming a desirable candidate for membership in Delta. However, it seemed that it was in preparation to carry out the objectives of the organization including programming and community service.

The second code identified was leadership. While involvement was critical to gain membership in the chapter. It was expected that involvement not only be maintained but that each member would take on a leadership role within the chapter. All of the participants held a leadership role within the chapter including, but not limited to, president, vice president, and secretary. Half of the participants served in multiple leadership roles within the chapter over the years as undergraduate members. Additionally, half of the participants gained and/or maintained leadership roles outside of the chapter.

It was a shared sentiment that membership in Pi Delta propelled the respondents toward leadership roles, and existing leadership skills were enhanced. The participants reflected on a sense of urgency, high standards, and expectations held by older sorors in the chapter. As a result, participants felt the need to maintain standards and exceed expectations. Across the initiation decades, participants shared similar leadership values
and similar regard toward their big sisters and the legacy of both Pi Delta and Delta Sigma Theta.

The third code that emerged was networking. The respondents felt that networking with sorors from Pi Delta, sorors outside of the chapter, as well as members from other historically Black Greek letter organizations was a lasting benefit of membership in Delta. The networking piece not only provided important opportunities of growth and career development, it also allowed members to build connections and utilize transferable skills. Networking was identified as a critical component to leadership enhancement within each decade of initiation.

The fourth code focused on the sisterhood aspect of membership experiences. The three interview questions allowed the respondents to reflect on their membership experiences during and after college as it related to their feelings of sisterhood. When discussing sisterhood, the respondents felt there was a sense of belonging and family amongst the women of the chapter. Similar to responses concerning leadership, the respondents felt a great deal of support from fellow sorors. There was a shared confidence across the eras of initiation that was instilled in the women of the chapter. When reflecting on the distinct differences of the Pi Delta Chapter, sisterhood was a reoccurring theme that made the sorors feel connected to the business of the chapter and passionate about producing national programs. Sisterhood was unique to the members that provided a foundation for what was mentioned as life-long bonds and friendships.

The final code focused on mentorship amongst the members and the ways sorors assisted one another in growth and development. The participants discussed mentorship as actions and characteristics modeled by sorors. Although new initiates began their roles
unaware of all it would entail, participants expressed that there was support and mentorship guiding younger members in their roles. Sorors made themselves available to one another to answer questions, assist in chapter business. The participants discussed encouragement, support, and setting an example regarding their older sisters. They discussed a form of support in which sorors challenged new initiates to improve and tap into potential skills. The big sisters inspired the little sisters.

The final chapter of this study provides a summary of the findings. It discusses in detail the implications of the findings, states the limitations, and offers recommendations. The chapter also provides an in-depth analysis and synopsis of the study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Introducing students to leadership opportunities within college/university settings assists in the growth and development in a multitude of areas both in and beyond college (Cordero, 2012). There exists a salient need to continue to explore the ways students of color develop leadership skills as they graduate at lesser rates than their White counterparts. Moreover, there exists little research examining the impact of membership in BGLOs on the development and advancement of student leadership abilities of students of color (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). According to Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) students who are afforded opportunities to participate in leadership roles increase their likelihood to be successful academically, professionally, and socially.

While there exists research examining leadership development and positive student outcomes, this study focused on membership in one historically Black sorority as a vehicle of leadership enhancement for its members. Alumnae of the Pi Delta chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. were selected as participants for this study.

Existing research has focused on examining leadership development and positive student outcomes (MacKay & Kuh, 1994; Patton et al., 2011; Yearwood & Jones, 2012), and researchers agree that leadership experiences have positive impacts on students. Researchers that have explored the impact of involvement in BGLOs have focused a great deal on the Black male fraternal experience (Cordero, 2012; McClure, 2006; Williams-Scurlock, 2005). Moreover, studies that reflect the Black female college
experience, as it relates to involvement in a historically Black sorority, focused on race as a determining factor of student development and leadership (Floyd, 2009; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr., 2014; Hurdle, 2012; Lee-Olukoya, 2010). Additionally, existing studies did not investigate the leadership enhancement of participants as a result of their sorority membership. The aforementioned studies utilized qualitative methods, including ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, to study membership experiences. This study also used a qualitative method of phenomenology to provide a narrative of the personal experiences of the participants. Lastly, this study sought to provide data that demonstrated the reflective accounts of individual membership experiences during and after college.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the impact of membership in one historically Black sorority on enhancing leadership skills. This study utilized retrospective accounts of alumnae of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Pi Delta Chapter at Stony Brook University. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 12 members of the organization, three representing each of the four decades of initiation since the establishment of the Pi Delta chapter in 1984.

