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MONETARY FORMS AS COMMUNICATION PROCESSES: BLACK VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AND AFFINITY CREDIT CARD PROGRAMS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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1997

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ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of monetary forms as communication processes. It develops a framework for the analysis of relations between emerging forms of "virtual," spatially-dispersed community and monetary forms, which include monetary instruments, associated institutions and practices, and interpretations.

Recently established Black-oriented affinity credit card programs are examined in order to expose the relations between monetary forms and constructions of virtual community. In such programs, credit card issuers provide donations to selected not-for-profit "affinity" organizations based on the number of cards issued and/or the amount of money charged to the cards, in return for use of the organizations' names and/or membership lists. Data drawn from documentary analysis of marketing and media materials, and in-person, semi-structured interviews were analyzed using five interrelated communication-centered perspectives: institutional, technological medium, patterns of access, content and interpretative.

It was found that the "virtual" relations created as part of the affinity credit card programs are less interactive than "virtual" communities based on technologies such as the Internet. Nevertheless, "pro-community" themes were foundational to the creation and operation of the affinity credit card programs. The affinity credit card programs were also supported
by quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes, which most social theories of money identify as "community-destructive." Therefore, affinity credit card programs represent a mix of "pro-community" and "community-destructive" themes.

The analytical framework developed in this study can be applied to a wide range of additional monetary forms, including conventional currency and digital money. Such analyses can offer insights into the ways that money is used both to support and to undermine community relations. As contemporary social and financial relations become increasingly disembedded, new ways of sustaining community are emerging. Informed theory and practice can benefit from the analysis of inchoate monetary forms implicated in community.
To the Enduring Spirit of my Mother

Mabel Ruth (Lester) Hadley
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Overview

This study is a theoretical and empirical examination of monetary forms, defined as monetary instruments, institutions and practices, and interpretations. The purpose of this study is the explanation of the nature of monetary forms as human communication processes, a view of money that is not prominent in social science and theory. A central goal of this communication-centered inquiry is the analysis of the relations between monetary forms and emerging conceptualizations and manifestations of community, particularly "virtual," spatially-dispersed communities linked by advanced telecommunication networks.

To examine the relation between monetary forms and virtual communities, this study uses as an exemplar recently established, Black-oriented "affinity" credit card relationships between banks, marketers and Black-oriented beneficiary organizations with a national membership or

\[^1\] Affinity credit card programs are a special form of credit card arrangement in which the card issuer donates a pre-determined portion of returns from charges made to the card, or when a card is issued, to a specified organization or "affinity" group, which generally provides some sort of support, direct or indirect, to the marketing effort. Affinity credit card programs are described in detail below in Chapter 4.
support base. This study investigates the processes by which these affinity programs function as media for the communication of various constructions of racially- and culturally-based communities. Of particular interest in this study is the extent to which affinity credit card programs provide a means for the articulation, interpretation, and manifestation of community among individuals and organizations in spatially dispersed, rather than spatially proximate, locations. This study focuses specifically on affinity credit card programs targeted toward Black consumers.

Through a preliminary theoretical analysis, this study presents a conceptual framework for the examination of monetary forms as media for the communication of community identity and expectations. A study of affinity credit card programs targeting Black consumers provides the empirical basis for applying this framework in a concrete context. The primary concern of this study is the relationship between concepts of community, monetary forms, and communication media, as these influence and are influenced by spatially dispersed social relations.

Research Questions

This dissertation deals with two broad, overlapping research questions:

1. In what ways can affinity credit card programs be conceptualized and examined as communication processes?

2 In this study, the terms "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably to represent U.S. citizens who identify themselves as being, wholly or predominately, of African ancestry.
2. What are the relations between the development and operation of Black-oriented affinity credit card programs and the constructions and interpretations of Black virtual communities?

The first question is presented because of the tendency for many scholars to neglect or reject monetary forms, such as affinity credit card programs, as inherently appropriate objects for analysis as communication processes. In contrast to research on media such as television, radio, film, the press, the telephone, and the internet, the application of communication theories and methods to monetary forms has not been extensively developed. The discussion below provides support for the preliminary claim that affinity credit cards, and other monetary forms, can be studied as communication processes.

After presenting a theoretical argument in favor of examining affinity credit card programs as communication processes, this study turns to the second question. Theoretical and empirical tools from the communication field are applied to Black-oriented affinity credit card programs to examine conceptualizations and interpretations of contemporary Black communities. In a manner analogous to the common communication focus on mass media to gain insight into social, economic, political, and cultural relations, this study revolves around the role of Black-oriented affinity credit card programs as communication processes which provide a range of opportunities for empirical examination of social relations among Blacks, particularly in spatially dispersed environments.

Efforts to answer the second question not only examine the conditions which have influenced credit card issuers to target Black
communities and organizations for affinity credit card programs. The empirical examination below also addresses some of the reasons why the respective beneficiary organizations have elected to participate in black-oriented affinity credit card programs at this time. This is a particularly important question underlying the creation, marketing and operation of these particular affinity card programs, because many of the beneficiary organizations examined in this study have not historically limited their organizational activities or funding appeals on a racially targeted or racially restrictive basis. An issue underlying the second question is whether the beneficiary organizations examined in this study are placing a greater emphasis on sources of support which are more "inner-directed" than "outer-directed."

Brown (1979) defines "inner-directed" associations as those which seek to strengthen the position of an ethnic group by fostering a sense of solidarity based on the retention of cultural and religious values, glorification of group history, and maintenance of group characteristics such as language and customs. He identifies fraternities, sororities and religious associations as examples of these among African Americans. In contrast, he defines "outer-directed" associations as those which engage primarily in activities directed at the wider environment, seeking to bring some change that will benefit group members. Rather than focusing on the group per se, "outer-directed associations focus on external conditions that are perceived as negatively affecting the group. He identifies the historical efforts of the NAACP as an example of an "outer-directed" group. Examination of the conditions underlying the decisions of
beneficiary organizations to participate in the Black-oriented affinity credit card programs can reveal clues regarding future efforts between these organizations and their constituents (e.g., members, communities, etc.).

The results of the empirical study involving Black-oriented affinity credit card programs are used to reassess the dominant theories concerning the introduction or transformation of money and the relation of this change to traditional characteristics of community. This discussion not only addresses literature on the historical impact of currency and coin on community. It also considers the implications of the study for emerging forms of electronic or "cyber"-currencies as they impact social relations. Since affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks at a nationwide level are very recent developments, some limitations exist on the conclusions regarding virtual community development that can be drawn from the empirical findings obtained from this study. However, the themes highlighted in the marketing materials reveal clearly a multi-functionality in the affinity credit card programs reviewed in this study, which is significant in determining the factors which will influence the type of community that can be developed as a function of these programs.

