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The journey of identity development for Jewish Millennial college students

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This paper discusses the ethnoreligious identity development of the Jewish millennial college student. Through analyzing Parks' (1986, 2000) theory of faith development and Phinney's (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development, this paper examines the shift from institutionalized Jewish community to non-institutionalized, Jewish peer networks of belonging and proposes that this shift occurs to help Jewish students make meaning of their minority identity within a majority White and Christian campus culture.

Current college student development research provides a limited understanding of the identity development of Jewish college students (Behneman, 2007). One of the most prominent difficulties in understanding and researching Jewish identity development occurs because Jewish college students "do not fit neatly into established and understood notions of ethnic, racial, national, or religious identity" (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006, p. 267). Although American higher education typically sees Judaism as a religion, it is important that university administrators, student affairs practitioners, and developmental researchers also account for the ethnic components of this complex minority identity (Cousens, 2007).

Jewish college students often define themselves through blending both the religious and ethnic components of this distinct social identity. Although some students may identify as merely religious Jews or as merely ethnic Jews, most understand their identities as "primarily cultural and secondarily religious," and often have difficulties making meaning of these two identities and how they are connected within contemporary American society (Behneman, 2007, p. i; Cousens, 2007). Therefore, to make meaning of these multiple identity components, Jewish students who were raised with less conservative and less-defined Jewish backgrounds find networks of belonging amongst Jewish friends or other Jewish communities on campus. Traditionally, these networks were created through institutionalized communities such as synagogues, campus centers (e.g., Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life), and Jewish community centers that directly related to Jewish peer group experiences. However, this traditional community structure has changed significantly with the rise of the millennial student generation. Millennial students, born between the early 1980s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, "are unlike any other youth generation in living memory...[t]hey are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and

more ethnically diverse" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4). Jewish millennial students come to college with a diverse set of ethnoreligious Jewish experiences and do not utilize institutionalized Jewish organizations on campus like previous generations. As a result of the millennial generation's increased emphasis on teamwork and developing positive interpersonal relationships, these students create in-group Jewish peer networks and non-institutionalized Jewish communities (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Cousens, 2007). These communities are built around common interests, a sense of belonging, and shared experiences, allowing students to better understand and make meaning of their ethnoreligious identity development.

College student development theory frequently referenced by contemporary practitioners and researchers is useful in showing this connection between non-institutionalized, Jewish peer networks of belonging and ethnoreligious Jewish identity development. In particular, this paper will use Parks' (1986, 2000) theory of young adult faith development and Phinney's (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development to explore this phenomena of the rise of informal Jewish campus communities. Parks' and Phinney's work supports the theory that Jewish millennial students who come to college with less-defined Jewish backgrounds establish non-institutionalized peer communities to make meaning of their minority identity within a majority White and Christian campus culture. To further support this social identity theory, it is important to understand the general history relating to Jewish identity development within American society and American higher education. Through assessing the literature associated with Parks' and Phinney's developmental research, the resulting theory provides tangible actions for higher education professionals concerning how to work with this student group. The theory also helps to reveal where more research is needed concerning the diverse journey of Jewish college students' identity development processes.

Jewish Identity Development in American Society: Past and Present

Throughout American history, the Jewish community has encountered repeated struggles in attempting to define its status in a majority White and Christian society. As a result of this struggle, Jewish communities have implemented programming and research initiatives to help group members better understand and define their collective and individual American Jewish identities (Charne, Horowitz, Hyman, & Kress, 2008). Although Jews were historically seen as a racially targeted group in many parts of the world, most contemporary American Jewish subgroups are now considered racially White because they have assimilated into economic and academic success and do not look different from the majority population (MacDonald-Dennis,

2006).

Formalized Jewish institutions, such as synagogues and Jewish community centers, have historically taken on different functions for the American Jewish community. These formal institutions acted as gathering points where Jewish individuals found resources to cope with systems of oppression such as anti-Semitism, workplace discrimination, and other personal and professional challenges (Greenberg, 2006). However, because of increased socioeconomic and cultural integration, contemporary Jews do not depend on these institutions in the same ways previous generations did (Greenberg, 2006). Although many Jews have assimilated into American privilege due to the color of their skin and their socioeconomic class, they are still sensitive to their minority status and the distinctiveness of their ethnoreligious traditions (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006). They struggle to balance a history of oppression and anti-Semitism based on ethnic, cultural, and religious alienation with modern societal successes.