While membership in historically Black sororities have several positive impacts for affiliated college women including an increase in classroom engagement, student involvement, and leadership development (Floyd, 2009; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, Jr., 2014; Hurdle, 2012; Lee-Olukoya, 2010), no such study utilized alumnae as a participant sample to determine the impact of membership in the historically Black sorority beyond undergraduate years. Minority women, often marginalized by their sex and race, are among the fastest growing populations entering college, yet they continue to graduate at
lower rates than their White counterparts (Greerbiehl & Mitchell, Jr., 2014). It is important to explore the ways involvement and engagement in organizations retain this population while also working to enhance their leadership skills, as this is an important predictor in academic, personal, and professional development and achievement (Floyd, 2009; Hurdle, 2012). This study adds to the body of research that has examined impacts of historically Black sororities. Specifically, this study examined the development and enhancement of leadership skills of the participants.

Delta Sigma Theta has been identified for its legacy of effecting positive change not only in the lives of its members but also as an organization made up of a group of women who have achieved historical accomplishments and have made contributions to society (Floyd, 2009; Giddings, 1988; Harper, 2007; Hurdle, 2012; Kimbrough 1996; Mitchell, 2012). “Membership in Delta Sigma Theta is a lifetime commitment” (O’Neil McGintis, 2008, p. 4). Members are expected to continue to uphold the mission of the organization through programming, community service, and overall community uplifting and involvement. This study explored the membership experiences of women from one chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. Numerous themes and subthemes were collected from participant responses, assembling meaning through the similarities and differences across eras of initiation.

This study utilized Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory as a framework. Astin (1984) postulated that through involvement in extracurricular activities, students would become more engaged and increase their leadership skills. The correlation of cocurricular student involvement and retention in higher education is particularly significant amongst minority students matriculated at predominately White institutions.
While the participants who were interviewed did not report high levels of dissatisfaction at Stony Brook University, a PWI, it is important to note that some participants, particularly those initiated in the 1980s era, felt a sense of belonging and viewed the Pi Delta chapter as a safe haven. Additionally, membership increased their desire to be involved and afforded them the opportunity to exercise and enhance leadership skills through leadership roles within and outside of the chapter. Participants demonstrated involvement and engagement throughout their undergraduate years and discussed how those experiences impacted their personal and professional lives after graduation.

The research questions were developed to determine the membership experiences within the Pi Delta Chapter during undergraduate years and how those experiences continued to impact the participants since graduation from Stony Brook University. Specifically, the research questions sought to discover how the participants’ prerequisite leadership skills were enhanced (or not enhanced) as active members of Delta Sigma Theta.

1. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ prerequisite leadership skills during their time as undergraduate students?

Membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhanced the prerequisite skills of the participants. The participants gave several examples within their responses that explained the enhancement, including support from fellow sorors, being thrust into leadership roles, and learning professionalism through conducting chapter business. While some respondents held leadership positions prior to being initiated into the sorority chapter, all respondents were given a leadership role within the
chapter once initiated. Lastly, respondents expressed the push from sorors to join additional on-campus organizations and seek leadership roles.

2. How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills since graduating from college?

Membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhanced the leadership skills of the participants since graduating from college. The participants reflected on their years following graduation from Stony Brook University and discussed the ways that their membership experience prepared them for their professional roles. Being forced to deal with a variety of personalities, working in a group/team dynamic as well as meeting deadlines and producing programs assisted in the facilitation of leadership skills, as well as professional development.

3. How did membership in the sorority enhance or not enhance the participants’ leadership skills above and beyond membership in other college activities?

Membership in the sorority enhanced the leadership skills of the participants above and beyond membership in college activities due to the nature of the work required to maintain the chapter. In other cocurricular organizations, the respondents were given more flexibility. Delta Sigma Theta requires national program compliance, which afforded respondents the opportunity to practice program initiatives on a local level. Additionally, the work of Delta in ongoing. It is the expressed expectation that members of the organization will continue the work of the organization beyond an undergraduate level.
4. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants during their undergraduate years?