Scope

The focus of this study is at the organizational level, emphasizing the mechanisms which have influenced the creation and development of affinity credit card programs targeted primarily to Blacks. Although an examination of individual attitudes among actual or prospective affinity cardholders toward particular affinity card programs and constructions of community would be of empirical value, access to information about
individual attitudes is precluded because of the proprietary nature of credit card prospect and cardholder databases. Competitive considerations and privacy restrictions make it nearly impossible to obtain convenient access to personal information about cardholders for research purposes. The alternative approach of attempting to identify holders of particular credit cards independently of the issuing banks would be impractical in the context of the present study.

However, the inaccessibility of individual cardholder information does not detract from the primary purpose of the study, which is to identify and examine the mechanisms through which affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks have been created and operated, and to explain how credit card issuers, marketers, and affinity organizations have conceptualized and communicated the notion of community to prospective and existing cardholders through various media. By focusing the empirical examination on the structure and practices of the participating organizations, as well as on the actions and interpretations of key officials in these organizations, a wide range of data sources is available for research purposes, providing the basis for triangulation in data collection and analysis.

Usage of Key Terms

This study incorporates a number of key concepts that have been hotly debated across the social sciences and the humanities. A clear presentation of the usage of these terms in this dissertation is essential to ensure clarity in the presentation of the object of study, to bring focus to the
theoretical discussion to follow, and to solidify the empirical analysis and conclusions.

Community

The concept of "community" is at once one of the most compelling themes in the social sciences and, at the same time, one of the most notoriously difficult to define. Community has been defined as a multidimensional phenomenon (McLeod, et al., 1996; Stamm and Fortini-Campbell, 1983). In the mid 1950's, George Hillery, Jr. (1955) found no fewer than ninety-four separate definitions of community, just in the sociology literature (L. Lyon, 1987, p. 5). Many of these definitions were reflected in research which argued that with the rise in the United States of urbanization, industrialization, and "modernity" in the late 19th century, and the subsequent rise of mass society in the 1950s and 1960s, community was either in decline or had been totally destroyed (see, e.g., A. Cohen, 1985; Durkheim, 1964/1893; L. Lyon, 1987; Simmel, 1983; Tönnies, 1957/1887; Weber, 1958/1904-05; Wirth, 1938).

The observers who have identified this sense of a lost traditional form of community base their perspective heavily on a perceived decline in interaction among closely-related people who interact in spatial proximity. Low (1997) notes that it was this perceived decline in community, rather than "community per se," that was the object of study for early social scientists. (p. 256). He states that

One reason why community has been central to normative social science accounts is because of the attributes of face-to-face negotiation (copresence) and an ability to consensually regulate local social life (congruence) it regularly carries. The notion that
community is a more "authentic" mode of regulating social life than more mediated sets of relationships is rooted in these assumptions. Social science notions of community developed not in isolation, but as part of a system of conceptual terms from the late 19th century. "Community" was, and often still is, elaborated as a concept in relation to the developing "society" viewed as colonizing, undermining, or eclipsing it (or its latter-day companions, public space, the public sphere, the life world, and so on). (p. 256)

In a recent work which is analogous to the late 19th century writings analyzing the decline of community, Putnam (1995) decries the fact that in recent decades memberships have dropped in what he defines as "secondary associations" -- churches, labor unions, PTAs, civic and fraternal organizations, and organized bowling leagues -- in which members have active social engagement with each other in pursuit of common interests. He states that during the same time period other groups, which he refers to as "tertiary associations," such as the National Organization for Women and the American Association of Retired Persons have been very successful at expanding their memberships. These tertiary associations Putnam describes as lacking in the social connectedness of "secondary" associations, having members whose only act of membership often consists of writing a check for dues or reading a newsletter. Putnam sees members of tertiary associations as having ties to common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to one another. Tertiary associations are here perceived as clearly inferior to the social bonds which exist -- or existed -- in the context of secondary associations.

This concern about the contemporary decline in intimate community relations is also reflected in research on African Americans.
William Julius Wilson (1987) argues that social isolation in inner cities is the primary problem for inner-city Blacks, who lost role models and support for neighborhood institutions with the ending of legalized residential segregation and the migration of many working- and middle-class Blacks to formerly all-White suburbs. He identifies this phenomenon of residential mobility as a key force behind the emergence of the "ghetto underclass."

Other commenters argue that the decline in traditional relations of community due to industrialization and globalization has not eliminated the significance of locality in contemporary society (See, e.g., Cox & Mair, 1988, 1991; Cox, 1997). Cox and Mair (1991) note that local organizational coalitions promote territorially defined identities and interests in constructing alliances based on mutual local interests which cross class or racial boundaries (pp. 205-207). Cox and Mair (1988) further note that the ability of business coalitions to successfully construct concepts of local "pseudo-community" is based largely on the threat to ontological security that has resulted for people in the transition from traditional to modern forms of local dependence (p. 318). One response to this threat is a search for meanings that can restore coherence to lives and secure identities. The appeal of nationalism can be understood as a reflection of the search for renewed ontological security (1988, p. 317, see also Anderson, 1983; Giddens, 1981). While this literature acknowledges the role of local business coalitions in developing modern forms of local dependence which can replace the traditional relations of family, ethnicity and race, it does not focus on the explicit use by organizations of traditional
community characteristics such as race and ethnicity for the construction of community beyond the boundaries of locality. This study takes up that issue.

The issue of race as the basis of community is by no means unproblematic. The individual and social relevance of the notion of shared biological characteristics such as race has been challenged as questionable or counter-productive. Such biological constructions of identity have been described as imposing invalid "essentialist" notions on concepts which are inherently socially constructed (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, hooks & West, 1992). The result of such scholarly attacks on biological markers of identity is to promote a "cultural hybrid," "multiracial," or "multicultural" view of society, which would diminish or eliminate the notion of race as an indicator of community membership.

This dissertation does not attempt to establish a rigid construction of community that is defined and interpreted by this researcher. Instead, this study takes an approach which, in addition to the researcher's observations, incorporates the meanings which individuals, groups, and organizations apply to "community" in their communications and interactions in society. In one example of such an approach, Anthony Cohen (1985) applies a social anthropological perspective in articulating the "symbolic construction of community," viewing community as the expression of a relational idea; a consciousness of social boundaries which are themselves largely constituted by people in interaction.

Similarly, Pilotta (in press) defines community as dependent on identifying "nodal points of interests and concerns." These nodal points of
interests and concerns are manifestations of interdependence and of shared investment and resources, as well as mutual recognition of each other as members of the same communal entities. Pilotta distinguishes two areas of contrasting perspectives on community that are of importance for purposes of this study. First is a spatial contrast which distinguishes the notion of community between one based on geographic proximity and another which, rather than being based on geographic proximity, provides for maintenance of social interaction via electronic communication media or transportation means, which permit interaction among people who reside in geographically dispersed locations. The manner by which communities are being constructed beyond spatial boundaries is a central research question in this study.

A second contrast noted by Pilotta in research on inner city Blacks highlights a distinction between interpersonal and economic aspects of community. His study revealed that, while interpersonal forms of community were present, economic cohesiveness or solidarity was found to be lacking, other than in the case of neighborhood organized drug dealing. Evaluation of attempts to use affinity credit card programs to establish or expand economic intercourse among Blacks is another central area of focus in this dissertation.