Jewish Identity Development in American Higher Education: Past and Present

In understanding this American societal dichotomy between assimilation and oppression/anti-Semitism, it is also important to recognize how Jewish college students have struggled to define themselves and gain acceptance within American higher education. Throughout history, Jewish students were often segregated and given restricted access to higher education. During much of the twentieth century, colleges and universities created quotas to reduce the numbers of Jewish students admitted to their institution; in addition, many campuses prohibited Jewish students from joining extracurricular activities such as Greek life (Behneman, 2007). Due to this denied access, Jewish students established their own social and academic organizations, which included programming that sustained their distinctive ethnoreligious identity. Although contemporary Jews are now permitted to join campus organizations, these students "still struggle to find their place within the larger campus community" because they remain a minority population in most college cultures (Behneman, 2007, p. 3). The increased diversity of Jewish backgrounds and belief systems along with increased secularization further excludes Jewish students from institutionalized Jewish community. Many students do not feel comfortable establishing networks of belonging among Jewish students who practice differently than the ways they were raised and educated.

Overview of Jewish Millennial College Students

It is estimated that "over 90% of American Jews between the ages

of 18 and 29 are currently working toward their [undergraduate] or graduate degrees" (Cousens, 2007, p. 11). These students, often identified as part of the millennial generation, are more likely to attend residential colleges, have more financial freedom when paying for college, are disproportionately involved in Greek life systems, and are very involved both academically and extracurricularly (Cousens, 2007). In the past, Jewish students have typically identified with the three primary movements of organized Jewish religion—the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox movements. Although some students are still raised with these denominational labels, Jewish millennial students with more loosely defined ethnoreligious backgrounds often change affiliations or identify as just Jewish or secular/cultural when they go through college and explain their Jewish affiliation to those both inside and outside of the Jewish realm (Cousens, 2007). These students reject institutionalized categorizations, value indistinct boundaries of identification, and desire flexibility and freedom in exploring the multiple components of their distinctive Jewish identities.

In a campus environment that is more pluralistic than in generations past, contemporary Jewish students can make conscious choices about how they want to define and exhibit their Jewish identity. They have the option of going through college concealing their Jewish identity and assimilating like much of the general American Jewish population. In addition, they can actively take responsibility for this identity component as young adult Jews in a majority White and Christian campus culture (Sales & Saxe, 2006). Jewish millennial college students are free to make meaning of their Jewish identities in manners that reflect their Judaism as a multifaceted ethnoreligious identity.

Faith Development Theory and Jewish Student Identity Development

It is important to address relevant college student development literature to strengthen the proposed theory examining the shift from institutionalized Jewish communities toward non-institutionalized Jewish peer communities. In particular, Parks' (1986, 2000) faith development theory supports this Jewish identity theory because it addresses the dynamic process of meaning making for college aged students, whom she calls young adults. Although Parks' literature predates much of the research on the millennial student generation, her theory provides evidence that demonstrates the relevance of faith development in the Jewish millennial college student's life.

Parks' (1986, 2000) work builds on Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development by extending his seven stages to include the young adult stage between adolescence and adulthood. To understand Parks' theory in an

ethnoreligious context, it is first important to differentiate between the terms religion and faith. Religion establishes the guidelines of practice through stories, symbols, and doctrine. Faith is the attempt to understand the big picture by allowing individuals to create connections among experiences and relationships, thereby trying to find meaning and purpose in life (Love, 2002). In Judaism, religion is typically expressed by placing value on Jewish doctrines such as the Torah and by celebrating religious holidays that define a relationship between an individual and God (Hartman, 1997). This basic structure for religious practice ultimately allows Jewish individuals to make meaning of how the relationship between religion and faith play out in their daily lives.