The relationships with fellow sorority members proved to have a positive impact on the participants during their undergraduate years. Participants noted that the older sorors:

- modeled leadership
- provided support
- set expectations
- held standards
- maintained relationships and bonds

Respondents described experiences of fellowship and quality time spent with older sorors. It was mentioned in several responses that the respondents did not want to disappoint their big sisters, therefore, they conducted themselves with an air of elitism and leadership. This standard was carried throughout their undergraduate years. Additionally, the respondents felt propelled to achieve academically.

5. How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact the participants after graduation?

Relationships with fellow sorority members positively impacted the participants beyond graduation. Respondents discussed networking as a benefit of membership, having access to opportunities they felt they would not have access to if they were not a member of a historically Black sorority. The professional networks were beyond members of Delta, in fact, participants created bonds and networking relationship with individuals who were members of the other BGLOs. The sisterhood aspect of the
sorority lasted beyond graduation. The respondents discussed their meaningful relationships with sorors both within the Pi Delta Chapter and Deltas belonging to other chapters. Fellow sorors became godmothers of their sorors children, assisted in professional, personal, and even spiritual growth. Overall the women of the Pi Delta chapter seemed eternally grateful for their connection to the sorority chapter and fellow Deltas.

Based on the five research questions, the researcher developed 13 interview questions. The interview questions were coded. Five major codes were identified from the interview questions, representing the themes that were found in the participant responses. The responses provided the foundation for the implications of the findings.

Implications of Findings

As a result of the study, six major implications are detailed. The implications of this study address theory, literature, and validate the positive impacts of membership in a historically Black sorority.

Implication 1: Holding leadership roles within organizations during undergraduate years prepares the individual for roles within a professional capacity after graduation. Common subthemes, such as transferable skills, adjusting leadership style, professional development, chapter management, and confidence, are just a few of the many that emerged within the answers given by the participants across the decades of initiation. It was evident that the participants felt their involvement within the Pi Delta Chapter prepared them in roles within their careers after graduating college. Participants felt that being given the responsibility to manage chapter responsibilities, create
programs, and setting an example for the larger campus community were all experiences that they attribute to their leadership and professional development.

While participants were involved in several organizations that existed on campus during their undergraduate years, it was their involvement in Pi Delta that impacted them the most due to the expectations of older sorors, as well as the support. Additionally, less than half of the participants held a leadership role within an organization prior to being initiated into the chapter. Upon initiation, all participants were required to take a leadership role. Six participants held multiple leadership roles while in the chapter, and six participants rose to a leadership role in organizations outside of the chapter after being initiated. This data substantiates the retrospective accounts of the participants as it relates to leadership enhancement.

**Implication 2: Sisterhood is a unique component that distinguishes the sorority from other organizations of involvement.** The participants demonstrated their involvement and prerequisite leadership skills prior to initiation. This effort satisfied one of the important requirements to pursue membership in the organization. It also prepared the women for continued involvement within the organization. Although the chapter functioned similarly to other student-run organizations, the participants identified sisterhood as the unique component to conducting chapter business. The participants shared unbreakable bonds with fellow sorors. Conducting chapter business required members to meet weekly, plan programs, be involved in community service, and remain visible leaders on campus. The participants reflected on the experiences they had with sorors outside of chapter business. Often time, sorors studied with one another boosting, academic morale, traveled to different colleges and universities to socialize with fellow
BGLO members, stepped, strolled, and took vacations with one another. The bonds have lasted post-graduation, as sorors enjoy speaking to one another on a daily basis, also remaining active in their undergraduate and graduate chapters. Weddings, graduations, christenings, loss of relatives, the participants explained their personal connections as the most important piece of their involvement and membership in the organization. The participants felt this was unique to this small chapter and instilled as an important value.

**Implication 3: Colleges and universities benefit from the establishment of BGLOs on campus.** The participants discussed their sentiments about BGLOs prior to attending college. Some were influenced by family members who had joined one of the BGLOs, others were exposed to the historic organization through television programs and movies that showed characters as members of the organizations. Some participants cited that they had a mentor that was a member of Delta Sigma Theta prior to attending Stony Brook University. Lastly, four participants explained that their decision to apply to a particular university or college was impacted by whether there was an established active Delta chapter on campus. Colleges and universities should consider that prospective students are influenced to select a school based on the availability of a particular organization of which the student is seeking to become involved.

Additionally, the participants recalled being very aware of their campus community and the desire to be change agents to benefit groups that they perceived to be underserved such as minority students and women. The participants sought membership in organizations that allowed them to have an impact. Academic institutions should consider the importance of student involvement in extracurricular activities and the
impact it has on students to remain academically engaged, persevering toward graduation.