Similarly, Wellman's (1979) social network approach leads to the conclusion that community can be identified as persisting in contemporary society. Wellman is principally concerned with delineating structures of relationships and flows of activities, rather than focusing on a search for "putative" solidary behavior and sentiments based on locality or kinship.
Using this approach, Wellman observes "community saved" situations, in which spatially-concentrated neighborhood and kinship solidarities continue to flourish in industrial society (see also Fischer, 1982; Macionis, 1978). In addition, Wellman identifies "community liberated" scenarios, in which the most important social ties among networks of people are focused beyond spatially defined neighborhoods. Oliver (1988) applies Wellman's social network approach in the urban context among African Americans and concludes that a network analytic perspective will lead analysts to move beyond "pathological" conceptions and "culturally deficient" models of American urban Black "communities" to an examination of the varied personal, organization, and interorganizational levels in which they are structured. In a recent work, Wellman et al. (1996) extend the concept of community liberated relations to computer-supported social networks (CSSNs), such as the World Wide Web, as becoming important bases of virtual communities (See also Rheingold, 1993).

Thus, the view of community adopted in this study incorporates the meanings and usages of the term by individual and institutional actors in communication and interaction. The concept of community can have a range of meanings for different people, and even for the same person across time and in different contexts. Thus, for purposes of this study, the definition of community can include the traditional locality-based understanding of the concept. However, the primary goal of this study is identification and examination of the mechanisms through which affinity credit card programs are being used to construct, communicate, interpret,
and negotiate conceptualizations of spatially-dispersed community networks, incorporating the traditional community relation of kinship through the element of race. Throughout the empirical portion of this study discussed below, the particular usages of the concept of "community" are highlighted in an attempt to identify the specific ways in which it is being defined, and the conditions underlying the expression and interpretation of those meanings. A central consideration is the extent to which the indicators of community which are identified in this study reflect interpersonal forms of community, economic forms of community, both aspects, or neither.

Monetary forms

While this study addresses the specific concept of "money" as part of the theoretical discussion and empirical study, the focus of this dissertation is on the broader concept of "monetary forms," as presented by Leyshon and Thrift (1997). In their formulation, a monetary form includes (1) a particular set of formal instruments of money, (2) a particular set of financial institutions and practices, and (3) a broadly conceived set of interpretations of what money is and what it does (p. 3). This tripartite definition of a monetary form provides a useful foundation for an integrated examination of the key topic of interest in this study: the ways in which affinity credit card programs serve as media for the communication of community. The definition of monetary forms by Leyshon and Thrift provides a unified framework which incorporates for analytical purposes the participating banks and affinity institutions, their respective marketing strategies and organizational practices, the affinity
credit cards themselves as the formal monetary instrument, and the various interpretations at the institutional level of what the particular affinity credit card is and what it does, or what it is designed to do. Leyshon and Thrift identify five monetary forms: premodern money; commodity money; money of account; state credit money; and virtual money (pp. 5-30). Credit card programs are defined as virtual money in this definitional scheme because of the dependence of credit card networks on computer and telecommunication systems, which overcome the limitations of space and time.

**Integrated Communication Approach**

In developing an approach for analyzing monetary forms as communication processes, this study integrates aspects of several analytically distinct, yet overlapping, approaches from the communication literature. The approach adopted responds in large part to the concern raised by Meyrowitz (1993, 1994), which identifies as a major failing in media studies the lack of explicit treatment of the question: "What are media?" He identifies three media metaphors that underlie most communication research: media as conduits, media as languages and media as environments, complaining that "in research practice and popular thought, the metaphors have usually operated in relative isolation . . . . This situation has been fostered by the fact that the underlying media metaphor – which helps to form a researcher's question and shapes a good measure of the answer – is most often left unstated and unexamined" (p. 65).
In the "media as conduits" metaphor, the focus is on the content delivered, in what is essentially a *medium-free* analysis (pp. 56-58). This communication metaphor, or focus of observation, is one of the five which is used in this study. Examples of questions asked under this conduit metaphor include: What is the content? How accurately does media content reflect reality?

Meyrowitz's "media as languages" metaphor is especially common in film studies, in which the analytical focus is on the unique *grammar* of each medium, which involves issues such as the particular expressive variables or production techniques within each medium or general type of media. An example of grammar questions in terms of women's images in media would be a focus on whether women are framed in intimate, personal or social space; whether they are made to look weak or strong through shot angles; and whether filters are used in closeups of some female characters to create a soft, ethereal glow (pp. 59-60). Although the present study does incorporate some analysis of advertising images, the production techniques involved in producing those images are not a central component in this study, and thus the "media as languages" metaphor will not be one of the five explicitly included in this analysis.

The "media as environments" metaphor involves an emphasis on the way each medium functions as a type of environment, setting or context that has characteristics and effects that transcend variations in content and manipulations of production variables. He calls this focus "medium analysis," using the singular *medium* because those who emphasize this metaphor examine the relatively fixed features of each
medium. An example of a question based on this orientation would include the following: What are the characteristics of each medium (or each type of media) that make it physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from live interaction, regardless of content or grammar choices (p. 61)? This is the second focus of observation which is applied in this study.

Explicit identification of the particular media metaphor under examination is important because analyses based on different media metaphors can lead to contradictory conclusions concerning the same mediated communication. For example, a look at traditional television content may suggest that TV has been oppressive to women, but a medium perspective could lead to the conclusion that TV, regardless of its portrayal of female characters, has exposed women viewers to a wide array of previously all-male arenas and has therefore encouraged greater blending of male and female roles in everyday life. As answers to the question of whether television supports or undermines a feminist world view, the aspect of the communication process being examined must be specified (p. 64).

This study incorporates three other metaphors or foci of observation. While not separated out in his tripartite framework, it can be argued that a "pattern of access" metaphor can be distinguished in Meyrowitz's model. Meyrowitz (1994) describes pattern of access issues as aspects of medium theory or the medium metaphor. He argues that everyday behavior is influenced by new media of communication because social roles are inextricably tied into social communication. According to
this view, social identity does not rest in people, but in a network of social relations. He contends that

When social networks are altered, social identities will change. In any given social period, roles are shaped as much by patterns of access to social information as by the content of information. That is, different cultures and different historical periods are characterized by different role structures not only because of 'who knows what', but also because of 'who knows what about whom' and who knows what compared to whom. (p. 59)

According to this theory, media that segregate access to social situations will work to segregate roles; media that blur access to social situations will foster less distinct roles. Meyrowitz defines roles as fluid information-networks that are susceptible to restructuring through changes in information-flow patterns, such as those brought on by changes in media use (p. 59-60).