Parks' (1986, 2000) theory of young adult faith development relates to this idea of finding meaning and purpose in a college student's life. Within this theory, Parks emphasizes the interrelatedness of the cognitive, affective, and interpersonal, also known as forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community. The forms of community component most resonates with Jewish millennial college students because it includes the mentoring community (Parks, 1986, 2000). This type of community "offers both challenge and support and thus offers good company for both the emerging strength and the distinctive vulnerability of the young adult" as students make meaning of the multiple facets of their identity (Parks, 2000, p. 95). Mentoring communities can be both formal and informal, and emphasize a "tension between the desire for agency and autonomy and the desire for belonging, connection, and intimacy" (Love, 2001, p. 9). All college students, both Jewish and non-Jewish, feel this type of tension in their journey to make meaningful connections in their lives.

Ethnic Development Theory and Jewish Student Identity Development

Ethnic identity development literature also provides relevant background to support the Jewish identity theory relating to the rise of informal Jewish networks of belonging on college campuses. Ethnicity refers to "racial or national characteristics determined by birth" (Talbot, 2003, p. 427). Also referred to as tribes, ethnic groups establish shared connections to identity facets such as religion, geography, and language (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Culture also plays an important role in understanding this definition of ethnicity. On a more general level, culture "provides individuals with an identity and value orientation that represents a society" (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, p. 6-7). This broad level frequently contains secondary cultures which emphasize the customs, values, and historical context that fills the needs of group members (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Hoopes & Pusch, 1979). It is important

that student affairs professionals and developmental researchers understand that the terms ethnicity and culture are often used interchangeably and often converge in the lives of American minority populations.

On American college campuses where acculturation is prevalent, minority students face oppression and marginalization as they are forced to find new ways to make meaning of their subordinate group membership (Phinney, 1992; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). For Jewish millennial college students, this convergence between ethnicity and culture is especially prominent because aspects such as art, humor, food, family, and language are often more important in the formation of their Jewish identity than religious doctrines, such as the Torah, or religious holidays, such as Passover or Yom Kippur (Blanchard, 2002). In outwardly displaying this "unique collective solidarity" of modern ethnic and cultural practice along with collective tradition, Jewish students work to "resolve questions regarding retention of their own cultural heritage, relationships with the dominant culture, and experiences with prejudice, [anti-Semitism], and discrimination" (Phinney, 1996, p. 163).

Phinney's (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development finds that the "development of an ethnic identity [is] closely tied to the process of resolving conflict between... the level of prejudice and stereotyping perceived as prevalent from the majority culture and... dissonance of values between minority and majority culture" (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, p. 36). This notion of conflict resolution results in a three-stage model of ethnic development. The first stage, unexamined ethnic identity, occurs when individuals explore different ways of thinking about their own ethnicity, either blindly committing to this identity facet or minimizing its importance in their lives (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). The second stage, ethnic identity search/moratorium, occurs when individuals examine their ethnicity through trying to understand the values associated with this social identity, and through reflecting on what membership within this group truly means on both a personal and collective level. This stage often induces emotional reactions such as anger or guilt because there is an increased awareness of oppression based on a newly found investment in this particular minority identity (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). The final stage of Phinney's model is ethnic identity achievement, where individuals feel personal responsibility toward their ethnic identity (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). In this stage, individuals achieve a more secure sense of belonging to this collective group and a more secure understanding of their relationship to the dominant, majority groups in society.

Jewish millennial students connect to Phinney's (1992, 1996) ethnic

identity development model because their understanding of what it means to be Jewish within a majority White, Christian society is often gained from their membership in both formal and informal Jewish networks of belonging. This understanding is also gained through "the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Phinney, 1992, p. 156). Jewish college students can find themselves in all three stages of Phinney's model because they are moving away from authority-bound relationships with family and Jewish clergy to more autonomous peer relationships. In these relationships they can experiment with and reflect on the parts of Judaism that most complement their personal, academic, and professional objectives. Like other minority subgroups, Jewish ethnic identity development is not static. Instead, progressing through this model and sometimes regressing into previous stages emphasizes how these group members continually make meaning of their experiences within the contemporary and historical Jewish ethnoreligious context.

Integrating Parks and Phinney with Jewish Identity Development Theory

Integrating Parks' (1986, 2000) faith development theory and Phinney's (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development will strengthen the proposed theory relating to Jewish millennial college student identity development. Through understanding the significance of the growth of Jewish mentoring communities and networks/tribes of belonging as well as the role of systems of oppression such as anti-Semitism in Jewish students' lives, this identity development process can be better understood within the context of the contemporary campus culture.