**Implication 4: Membership in a BGLO provides networking opportunities unique to its affiliated members.** The responses from the major theme *networking* indicated that the participants felt it was one of the most critical and important benefits of membership in the sorority. Networking with sorors across generations of the chapter encouraged participants to seek career opportunities that they had not previously considered. The support and encouragement from sorors assisted the participants in building their confidence and explore their potential. Networking with sorors provided participants with internship and job opportunities.

Building connections was not limited to sorors within the chapter nor within the particular organization of which they belonged. Instead, participants explained that relationship building with sorors outside of the chapter as well as affiliated BGLO members was encouraged. Participants reflected on the relationships they built with sorors and even members of various fraternities as mentors and connections to educational opportunities and career advancement. Having pledged these organizations worked as conversation-starters and a foundation to build long-lasting relationships of support and reliability.

**Implication 5: The findings support the theoretical framework.** This study utilized Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement. The theorist asserts that student involvement positively impacts and correlates with student success academically and ability of the student to graduate. Additionally, the theorist asserted that colleges and universities could retain students by encouraging involvement. Astin (1984) defined
student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 518).

Pi Delta Chapter has a 100% graduation rate. Of the 12 participants, nine participants of this study pursued additional degrees upon graduating from Stony Brook University, with the remaining three youngest participants and recent grads currently exploring their own master’s degree pursuits. All of the participants completed their undergraduate degrees at Stony Brook University.

**Implication 6: The study advanced the current research literature on BGLOs and, specifically, Black sororities.** As discussed, there exists limited research exploring the impacts of BGLOs and, specifically, the membership experiences of minority women affiliated with a Black sorority. The researcher sought to fill the research gap by presenting retrospective accounts of the experiences of 12 alumnae of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. While there exists literature that focused a great deal on the male experience in fraternal organizations, and studies that have combined fraternity and sorority impacts, limited studies exist focusing on the sorority experience through the lens of minority women. This study explored those experiences in an effort to determine the factors that assisted members in enhancing their leadership skills.

The findings of this study support those of the existing studies discussed in Chapter 2, which demonstrate positive impacts of membership in BGLOs. In Floyd’s (2009) study, the researcher sought to examine the impact of membership in historically Black sororities on the ability of Black college women to graduate. The researcher found that the participants of the study increased their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and gained a sense of community and network through their affiliation in their respective sororities.
Additionally, the participants increased academic performance and bonded with fellow sorority sisters. In Hurdle’s (2012) study, the researcher focused on leadership development of Black college women and university responsibility. Through participant responses, the researcher found that involvement in historically Black sororities provided support, unity amongst Black women, and described the need for colleges and universities to establish student organizations like BGLOs that provide their members with leadership opportunities. In the Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, Jr. (2014) study, the researchers explored the influence of historically Black sororities on the membership experiences of Black college women at a PWI. The researchers found that members of historically Black sororities had a positive effect on student-faculty relationships, student involvement and engagement, leadership development, and academic achievement.

The findings of the aforementioned studies are consistent with those of this study and substantiate that membership in historically Black sororities provide an assortment of positive impacts. The members not only credited the organization with personal, professional, and leadership development, but they also support and a push toward academic achievement.

While the aforementioned studies mirror this study in results, the sample of alumnae participants allowed the researcher to demonstrate that the positive influences of membership extend past undergraduate involvement. The 12 participants all discussed their continued commitment to the organization as well as the support of the Pi Delta Chapter by continuing sisterly relationships, bonds, and benefits of membership such as mentorship and networking.
Implication 7: The Pi Delta Chapter built a culture of leadership based on member interpretation of the mission and expectations of the national organization. From the Pi Delta Chapter, 12 alumnae were selected to participate in this study. In an effort to explore the possible differences in membership experiences throughout time, the researcher selected three participants representing each decade of initiation: 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s.

All respondents indicated that they were involved in a cocurricular organization on campus prior to becoming initiated into the Pi Delta chapter. Although some respondents held leadership positions in their respective organizations prior to becoming Deltas, all respondents were given leadership roles within the sorority chapter once they were initiated. It was an expressed expectation that new initiates would take on leadership roles within the chapter and perform the business of the chapter including programs for the campus community, community service, and national initiatives.