This issue of "patterns of access" to communication media is also raised as an area of emphasis in the context of access to economic opportunities as reflective of communication codes. Pilotta (in press) notes in research on low income Blacks that when they are excluded from economic resources and opportunities, such discrimination or lack of access can be viewed as a social and communication code, which reflects society's view of and for them. If accepted as such, this can function as a sort of "blueprint" for the creation and interpretation of much of their social reality. An explicit pattern of access focus, which highlights differing patterns of access for a single medium (e.g., differing access to the advanced telecommunication services in suburbs as compared to rural areas), is thus distinguishable from a medium focus which emphasizes differences
between media (e.g., the social impacts of television as compared to the Internet).

A fourth focus of observation that is incorporated in this study is an institutional emphasis. Meyrowitz (1994) tends to conflate the institutional focus with the content focus in his discussion. He acknowledges that one weakness of medium theory is that it focuses on the invention and use of a medium and tends to ignore the institutions that have important political and economic stakes in the development of some technologies over others (pp. 70-71). Despite the fact that this claimed limitation of medium theory could be challenged in light of the work of some medium theorists, such as Harold Innis, an explicit focus on the institutions which control and construct particular media networks is important. Questions which would require an institutional focus to resolve might include: What is the difference between ownership of a media outlet by a private enterprise as compared to a governmental entity? What is the difference between ownership by a racial minority as compared to non-minority ownership? While issues of content, patterns of access, and a particular medium might come into play in answering these questions, abstracting based on an institutional perspective is of value in conducting this study in an integrated manner.

The fifth focus of observation that is applied in this study is an interpretative focus. This is designed to address Meyrowitz's observation that medium theory tends to ignore vast cultural differences that mute and alter the development, use and perception of various communication technologies (1994, p. 71). However, the focus on interpretation to reveal
cultural difference does not eliminate the prospect that culture may be observed by the researcher as an institution in its own right. The goal of incorporating interpretation as a focus of observation is to determine how institutions, and key individuals within them, construct and communicate their understanding of the meaning of particular media, in this case, affinity credit card programs.

Further support for use of an interpretation focus is found in Meyrowitz's combination of questions of audience interpretation in his content focus/conduit metaphor (1993, p. 56). The issues of interpretation are not limited to one media metaphor, however. One can study interpretations, not only of content, but of institutions, technological media, and patterns of access. Thus, this study includes an interpretative focus to incorporate the observations of actors regarding the media with which they interface, to augment the observations of the researcher.

Thus, the focus of observation in this study integrates the following perspectives: (1) content; (2) technological medium; (3) institutional; (4) patterns of access; and (5) interpretative. Following Meyrowitz's advocacy of the integration of medium theory with other perspectives, this application of multiple perspectives is not only important in providing a more complete view of the communication processes under examination, it offers an explicit statement of the foci of observation which are being employed in order to avoid confusion about the conclusions which are drawn from the theoretical and empirical analysis.
Literature Review/Rationale

Scholarly literature on the subject of credit cards is extremely limited in the majority of the social sciences, with most of the research existing in the areas of economics and marketing. The emphasis of these studies is on either the economics of credit cards, the analyses of different marketing strategies for credit cards, or debates over the justification for the level of credit card interest rates. These studies generally do not emphasize credit cards as a means of constructing and promoting concepts of community, beyond descriptive reports on the use of the concept of "group affinity" in the affinity credit card context. Although a few studies have addressed the issue of race, culture and identity in terms of credit card programs, none focus on their role as a medium for the communication of conceptualizations of spatially dispersed community.

In a book entirely devoted to a sociological analysis of the global credit card society, George Ritzer (1995) provides a broad survey of social issues raised by the global proliferation of credit cards, including a discussion of topics such as rationalization, privacy, postmodernism, and consumerism. Ritzer describes his decision to base his study of society on credit cards as largely an extension of Georg Simmel's work, The Philosophy of Money (1900), in which observations about society and culture were grounded in the study of money.

In developing his analysis of contemporary society, Ritzer addresses the central role of U.S.-developed credit card programs in the global process of "Americanization," noting that the credit card is similar to other American-developed consumer products and companies, such as Coca-
Cola, Levi's, and McDonald's, which are increasingly visible as global symbols of the American dream (pp. 157-165). Ritzer also incorporates Weber's theory of rationalization in analyzing credit cards as imposing calculability, efficiency, predictability, and nonhuman technology on the process by which consumer loans are made, contributing to society's dehumanization (pp. 129-156). Furthermore, Ritzer not only considers credit cards to have elements of modern society, such as rigidity, rationalization, a common sense of culture, and perceptions of a "real" world. He also asserts that credit cards possess characteristics of postmodern society, such as a nonrationality or irrationality, flexibility, ambiguous boundary lines of cultures, and a focus on representations of the world (pp. 167-170). Ritzer makes specific reference to affinity credit card programs in his discussion of initiatives of credit card firms designed to find new customers and to maintain their loyalty (pp. 45, 77). Affinity cards are also referenced because of the tendency for secrecy in terms of the percentage of charges from the card which go to a particular affinity group (p. 113).

While Ritzer's book touches on several of the theoretical concepts and the object of study of this dissertation, the present project is distinct in a number of ways. First, the strength of Ritzer's study, its broad scope and coverage of a wide range of theories and concrete credit card programs, is also its major limitation. Ritzer provides only a brief overview of the work of Simmel, Weber, and Marx, and raises but fails to address in detail the themes of modernism and postmodernism, rationality and nonrationality, Americanization, consumerism, and the like. This study
provides a more detailed theoretical treatment of the major theories of money that have been developed, and the relation of money to social relations.

In addition, this dissertation is centered on the notion that credit card programs, particularly affinity credit card programs, promote more than just Americanism in the global marketplace. This study focuses on the way in which affinity credit card programs function as communication processes for the construction and interpretation of various conceptualizations of community. While Ritzer mentions different types of affinity organizations that act as participants in affinity credit card programs, he notes only in passing that the incentive of the banks in these programs is to increase credit card usage, failing to address the processes by which affinity credit card programs are created and function. Ritzer's emphasis is primarily on the role of credit cards in the dissemination of Americanism, and its accompanying characteristics, to global consumer markets. In contrast, this dissertation highlights the role of affinity credit cards in the communication of community networks at the sub-national or transnational level of race and culture.

Consistent with this emphasis on the role of affinity credit cards as a communication medium is this study's focus on programs targeted to African Americans. This reveals another contrast to Ritzer's work, which primarily looks at the issue of race from the standpoint of how credit card programs can be used as a means of exclusionary discrimination (p. 25). In one of the few scholarly studies done on the subject, it was found that race was a significant variable for the use of bank credit cards but not for
nonbank credit cards (Lindley & Selby, 1977). However, that study, based on a multiple discriminant analysis, did not explore the reasons for these distinctions, other than to identify other variables, such as income and education, which were shown to be factors for Blacks in "determining" their use of financial services. An analysis such as that conducted in this study is needed to identify the reasons for the development of affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks.