The Role of Mentoring Communities and Tribes

One primary way to integrate these developmental models is through looking at the role of mentoring communities and networks/tribes of belonging on campus. These communities provide opportunities for "challenge and support" during a time when young adult Jewish students rely on family members, authorities, and peers to help them make sense of their ethnoreligious development toward autonomy (Parks, 2000, p. 95). By combining the traditional faith development notion of the mentoring community with the traditional ethnic development notion of the tribal group, this paper's proposed theory is supported. Both types of in-group communities provide Jewish college students with the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility for how they fit within the larger campus culture and how they want others to perceive their own personal Jewish development process.

In the past, institutionalized Jewish communities have reached out to Jewish college students by providing them with structured educational

opportunities that did not always combine the relationship between religion and ethnicity in personally meaningful manners (Cousens, 2007). Students were often taught about where they should be in their understanding of their Jewish backgrounds instead of allowing for the creation of “meaningful Jewish experiences based on where they are and where they have the potential to grow and develop” (Cousens, 2007, p. 40). Although this institutionalized culture is beginning to adjust to the millennial generations’ distinctiveness, students with lesser-defined Jewish backgrounds feel that these formalized communities are not pertinent to their needs because they see this structure as unaccommodating to the many parts of their complex identities (Cousens, 2007). Therefore, these students find their own Jewish networks of belonging through in-group peer connections where they can celebrate, practice, question, and make meaning of their multifaceted identities on their own terms (Cousens, 2007). These environments create opportunities for both communal and individualized interpretation and reflection into Jewish ethnoreligious practices and customs (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Greenberg, 2006). This interpretation creates genuine meaning making experiences, where Jewish students feel validated for exploring this social identity component in manners that exhibit connections amongst other Jews who are managing similar identity development processes within a majority White, Christian environment.

The Role of Anti-Semitism and Systems of Oppression

Anti-Semitism also plays an important role in supporting the movement of Jewish millennial students toward non-institutionalized, Jewish peer networks of belonging. Although Jewish college students have assimilated into the majority campus culture, anti-Semitism is still relevant for these students. This relevancy relates to both Parks’ (1986, 2000) theory of faith development and Phinney’s (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development; as students work through oppressive stereotypes and prejudices, they often align with Jewish ethnoreligious mentoring communities of peer support to make meaning of these potentially destructive situations (Cousens, 2007). These particular communities are often non-institutionalized and informal because students still desire to integrate into the general campus culture and may not want to draw attention publicly to their minority status.

In addition, although some Jewish students might feel judged or oppressed in the majority culture, institutionalized Jewish communities can also be perceived as judging and intimidating to students who may not feel Jewish enough to enter into these types of organized communities. Through the development of smaller, informal communities with significant peer influence, Jewish college students work with their peers to better understand

and actively “deconstruct oppressive and limiting ideologies” (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006, p. 275). These informal environments provide appropriate support, allowing students to progress and regress through Phinney’s (1992, 1996) model of ethnic development. These students can feel secure in exploring their attitudes about their own ethnoreligious identity, feel safe in expressing strong emotions triggered when tangible and oppressive anti-Semitism is recognized, and achieve confidence in how they want to represent their ethnoreligious Jewish identity in the majority society.

For minority group members such as Jewish college students, “identification with others who share their origins and traditions is critical in developing both a positive personal identity and feelings of self-esteem and efficacy, rather than self-blame and powerlessness” (Arce, 1981 as cited by Phinney, 1992, p. 163). Although institutionalized Jewish campus communities are becoming irrelevant in many Jewish millennial students’ meaning making experiences, it is still vital for these communities to exist. These formalized communities act as connectors of the non-institutionalized peer networks of belonging to help students preserve their positive sense of ethnoreligious identity.

Jewish Identity Development Theory: Implications for Student Affairs Practice

Although research on Jewish college student identity development is limited, it is important that student affairs practitioners understand the dynamic experiences that Jewish millennial students face as they journey to make meaning of their distinctive ethnoreligious identities. In particular, there are three principal considerations for higher education that professionals should address when working with these students: trying not to stereotype and oversimplify the process of Jewish identity development, supporting the creation of safe spaces to foster Jewish identity development, and understanding the role of experiential education in creating informal, out-of-class learning opportunities that help students relate to other oppressed minority groups and connect to other Jewish peers. These implications are effective when working with other minority student populations; this section will further develop these considerations to show their applicability to the Jewish millennial student subgroup.