Additionally, older sorors provided support, guidance and a push for initiates to either continue to be involved or become involved in other organizations. Students who held leadership positions on campus were afforded the opportunity to impact change on campus through organizing campus events and programs and bringing awareness to important current issues. It was an expectation that the Deltas would be the leaders on campus and have a sense of control. The Deltas seized all opportunities to sit on student boards including judiciary boards of the campus community, the undergraduate student government, and the most funded student organization on campus—the student activities board.
As an example of this expectation and practicing leadership: In 2007, there were 11 existing members of the Pi Delta Chapter at Stony Brook University. Of the 11 members, seven members sat on the Student Activities Board, holding leadership positions concurrently and all members held leadership positions within the Pi Delta chapter including president, vice president, and secretary. The researcher was one of the 11 members during that year and credits membership in the organization for continued success and opportunities.

Respondents indicated that being thrust into leadership roles not only benefitted them during their undergraduate years, the positive impact was also beneficial after graduation and useful in their professional careers. Of the 12 respondents, 10 currently hold leadership roles in their careers, and they credit membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta with the tools, skills, support, and push toward continued leadership. Members were not allowed to be invisible. Visibility on campus and relationship building with faculty was essential. The older sorors encouraged strategic positioning of leadership, aligning all Deltas at Stony Brook with organizations that gave students authority on campus.

The respondents regarded Delta as an organization that requires its members to uphold high standards, to become leaders in their communities, and be change agents whenever possible. Through their responses, participants described their intense passion and love for the organization as well as fellow sorors. The sisterhood aspect of the membership experience proved to be the most treasured benefit of being a Delta. Genuine relationships and bonds were built as the women conducted the business of the chapter.
Lastly, it is important to note that race was not discussed as a limitation in pursuing leadership opportunities. While some sorors, who were initiated in the 1980s, felt hostility on campus, membership in Delta was viewed as a safe haven and provided the support necessary to pursue leadership roles. Sorors of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s did not view Stony Brook University as a PWI. Doors were not closed, sorors did not feel discouraged. Membership in the organization gave the respondents confidence and encouragement to the extent that they felt capable to set and accomplish their goals.

Limitations

**Time.** This study was limited by the amount of time the researcher was given to conduct the study. The program was accelerated and, as such, did not permit the researcher to collect additional data that might have revealed themes and subthemes not included in this study. The researcher reached out to the women who had been initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter utilizing the chapter email listserv. The greatest response came from the 2000-2010 era initiates. The researcher felt it would have been prudent to conduct a focus group among this era as they seemed most anxious to tell their stories.

**Generalizability.** This phenomenological study explored the membership experiences of 12 participants, therefore, it should not be assumed that their experiences are that of all members of Black sororities, nor all members of Delta Sigma Theta. The participants were initiated into the chapter at PWI Stony Brook University however, it should not be assumed that the experiences of the participants are exact or similar to those at other PWIs.

**Pi Delta initiate.** The researcher was initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter during her time and as an undergraduate student at Stony Brook University. It should be noted
that the researcher had formulated relationships with the participants prior to their interviews. It is possible that the participants may have tailored their answers to fit what they believed the researcher wanted to hear as opposed to speaking freely to a non-member.

**Recommendations**

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. would benefit a great deal if statistical data were represented on the national website or an equally reliable source to expose the individual efforts of its members as well as the chapter efforts to uphold scholarship, sisterhood, and community service. The national organization and the executive board have made strides to eradicate the issue of hazing, and they discussed the value of undergraduate chapters due to a seemingly overwhelming amount of reports of hazing deriving from activities within undergraduate chapters. If the administration of the national organization was presented with related data, the need for undergraduate chapters to continue to function and initiate new members would be substantiated.

Colleges and universities must continue to explore the ways they can enroll and retain minority students, specifically minority women. Membership in historically Black sororities have proven to provide a positive impact and an overall positive college experience for its members. Perhaps a collaborative effort between the national boards of historically Black Greek letter organizations and academic institution officials would work to keep the undergraduate chapters active while easing the concerns of negative initiation practices. Student involvement and leadership opportunities have proven to have positive impacts on students and assist in issues of retention. BGLOs are vehicles of positive student outcomes, therefore, academic institutions should consider these student
groups as useful agents to provide opportunities of participation in social constructs, in learning how to conduct a business, and support what is unique to their members. Persistence toward graduation, student satisfaction, and overall enrichment of the college experience would be additional benefits as a result of involvement in BGLOs.