A more recent study takes a more direct look at the relationship between credit cards and social identity. Feinberg, Westgate & Burroughs (1992) found that the value of credit cards goes beyond their utility. Their semiotic study of users of credit cards led to the conclusion that particular credit cards convey information about the users' social identity. Observers perceived differences between people who differed in their choice of credit cards. However, they found that these perceived differences did not reflect actual differences in the self-described identities of people. This study, while valuable in illustrating the role of credit cards in communicating meanings and identities, was limited to general types of credit cards, and did not include affinity credit card programs. Thus, the type of identity theorized and studied by Weinberg, et. al was more focused on individual personality type than on the conceptualization of a collective sense of community or group identity that is the focus of the present study.

Crawford (1994) connects credit cards and the communication of social relations by the use of symbolic or metaphysical metaphors. He describes credit cards as a way of gaining insight into the even newer phenomenon of electronic fund transfers (p. 219). According to Crawford,
if credit cards and electronic transfers replace the use of paper money and coins, there are dramatic symbolic implications. With the movement of money becoming increasingly abstract and invisible, it begins to resemble ancient notions of the origins of money in the worship of unseen divinities. Crawford makes an intriguing argument about the symbolic nature of money, and its role in human understandings of their surroundings. However, he does not extend his discussion to the area of affinity credit card programs and their capacity to articulate the symbolic aspects of community to collectivities such as African Americans.

Coleman (1990) states that in the developing cashless society, sellers no longer place trust in the customer. Instead they now place their trust in the promise by the central clearinghouse of debts (such as Visa or Mastercard) that it will pay (see also Liu, 1997, for a discussion of trust in the context of electronic trading networks on the World Wide Web). The issue of the transfer of trust from human to electronic networks is of relevance to this study because it offers another illustration of how credit card programs can serve as alternative media for the communication of traditional values. However, the studies on trust in electronic networks does not reach the heart of the present study, which is an examination of the mechanisms by which affinity credit card programs are designed and operated as a means of constructing and interpreting community.

Another area in which there is some literature on credit card programs is in the area broadly defined as the political economy of telecommunication or critical telecommunication studies. This literature is generally focused on the privacy, surveillance or social control aspects of
credit cards, due to their connection to networked databases. For example, James Rule (1973) raises the issues of surveillance and social control in the context of the organization of the fledgling BankAmericard credit card system (later renamed Visa) (pp. 223-268). In a study conducted in the late 1960's, Rule notes that BankAmericard, like virtually all other consumer credit schemes, relied primarily on preventative or pre-emptive forms of social control. These included detailed screening of applications and the monitoring of credit card transaction via the imposition of maximum charging limits beyond which a merchant was required to obtain telephone authorization from BankAmericard headquarters (pp. 232-249). Despite the occasional need to impose coercive measures on delinquent cardholders, Rule notes that preventative or pre-emptive forms of social control were much cheaper and a generally preferred means of ensuring compliance than the imposition of more forceful sanctions.

Other critical scholars have focused on the surveillance component of information-communication technologies, which include credit card networks, in the creation and maintenance of various forms of consumer discipline or control (D. Lyon, 1994; Rule, et al., 1980; Robins & Webster, 1988; Samarajiva, 1996; Webster & Robins, 1989). Related to the issue of manipulation of consumption is concern about whether the segmentation aspect of the marketing technologies may be used for redlining, another form of social control that involves the exclusion of certain groups from access to goods or services based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or other criteria (Gandy, 1993a, 1993b; Larson, 1992). A recently published book is totally devoted to the ways in which advertisers are
"breaking up" America and the implications of this process for both the media and society (Turow, 1997).

This manipulation of consumption behavior via geodemographic systems has also been identified as including attempts to control the social identities of consumers by placing them into manageable clusters or segments that are preestablished. Limited opportunities for consumer resistance to the system include the abandonment of meaning or efforts at tricking the system (Goss, 1995).

While this literature on surveillance and social control is useful in its focus on the manipulative potential of information-communication networks on consumers and the potential for exclusion based on factors such as race, it does not address the role of programs such as affinity credit card initiatives in the construction of community. Goss's (1995) argument that geodemographic systems artificially simplify the complexities of social identity fails to detail the mechanisms by which messages regarding identity or community are developed, communicated, negotiated, and rejected by consumers, without abandoning meaning or tricking the system. In addition, the conditions underlying decisions to exclude African Americans from target marketing efforts at times, while including them at others, is not emphasized in the critical telecommunication literature.

The strategies underlying target marketing activities is addressed in more detail in an orthodox stream of literature that is more consistent with mainstream marketing or sociology. Works including Weiss's *The Clustering of America* (1988) address the criteria which are used to establish
various clustering systems for marketing purposes. While Weiss describes clusters of African Americans, such as "Black Enterprise," constructed by Claritas Corporation as part of the PRIZM ("Potential Rating Index for Zip Markets") geodemographic clustering system, this cluster is only used for identification purposes for firms that wish to engage in target marketing to individuals who are included in that cluster. The creation of these clusters for marketers does not involve a direct effort on the part of Claritas Corporation to expressly attempt to encourage members of the "Black Enterprise" cluster to view their membership in that particular cluster as an expression of community cohesion or group identity. While they may receive similar or identical marketing appeals from marketers that use the PRIZM system, the membership in a particular cluster is more important for the segmentation efforts of marketers than for the establishment or enhancement of relationships between members of a particular cluster.

This study takes a different approach in its emphasis on the processes underlying the use of affinity credit card programs to identify and communicate concepts of community to African Americans, acknowledging surveillance technologies as part of the process. This study includes the assumption that while consumers might be the subject of surveillance via credit card technologies, the resulting affinity card marketing efforts remain an imperfect process, with consumers exercising agency to interpret messages in ways that are potentially different than intended by the affinity card marketers.

The preceding discussion reveals that while some attention has been paid to the credit card phenomenon by social scientists, the
communication of notions and expectations of community at the sub-national or transnational level has not been a topic of study. The recent proliferation of affinity credit card programs in general, and those targeted to African Americans in particular, is a development that raises fundamental issues regarding the role of this monetary form as a communication process. These issues include the nature of the constructions, expressions and interpretations of racial community among credit card issuers, marketers, and affinity organizations. In addition, these issues incorporate the conditions underlying the decisions of organizations to create and market these particular financial products at this particular time. Examination of these questions in this study provides a novel opportunity to gain an initial foothold that will be of value for new avenues of research which are beginning to unfold.

Methodology

The empirical component of this study is centered on an examination of affinity credit card programs as communication processes and the conditions under which these processes are used by affinity credit card marketers to construct and interpret Black virtual communities. Because of the relational nature of these phenomena, this study emphasizes a qualitative research approach, drawing on a critical realist framework as described by Andrew Sayer (1992). An important goal of this study in considering the issue of community is to distinguish between "substantial" relations of connection and interaction, as opposed to "formal" relations of similarity and dissimilarity, relations which require no actual interaction (Sayer, p. 88). Clear explication of the general concept
of interaction, and the specific nature of the interaction between institutional and individual actors in affinity credit card programs, is central in this study to provide a basis for understanding the existence and nature of Black communities. This study assumes that "community" requires some form of interaction, shared commitment, or common identity among its members; however, consistent with the discussion of community provided above, such interaction, shared commitment, or common identity need not exist in spatial proximity if other common conditions are present.