Avoid Stereotyping and Oversimplifying Jewish Identity Development

Administrators and staff must realize that the terms Jewish and Jewish identity have subjective interpretations based on the particular college student who uses these terms to define their identity (Behneman, 2007). Professionals must be cautious in stereotyping and oversimplifying the identity development of all Jewish college students. They must allow Jewish

students to “name themselves and their identities” like any other minority group on campus (Poynter & Washington, 2005, p. 46). It is important that student affairs professionals understand that “there is not one way of being Jewish” (Behneman, 2007, p. 62). They need to recognize that Jewish student development involves a process of learning how to express Jewish identity while also developing other social identity characteristics at the same time.

In addition, professionals must also understand that Jewish millennial students develop differently than previous Jewish generations. This contemporary group holds different priorities and ways to exhibit their ethno-religious backgrounds. They attempt to make meaning of being perceived as part of the White, majority culture due to economic and social successes and physical similarities, while simultaneously experiencing systems of oppression and anti-Semitism.

The Creation of Safe Spaces to Foster Jewish Identity Development

It is also important that student affairs professionals understand the need for safe spaces to foster the development of non-institutionalized Jewish networks of belonging within the White, Christian campus environment. Safe spaces are defined as “the public spaces of social groups...student organizations, and physical space in which students feel as if they belong as well as the private space of students’ reflection and intimate conversations about who they are and who they want to become” (Renn, 2000, p. 405). Parks’ (1986, 2000) mentoring communities and Phinney’s (1992, 1996) stages of ethnic identity development relate to this idea of creating a safe space. These theorists illustrate the importance of providing spaces where Jewish students can work through their multiple identity facets in an environment where they feel supported and feel that they belong (Renn, 2000). Campus professionals must address Jewish identity development through creating safe spaces that cater to their unique campus cultures, thereby helping to foster the growth of non-institutionalized, informal mentoring communities and tribes of belonging (Behneman 2007).

In creating these spaces, professionals allow students to practice their Jewish identity in places such as residence halls, Greek house lounges, and the student union, which are not explicitly labeled as Jewish space on campus. These non-institutionalized locations provide accessible learning environments where Jewish students can band together to resist stereotypes, oppression, and anti-Semitism, while also developing positive ethno-religious identities. However, administrators need to construct a careful balance to maintain these spaces. They should be intentional in fostering the development of spaces where Jewish students do not further isolate or self-segregate from the greater campus community.

The Role of Experiential Education Opportunities

One final action involves fostering campus environments where experiential educational opportunities are created to help Jewish students make positive meaning of their identities. These experiential opportunities differ from the “one-time interactions with staged events” that institutionalized Jewish communities had previously implemented to connect students to their Jewish identities (Cousens, 2007, p. 41). College professionals can help create “ongoing and authentic immersion into the Jewish narrative, into what it means to be Jewish” by providing out-of-the-classroom, informal learning environments (Cousens, 2007, p. 41-42). These particular environments will further connect Jewish students to non-institutionalized, in-group peer networks of belonging.

Moreover, many Jewish millennial college students are especially committed to involvement in experiential education programs that promote social justice because they want to give back to their community in meaningful ways (Cousens, 2007). Often, these students grow up learning about Jewish values such as *tzedakah* (charity) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), but find more personally meaningful and tangible ways to communicate these intrinsic principles when they can actively demonstrate these terms through community service. These Jewish students often participate in philanthropic initiatives because they are going through faith and ethnic identity development that allows them to come to terms with their own Jewish history of oppression and anti-Semitism, how they make meaning of this history in their own lives, and how this history directly connects to other oppressed minority communities (Parks, 2000; Cousens, 2007). It is the college professional’s role to help create environments where Jewish students can come together and make meaning of their history of oppression and anti-Semitism through taking part in significant immersive experiences.