BGLOs would benefit a great deal if each national organization collected data of the positive outcomes of students. There exists an unfortunate stigma associated with these organizations, especially regarding hazing and deaths as a result of the initiation process. What is clear from the existing research examining these organizations, is that the positive impacts are common and long lasting amongst its members. If this data were collected, analyzed, and presented, it would help to alter the view of these organizations as well as demonstrate the unique value of membership. There is a salient need to continue to fill the research gap, providing empirical data on the unique membership experiences of historically Black sororities and fraternities.

**Recommendations for future research.** There exists a need to expand literature on Black Greek letter organizations. Specifically, there is a need for additional research exploring the impact(s) of historically Black sororities and the Black female college experience. Existing literatures report high levels of student satisfaction in academic institutions, crediting involvement in BGLOs. With the expansion of literature uncovering additional membership experiences, there is an opportunity to meet the needs of this student population while supporting the importance of these historical fraternal organizations that have thus far provided unique and beneficial opportunities for their members. This study investigated the ways membership in one chapter, Pi Delta, of one historically Black sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, assisted its members in enhancing their
leadership skills. Additionally, this study utilized a sample of alumnae to identify the differences in membership experiences over the years as well as the lasting impact of membership in individuals’ lives beyond graduation. This study presented areas of consideration for future research including:

1. A quantitative study exploring the multiple impacts of membership in Delta Sigma Theta during and after college, utilizing a sample of multiple chapters of the sorority in the United States. This study revealed that leadership is a main function of the Pi Delta Chapter; the suggested study should investigate the functions of other chapters of the organization to uncover whether leadership is a unique expectation.

2. A mixed methods study exploring the impact of BGLOs on personal and professional development. This study has the potential to substantiate the benefit of undergraduate chapters of the organization and how involvement has a long-term positive impact.

3. This study raised questions in terms of active members of the organization. A qualitative anonymous study exploring the lived experiences of individuals who joined a BGLO during their undergraduate years but are no longer active would certainly be valuable to understanding the differences in membership experiences. This study should explore the reasons why those individuals ceased active participation in these lifetime organizations. The study could assist in improving membership experiences of BGLO members.

4. As noted, when the researcher attempted to collect participants for the study, the largest pool in response were sorors representing the 2000s years of
initiation. If this study were to be replicated, a focus group would be useful amongst this group of women as they seem most active in the sorority as well as eager to discuss their membership experiences.

5. It would be useful to the body of literature of historically Black sororities to conduct a quantitative study on the comparative impacts of each sorority. The alumnae participants from all four historically Black sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.; and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. should be selected to participate in the study. The study should explore the differences and similarities in membership experiences across the four sororities in professional, personal, and leadership development.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the impact of one chapter, Pi Delta Chapter, of one historically Black sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. on its members’ leadership enhancement. Of the alumnae who were initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter during their undergraduate years, 12 shared their retrospective stories of their many experiences under the focus of involvement, leadership, sisterhood, networking, and mentorship. It is important to add to the research gap that exists by giving a voice to minority women and their unique college experiences as this group is surpassing their male counterparts, yet falling behind their racial counterparts.

Unlike fraternal organizations established by White students, BGLOs were created as a result of marginalization felt on college campuses during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During that time the number of African Americans entering college
slowly increased, yet they were met with racism and hostility by White students, faculty, and staff. The opportunities for African American college students to advance and develop personally and professionally were non-existent. These students were excluded from student activities and fraternal organizations. Having nowhere to fellowship and feeling targeting, Black students established Greek letter organizations that served their own interests and provided opportunities for growth.

The first Black fraternity was established in 1906 (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.) followed by the first Black sorority, which was established in 1908 (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.). As of this writing, there are nine fraternities and sororities under the umbrella organization of the National Pan-Hellenic Council. The organizations serve a multitude of purposes and have had life-long positive impact on their members. It is important to acknowledge the circumstances of their establishment as the organizations’ legacies are embedded within national programs and service. Several studies have been conducted exploring the membership experiences of college students initiated into their respective organizations. The results have discussed BGLOs serving as vehicles for building meaningful relationships, increasing classroom engagement and involvement, persevering toward graduation, enriching the Black student experience, and leadership development. This study sought to focus on one sorority as a vehicle for leadership enhancement.

Delta Sigma Theta requires that prospective members possess several characteristics prior to seeking membership within the organization. One such characteristic is leadership. Prospective members can demonstrate their leadership skills through their involvement within organizations on their respective college campuses as
well as in acts of community service. For the purpose of this study, it was important to
discover how members’ prerequisite leadership skills were enhanced by membership in
the Pi Delta Chapter.