Another useful distinction made by Sayer is that between external or contingent relations, on the one hand, and internal or necessary conditions on the other. Contingent or external relations describe an interaction between entities in which either entity can exist without the existence of the other. Necessary or internal relations are those in which the very status or existence of one of the related entities, in a particular context, is dependent on its relation to the other entity. A clear definition of the particular relationship under study is crucial to avoid confusion when making these determinations (pp. 89-92).

The object of study in this dissertation can be described broadly as the contemporary consumer financial environment. This particular focus of study includes the relations between the affinity credit card programs and communities that are examined in the empirical study below, and also provides room for the comparison of relations among different constructions of community and alternative consumer financial networks.
Where the relations under examination are determined to be necessary, they constitute a distinguishable social "structure" (Sayer, pp. 96-97).

Once a structure has been identified, understanding of its nature and the conditions under which it functions requires causal analysis. According to the critical realist view incorporated in this study, causality does not involve a "cause and effect" relationship between discrete events. Instead, causality refers to the "causal powers" or "causal liabilities" of objects or relations, or their "ways of acting" or "mechanisms." Causal claims are not about regularities between separate things or events, but are instead about what an object or structural relation is like and what it has the potential to do and only derivatively what it will do in any particular situation. The particular mechanisms exist necessarily as a result of their object's nature (Sayer, pp. 104-105).

The key question in this form of causal analysis is not that some external relation causes a change in a structure or object. The topic of primary interest, instead, is what it is about the nature of the object or structure that enables it to act or react in a particular manner. Whether a causal mechanism is actually manifested, activated, or exercised on any occasion depends on contingent conditions. Similarly, when causal mechanisms are manifested, the actual effects will also depend upon contingent conditions. Of key importance here is the recognition that these contingent conditions which lead to manifestation of causal mechanisms and particular effects are not uncaused, only that they are caused by different mechanisms (p. 107).
In the context of this study of Black-targeted affinity credit card programs, this methodological approach is revealed as an empirical focus on the identification of the structural relations or nature of the programs, and the mechanisms or causal powers and liabilities which necessarily exist as a result of the structure of the programs under examination. The goal of this examination is to determine the ways in which these affinity credit card programs and their mechanisms develop and operate as communication processes. While significant, the issues of whether or how any communicated constructions of community are interpreted by affinity credit cardholders is of secondary importance in this particular study. The issue of the effects of these communicative mechanisms, which are the result of contingent conditions, requires a detailed analysis of individual cardholders that is beyond the scope of this study.

In conducting the empirical study, the detailed focus of observation is on the structures of two Black-targeted affinity credit card programs, the UNITY Visa card program and the America's Black Colleges Visa Program. An additional Black-targeted affinity credit card program, the proposed Church of God in Christ (COGIC) Visa, which was announced but not introduced, is examined in less detailed fashion for comparative purposes.

The structural analysis is conducted based on five "foci of observation." These are:

1. Institutional;
2. Technological medium;
3. Pattern of access;
4. Content of communication products; and
5. Interpretative.
While these five foci in practice overlap in concrete communication environments, in this study they are explicitly identified and abstracted for analytical purposes. This preliminary identification of different foci of observation allows for their individual and comparative examination. This approach allows for conclusions drawn from each isolated area of analytical focus to be placed in proper context when reintegrated into the overall conclusion.

Significance

There are a multitude of compelling reasons for this study of Black-oriented affinity credit card programs as a medium for the communication of community. The analysis of money has not been a focal point in the social sciences (e.g., Doyle, 1992; p. 641). Money has been described as the "single most important neglected topic in sociology," and "probably the most neglected topic in all of the social sciences." (Collins, 1976, p. 190). It has been argued that the nature of money has not been dealt with adequately by either economics, where the nature of money is taken as given or defined by its function, or in sociology, where money is generally approached as a sign or symbol, or where it is viewed from a Marxist perspective as a product or reflection of the economic infrastructure (Smelt, p. 204).

The particular focus on credit cards as a monetary form is justified because of their high level of prominence in contemporary society, in terms of total consumer usage and debt and their centrality to the economic system. This key role make credit cards a primary source of insight into larger social issues (Ritzer, 1995, pp. 2-3). While a study
entirely on traditional credit card programs would reveal valuable areas of interest, this study on affinity credit card programs highlights the relations between specially designed affinity credit card programs and the particular constructions of community for which those affinity credit cards have been designed.

Affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks are a very recent phenomenon in an affinity credit card market that is itself less than two decades old. Important issues of race and economics are revealed as part of this analysis. Most issues involving Blacks, banking and credit in the United States involve a history of exclusionary discrimination, which has resulted in legislation such as the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977. Given this tradition, the creation of credit card programs specifically designed to target Blacks as a market raises intriguing social as well as economic issues.

This affinity credit card focus is also important as a means of examining the conditions surrounding the participation in Black-targeted affinity credit card programs by mainstream Black charitable organizations which traditionally have been multi-racial or non-racial in their funding appeals. The extent to which these affinity card programs are exclusively or predominately Black-focused raises questions about the motivations for such a marketing strategy, such as the reasons why Black charities are choosing to target a racially homogeneous market, and why they have elected to use affinity card programs in addition to or in place of direct appeals to the public. Key issues of interest include the growing purchasing power of Black consumers, projected at $469 billion for 1997
(Humphreys, 1997), and reports that, despite this fact, donations from Black middle and upper income people to Black-oriented charities are underdeveloped (Kaufman, 1996).

Of particular importance in this study is the issue of the role of affinity credit card programs as communication processes for the negotiation of Black virtual communities. This topic is important not only from a racial perspective, but also from the perspective of those who are attempting to construct new forms of social relations using the internet and other emerging electronic technologies. The mechanisms underlying affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks provide insight not only into other affinity card initiatives, but also into the issues underlying the development of virtual communities in general.

It is important to note that since affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks on a nationwide basis are new developments, the findings which are presented below are not definitive, especially in terms of donation levels as indicators of the extent of virtual Black communities which are being constructed via Black-oriented affinity credit card programs. However, given the embryonic nature of the object of study, such indeterminate results are not unexpected. Rather than serving to undercut the value of the findings and conclusions reached, the fact that the study addresses phenomena that are not fully developed provides the opportunity to examine an evolving process which incorporates changing technological, financial, and racial considerations. Further analysis of these programs will enhance the findings which have been obtained in
this study, and will provide additional insight into monetary forms which are even less defined than affinity credit card programs.

Finally, rather than lessening in importance, issues of race and community are increasingly being debated in academia and throughout various segments of society. The recent debate over a proposal to create an official "multi-racial" category on the U.S. census and its potential impact on community cohesion is an example of the continuing controversy over the issue of race in America. This study will provide another means of examining how these concepts are being constructed in the context of a contemporary monetary form which operates as a complex communication network over space.