Strategies for Further Investigation

The student affairs field can further investigate Jewish identity development in millennial college students by creating longitudinal studies that track the development of specific Jewish individuals as they progress through their undergraduate years. Researchers can develop surveys or utilize interviews to gather data to further understand how Jewish students progress and regress through the stages of Parks’ (1986, 2000) faith development model and Phinney’s (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development, ultimately allowing them to correlate Jewish ethno-religious development with these traditional research tools. Although all Jewish students develop differently, identifying similarities in developmental patterns can be influential in further understanding how Jewish students connect to each oth-

er through non-institutionalized peer networks of belonging. It can also be influential in understanding how they connect as part of a minority subgroup on predominantly White, Christian campuses.

Student affairs professionals and researchers can also examine Jewish student identity development by looking at the influence of other components of identity, such as gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and race. Additionally, practitioners can consider the effects of these components on how Jewish peer networks of belonging are created and the reasons for the shifting away from more formalized Jewish community. Through using Reynolds and Pope's (1991) Multidimensional Identity Model or Jones and McEwen's (2000) models of multiple dimensions of identity, the student affairs field can assess the influences of "multiple layers of diversity and identity" instead of offering "one-dimensional images of culturally diverse individuals" (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 174). Moreover, through examining the role of age in developing Jewish identity, student affairs researchers and practitioners can examine how the millennial student generation differs from other generations such as Generation X and the Baby Boomers generation in terms of how they experience their Jewish journey of identity development.

Lastly, this topic can be further researched by examining the systems of oppression and anti-Semitism that are still relevant within Jewish college students' lives. Through researching the campus cultures of colleges and universities across the country, researchers can assess if there is a specific type of American campus that is more or less conducive to the creation of informal Jewish peer networks of belonging for this millennial student population.

Conclusion

This paper's proposed theory combines Parks' (1986, 2000) theory of faith development and Phinney's (1992, 1996) model of ethnic identity development to address issues that "have been previously studied separately without specific attention to Jewish college students" (Behneman, 2007, p. 12). Based on this student development literature, this theory guides practitioners to make intentional decisions that reflect the best interests of Jewish millennial college students as a distinctive, ethnoreligious subgroup. Although this theory illustrates that there is a shift from institutionalized Jewish community toward non-institutionalized, peer networks of belonging, it is still very important that college professionals support the existence of both types of Jewish campus communities. The formalized Jewish community must still exist to act as a central gathering point for all Jewish peer tribes of belonging. It must exist to act as a dynamic connector of these smaller communities as Jewish students make meaning of their ethnoreligious identities.

With the increase in diversity education and the ongoing efforts to create pluralistic campus environments, researchers and practitioners can further explore the complex nature of Jewish college student identity relating to the Jewish journey of self-discovery, autonomy, and meaning making.

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Alpha Kappa Alpha as an educational institution and component of supplemental education

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This paper explores Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated as an institution of education. With its principles rooted in racial uplift, this sorority emits four key principles: education, sisterhood, community consciousness, and the appearance of womanhood. The principles, in combination with active membership, help members to develop self authorship and develop cognitively and socially.

For a hundred years, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated (AKA) has educated and prepared its members for the social and communal action for racial uplift. Its members are found all over the world and number more than 200,000 women (Alpha Kappa Alpha, 2008). The founders of this sorority were taught the foundations of African American womanhood and community consciousness at home. They used these lessons to build AKA and instilled them within the initiates that followed in their footsteps. Recent research shows that social capital, such as membership in AKA, provides increased social interaction, cognitive development and greater success in college (Broh, 2009; Pike, 2003). AKA, as a source of social capital, is rooted in principles of racial uplift and a reflection of a cause for equal citizenship felt throughout higher education at the time of its founding (Shaw, 1996). This paper will explore AKA as an educational institution and answer two key questions. First, how does AKA, as an educational institution and product of higher education, supplement the college education of its members with principles rooted in racial uplift? Then with a foundation to understand this supplemental education, how is this education beneficial to these women?

In order to answer these questions, a historical analysis was done in order to determine the social context and position of Black women at the time of AKA's founding and explore how this time period influences and shapes the organization's principles and concerns. In addition, a review of current research was examined that supports student involvement in student organizations as beneficial to their college education. In result, it is concluded that the higher education provided for African American women at the time of AKA's founding shaped the teachings of the sorority into four major principles: education, sisterhood, community consciousness, and the appearance of womanhood. All four principles are grounded in the concept of racial uplift. As a result, the college women involved in this organization are provided with a supplemental education that is not only beneficial to its