In order to effectively gather and study the data for this particular body of
research, the researcher selected to utilize a qualitative approach. Collecting data
quantitatively would not have allowed the participants to give an in-depth view of their
membership experiences. The researcher chose a phenomenological approach to study
the data.

The researcher selected 12 participants for this study composed of three
participants from each of the four decades of initiation since the establishment of the Pi
Delta Chapter in 1984. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews with 13
questions to gather the data. Five research questions were developed to inform the study.

As evidence of the responses retrieved during data gathering, the Pi Delta Chapter
has remained committed to national programming, sisterhood, scholarship, and service as
well as providing members with opportunities to serve in leadership roles during their
time in the undergraduate chapter. Although the Pi Delta Chapter was not the sole
organization to be credited with the enhancement of leadership skills, the members
discussed experiences unique to being a Delta that they felt they would not have had
otherwise.

The Pi Delta Chapter has provided its members with unique experiences to
enhance their prerequisite leadership skills. While there was not a specific training nor
preparation period in place prior to the participants entering their leadership roles, it
worked to their benefit to be placed in the role and learn the mechanics as they moved
along. The business of the Pi Delta Chapter was left to new initiates to conduct. Managing records, managing the chapter budget, producing informative programs for the campus community, working in teams, and communicating with the larger national organization were just a few of the responsibilities that were expected to be effectively executed by the new initiates. This method worked to enhance the leadership skills of the participants.

The participants discussed their experiences since graduating from Stony Brook University that they attribute to their membership in Pi Delta Chapter. Managing the chapter prepared the participants for roles in their professional lives. Additionally, several participants felt that working with others in Pi Delta helped them to learn to adjust their leadership style, which was also useful in their careers.

Sisterhood was perhaps the most important theme identified across the generations of the participants. The participants spoke about this piece with a great sense of pride and admiration of the chapter. The relationships with fellow sorors were invaluable. Sisterhood contributed to relationship building, connectedness, and also networking. While networking, today, lives mainly in the digital arena with forums such as LinkedIn and institution alumni newsletters, membership in these elite organizations prove to be a strong bonding element as opportunities are shared amongst its members primarily.

The sincere passion, respect, and love for this chapter was palpable amongst the participants as they each recalled a specific story or experience they found most meaningful during and after college. It was in their storytelling, the movement of their hands, and the laughter during their account of events that painted a picture of the long-
lasting impact that pledging this sorority had on the members. Perhaps most enlightening and interesting was that the membership experiences differed minimally across the eras of initiation. The consistency of the chapter to provide meaningful and useful experiences was demonstrated through the responses of the participants that were collected by the researcher.
References


Floyd, R. D. (2009). *Yes we can: The impact membership in Black sororities has on the experience and persistence of Black women students at predominantly white 4-year institutions* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3358467)


Appendix A

Email to Sorors

Greetings Sorors,

My name is Kyana M. Gordon and I am a spring 2007 initiate (#2) of our beautiful chapter, Pi Delta of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated located at Stony Brook University of Stony Brook New York. I am currently a doctoral student of the Education and Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. For the purpose of my completing my dissertation research I have decided to examine the impact that the Pi Delta Chapter has on leadership in enhancement since its 1984 establishment.

I intend on investigating this subject through a series of semi-structured interviews consisting of 14 questions. From 1984-2012 sorors who were initiated into Pi Delta Chapter during their sophomore and junior years at Stony Brook are called to serve in aiding me in this endeavor. I am humbly requesting your assistance, support, and participation by agreeing to a 30-minute interview that will either be conducted via in person or over the telephone, both by your convenience. The interviews will be recorded for my study, however, ALL information will be considered confidential and your identity will be protected.

It is my intention to create a composite of member perceptions of student involvement, the influence of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated on members and society, as it pertains to leadership enhancement. Sorors, Deltas have accomplished many tasks and we’ve all marveled at what we are capable of. It is time that we provide empirical research that cannot be refuted of who we are and what we do. Will you aid me in this task Soror? I ask that all sorors who have been initiated into our chapter in your sophomore or junior year please respond to this email. Your response is an indication that you are willing to be interviewed for study. Once you are selected, you will be given a consent form and more information about my study as well as your rights as an individual participant.

The final product will be made available to all members of Pi Delta Chapter. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at kyana.mgordon@gmail.com or call me at (347) 596-0000. Thank you in advance for considering this endeavor.