Outline of Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 addresses theories which examine the impact of commonly-accepted communication media on relations of community. The sophisticated interplay between communication media and spatial relations is revealed as central in understanding the impact of recent transformations in the conditions that have historically been used to identify traditional communities. Chapter 3 presents a theoretical examination of the relationship between monetary forms and traditional understandings of community. This chapter develops a theoretical justification for viewing the operations of monetary forms not only as mechanisms that destroy traditional relations of community, but also as communication processes with the potential to maintain, protect, and reconstruct traditional community bonds in conventional as well as
unconventional spatial contexts. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the nature of credit card programs in general, and affinity credit card programs in particular, addressing the conditions underlying their creation, operation, and impact on society. The role of these monetary forms as spatially distanciating communication processes is developed in this chapter. Chapter 5 details the methodology used in the empirical case study which examines affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks. Chapter 6 presents a detailed empirical analysis of the Black-targeted affinity credit card programs as communication processes for purposes of identifying constructions and interpretations of contemporary Black communities. This examination is taken from five interrelated, but analytically distinct, foci of observation. The final chapter presents conclusions about the relations and characteristics of community as constructed through the affinity credit card programs examined, discusses the implications for the study of other monetary forms for similar purposes, and discusses the practical relevance of the study.
CHAPTER 2
THEORIES OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA, SPACE AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

This chapter addresses theoretical work on the impact of communication media on relations of community, particularly in terms of spatial factors. This chapter will show how different communication technologies have a multi-faceted nature as messages in themselves, depending on the technology in question, and as conduits or media for the exchange of various ideas, concepts, and meanings. Highlighting these diverse aspects of communication technologies is central to understanding the relations between communication and community, and is of utmost importance for the next chapter's presentation of the theories which address the impact of money on community.

This chapter begins by addressing the theories on the impact of various forms of communication on traditional community relations. These theories range from claims that mass communication technologies result in the demise of community, to others that contend that traditional communities are retained in the midst of mass society that emerged concurrently with the growth of mass communication. This chapter concludes with a discussion of communication technologies which allow the establishment of new forms of community networks beyond particular
spatial boundaries. This discussion of "virtual communities" reveals the potential for the delinking of the element of spatial proximity from other characteristics of traditional communities, such as kinship or ethnicity. The chapter concludes with a summary and presentation of a foundation for the theoretical discussion of money to follow in the next chapter.

**Mass Media and Decline of Community**

Many of the founders of the discipline of sociology viewed the rise of urban society as a force which resulted in the corresponding decline of traditional relations of community. These views describe the decline in community as operating in opposite directions: toward individualism from one perspective, and toward mass society on the other. McQuail (1994) notes that the media were early on associated with the problems of rapid urbanization, social mobility and the decline of traditional communities, giving rise to individualism, impersonality and a loss of traditional values. He also describes the alternative view of the relation between mass media and social integration, which holds that mass media has the capacity to unite scattered individual within the same large audience, or to integrate newcomers into urban communities by providing a common set of values, ideas and information and helping with the process of identity formation. This process has been viewed as binding together of large-scale, differentiated modern societies more effectively than older mechanisms of religious, family or group control (pp. 70-71). Thus, the mass media are identified as being capable both of supporting and of subverting social cohesion, but at extremes which undermine the
viability of communities which function based on traditional values and characteristics.

For example, Rothenbuhler (1991) notes that while the work of Ferdinand Tönnies on the impact of modern society on community did not focus on communication explicitly, Tönnies' analysis, and that of subsequent researchers on the subject, is marked by clear presumptions and implications regarding community. According to these assumptions, communication in Gemeinschaft relations, characteristic of community, is about meaning and aims at understanding, while communication in the Gesellschaft relations of modern society is about information and aims at utility (Rothenbuhler, p. 64). The decreasing dependence on members of locally-based kinship groups was viewed as dissolving the boundaries of community and creating the type of individual exchanges which are essential in modern society.

These themes were picked up by members of the Chicago school of sociology during its "golden era" of 1915 to 1935 (Rogers, 1994). Robert Park and his pupil Herbert Blumer emphasized the potentially positive role of mass media for assimilation of immigrants into their new nation (McQuail, 1994, p. 73). Park's interest in urban life, sparked by studies under Georg Simmel, concentrated on the disruptions and social disorganization of the city, especially among new immigrants (Rogers, 1994, p. 180). To the Chicago school, communication was more than just the imparting or exchanging of information: communication created and maintained society. Rogers argues that the Chicago School provided a more unified theory of communication's place in society than did the "so-
called four founders" of Lasswell, Lewin, Lazarsfeld, and Hovland (p. 196). With the growing impact of mass media and scholarly emphasis on mass society in the 1950s and 1960s, sociological research on local communities entered a period of decline (L. Lyon, 1987, pp. 14-15).

The role of the press as a mass medium has also been implicated in the transformation from local community-based forms of social formation to more extensive geographical conceptualizations of community. In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) defines community not in its traditional, kinship-based, local sense, but as a national construction based largely on national newspaper coverage, in the form of print capitalism, in establishing the basis for an "imagined" sense of national consciousness and community.

The role of communication media in the integration of traditionally-defined, small-scale communities into mass society or macro-level national "communities" extends beyond print and broadcast media. Harold Innis (1956, 1972, 1991/1951) was a pioneer in examining the role of commercial and communication channels in providing the foundation for national autonomy or international integration. Karl Deutsch (1969) describes the development of national integration as an evolution of society from kinship groups or "tribes," defined as "a group of people who think that they are related to each other," to "peoples," defined as "a community of shared meanings" or a group of people who have "interlocking habits of communication" (1969, pp. 12-14). The development of contemporary nation-states that survive their leaders is a condition of the subsequent transition from "peoples" into politically
integrated nation-states (pp. 16-20). Deutsch (1979) has also noted that the relative proportions of domestic as compared to international communication and commercial transactions is indicative of the relative strength of interests groups within nations and the relative influence between nations.

Marshall McLuhan (1964) took the project of analyzing the social impact of media to an extreme level, studying as communication technologies items as diverse as clothing, housing, photographs, weapons, and even money, which is the subject of the next chapter. His well-known pronouncement "the medium is the message" reflects in a concise form the role of communication technologies as meaningful and as having profound implications for social organization and individual understanding. This research emphasis has been applied to other communication technologies, such as the printing press, the telegraph, the telephone, television, and satellite technologies (Rogers, 1994, p. 484).

The work of these and other scholars can be described as "medium theory" (Meyrowitz, 1994). Meyrowitz identifies a consistent pattern in the "first generation" of medium theory which sets forth the nature of the interaction of media and culture over time. This pattern can be distinguished by three broad phases of civilization matched to three major forms of communicating: the transition from (1) traditional oral societies to (2) modern print societies (via a transitional scribal phase) to (3) an electronic global culture (pp. 53-58). Traditional oral societies are defined as being dependent on physical presence. The advent of writing in the transitional scribal phase is viewed as breaking down tribal cohesion and
the oral mode of thinking. This allows people to share experiences to others who read the same material regardless of the physical distance between them (pp. 54-55). Print, even more than writing, is viewed by medium theorists as undoing the "tribal balance of the senses," leading to a dominance of the sequential sense of sight over the simultaneity of the aural sense (p. 56). The break from intense, ongoing aural involvement "distances people from sound, touch, and direct response and allows people to become more introspective and more individualistic," leading to an increase in rationality and linear reasoning (p. 56). Medium theorists view global electronic culture as bringing back the sensory simultaneity of oral societies, but without the physical limitations of time or space. Electronic media is seen as bypassing group associations and national boundaries, weakening their authority and power (pp. 57-58).