YID,
Kyana M. Gordon
Doctoral Candidate
Education & Executive Leadership
Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College
Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of study: **Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated: A Phenomenological Study of Alumnae Reflections on Leadership Enhancement During and After College**

Name(s) of researcher(s): Kyana M. Gordon  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Janice Kelly  
Phone for further information: 347-596-0000

Purpose of study: The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine the impact that membership in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority has on enhancing leadership development of female students of color during their undergraduate years at Stony Brook University (Pi Delta Chapter). Research indicates that BGLOs have the potential to provide an important form of support, social/professional networking and a foundation for student engagement and leadership. By filling the research gap with reflections of alumnae members’ leadership enhancement while being a member of the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, the researcher intends to reaffirm existing studies which provide empirical data substantiating that Greek affiliation for students of color have lasting positive impacts.

Leadership Enhancement is: the process of increasing, improving and/or adding to existing leadership skills

Leadership Skills are: abilities developed that provide one with the tools necessary to act in a governance capacity

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Length of participation: approximately 90 minutes
Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

- There are no reasonably foreseeable physical discomforts or risks associated with this activity.
- Data collected from this study may contribute to a better understanding of Historical Black Sorority membership.
- Interviews with participants will be recorded with a digital voice recording device.
- All participants will be entered into a raffle to win $75 gift card for their participation. The winner will be announced via email at the conclusion of the study.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:

- The data collected in this study will be summarized. Information gathered that personally identifies you will not be reported to anyone outside the research project.

Your rights:
As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study. I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant) Signature       Date

Print name (Investigator) Signature       Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you or your child experiences emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, contact the Office of Academic Affairs at (585) 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at (585) 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.
Appendix C

Demographic Survey

Sorority Demographic Survey

NAME: ___________________________ DATE: ___________________________

Please answer the following questions:

1. What year were you initiated into the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated?

2. What year did you graduate from Stony Brook University?

3. What was your role in the chapter during your time as an undergraduate member?

4. What is your line name?

5. What is the name of your line?

6. Are you the first member of your family to join a Greek letter organization? If no, what are the organizations that your family members belong to?

7. How did you find out about the sorority?

8. What contributions do you think you have made to Delta Sigma Theta?

9. What contributions do you think Delta Sigma Theta has made to you?

10. How do you think membership experiences reflect differences or similarities throughout the years of initiation?
Please circle the answer that best suits your experience for questions 11, 12, and 13:

11. Did you experience a feeling of community (or sisterhood) within the sorority during your undergraduate years?
   - Not at all
   - Not too much
   - Somewhat
   - A lot

12. Did you experience a feeling of community (or sisterhood) within the sorority beyond graduation?
   - Not at all
   - Not too much
   - Somewhat
   - A lot

13. What was your reason to join?
   - opportunities to get involved in campus life
   - service
   - scholarship
   - opportunities for leadership development
   - social opportunities
   - to help your career
   - to build self-confidence
   - friendship
   - relatives/friends were Greek
   - follow family tradition
   - cultural inclusion
Appendix D

Interview Questions

RQ1: How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance your prerequisite leadership (skills) during your time as an undergraduate student?

1. What organizations did you hold membership in while in college? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

2. What leadership positions did you hold prior to becoming a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.?

3. What leadership positions (i.e., president, vice president, team captain, etc.) did you hold on campus and/or within sorority after becoming initiated? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

4. What do you think were the determining factors to propel you towards leadership roles?

RQ2: How did membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. enhance or not enhance your leadership (skills) since graduating from college?

5. How has being a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. opened doors for you that you may not have otherwise had access? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

6. What experiences have you had since graduating that you attribute directly to your membership in the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.?

7. How have you remained active in the sorority since graduating from Stony Brook University?

RQ3: How did membership in your sorority enhance or not enhance your leadership skills above and beyond membership in other college activities?

8. What specifically do you believe contributed to your leadership enhancement?
9. What influenced your decision to become a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.? (Cordero, 2012; Williams-Scurlock, 2005)

10. What were the distinct differences between the Pi Delta Chapter and other organizations that existed on campus?

RQ4: How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact you during your undergraduate years?

11. During your undergraduate years as a member of Pi Delta Chapter, how did your fellow sorors assist you in enhancing your leadership (skills)?

12. How has mentorship with fellow members of Delta Sigma Theta played a role in your life during your undergraduate years?

RQ5: How did the relationship(s) with fellow sorority members impact or not impact you post-graduation?

13. Since graduating, how has membership in Delta Sigma Theta assisted you in enhancing leadership/professional development (skills)?