Meyrowitz (1994) develops what he refers to as a "second generation" medium theory analysis of the three phases of culture based on the concept of social roles. He asserts that social roles should be viewed as "fluid information-networks that are susceptible to restructuring through changes in information-flow patterns, such as those brought on by changes in media use" (p. 60). He views all social roles as capable of being described in terms of an information-network-sensitive triad of social roles: group identity, socialization, and hierarchy. Group identity is defined as roles of affiliation or "being," such as male vs. female. Socialization involves roles of transition or "becoming," such as child to adult. Hierarchy describes roles of authority, such as employer to employee (p. 60). This triad of social roles is used to present a three-phase
presentation of cultural change based on changes in communication media.

Meyrowitz's three phase chronological framework retains the basic elements of first generation medium theory: an initial oral conception of social roles, followed by literate forms of social roles (including a transitional scribal phase), concluding in electronic conceptions of social roles. Oral conceptions of social roles, for example, are defined by Meyrowitz as spatially rooted and supported, with relatively low levels of social differentiation. Spatial segregation is required in oral cultures to establish social differentiation (pp. 62-64). Print technology leads to more specialization, segmentation and heterogeneity in social roles and functions due to differential levels of access to particular printed information, either because of different levels of literacy or because information is made differentially available at different levels in the hierarchy (pp. 64-66). Electronic technology is seen as making the boundaries of all social spheres -- group identity, socialization stages, and ranks of hierarchies -- more permeable. The social spheres established in print society are viewed in electronic culture as being transcended and replaced with new groupings, which do not require actual spatial or social proximity. The social spheres which are capable of being transcended include ethnicity, race, neighborhood, and social class (pp. 66-69).

The assumptions in the scholarly literature on the role of communication technologies in overcoming community relations and boundaries is also evident in literature in the development field. Prominent scholars such as Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964) have
addressed the role of mass communication in overcoming traditional community distinctions in order to establish the social integration necessary for national development. Much of the subsequent research on telecommunication and development, such as Hudson and Parker (1975), are built on the assumption that national integration is desirable and that the cultural boundaries and traditions of local communities are best removed (Samarajiva & Shields, 1990).

**Mass Media and Maintenance of Community**

Despite the work of the early sociologists who considered the rise of urban society to be the death knell of traditional community, some scholars in the American intellectual tradition, such as Dewey, Mead, and Cooley, noted the continuing existence of relations of community in this environment. Although the work of the Chicago sociologists viewed mass media as having the potential of integrating new immigrants into American society, it also acknowledged that the small scale geography of the neighborhood was the location of Gemeinschaft even within the alienating context of the city. Works by Robert Park (1922) and others have focused on the role of the press in the development of community identity and connectedness. Several scholars in the journalism research area have conducted studies focusing on the relationship between the press and commitment to the local community (Jeffres, Dobos & Lee, 1988; Jeffres, Dobos & Sweeney, 1987; Stamm, 1985; Stamm & Fortini-Campbell, 1983; Stamm & Weis, 1986).

Wellman provides another example of the maintenance of territorial community in urban society with his observation of
"community saved" situations, in which spatially-concentrated neighborhood and kinship solidarities continue to flourish in industrial society (1979). Other researchers who address the maintenance of community relations within the urban context include Fischer (1982) and Macionis (1978).

From another perspective, the study of "sub-cultures" beginning formally in the 1970s within the cultural studies literature of the Birmingham School can be viewed as an example of communities which persist despite the integrating character of mass media. Like the work of the Chicago School of the early 20th century, the cultural studies literature focuses on understanding the social experience of subgroups in society. Significant, however, is that the critical approach associated with the Birmingham School shifted from the question of ideology embedded in media texts to the question of how ideology might be "read" by its audience. Stuart Hall's (1980) model of "encoding-decoding media discourse" represented the media text as located between its creators, who "encoded" or presented meaning in a certain way, and its audience, who "decoded" its meaning according to their own unique social situations and frames of meaning. Morley's work on "differential decoding" was another audience centered theory designed to find evidence of resistance to dominant media messages (McQuail, 1994, pp. 100-101).

**Individualized Media and Virtual Communities**

Meyrowitz (1985) argues that social roles should be understood in terms of social situations, which he contends have been until recently tied to physical place. He sees the evolution in electronic media as changing
the logic of the social order by restructuring the relationship between physical space and social place (i.e., situation), altering the ways in which people transmit and receive social information, and altering the sense of shared group identity.

With the introduction of new communication networks which link people as well as machines, such as the World Wide Web, commenters have identified the development of new forms of social networks referred to as "virtual communities" (Rheingold, 1993; Wellman et al., 1996). A key element of these technologically-supported networks is their capability for facilitating "many-to-many" or "peer-to-peer" communication, as opposed to broadcast or uni-directional media. These interactive communication technologies greatly expand the types of social interactivity which were previously available in a limited fashion via the telephone.

The role of "computer-supported social networks" (CSSNs) for the development of new human relationships can be viewed as a technologically supported continuation of a long-term shift to communities organized by shared interests rather than by shared neighborhoods or kinship groups. When the shared interests are important to them, those involved in the same virtual community may have more in common than those living in the same proximate space. However, these virtual communities can also develop based on shared cultural foundations, shaped by the cultural backgrounds of the users of particular networks (Wellman et al., 1996, p. 224-225).

While Wellman et al. (1996) argue that CSSNs and the resulting virtual communities are continuing the shift away from social relations
based on shared neighborhood or kinship group, there is reason to consider that assumption more closely. While the spatial proximity that once characterized traditional communities has certainly been fragmented, point-to-point technologies -- from postal service to telephones to CSSNs -- not only offer the opportunity for relations based on non-traditional bonds. These technologies also provide a means for the re-establishment or maintenance of traditional relationships in a spatially dispersed fashion. There are some indications that many of the traditional ties of ethnicity, race and religion remain important despite the nationalizing and globalizing tendencies inherent in the emerging communication environment. Kotkin (1992) asserts that despite the predictions of a rational and universal world order, certain globally dispersed ethnic groups are using three key characteristics to become leaders in the global economic system: (1) a strong ethnic identity and sense of mutual interdependence; (2) a global network based on mutual trust that allows collective functioning beyond national or regional boundaries; and (3) a passion for technical or other knowledge from all possible sources (p. 4-5). He offers the Jews, British, Japanese, Chinese, and Indians as examples of such economically successful global tribes.

Summary

This chapter has discussed various theories of the impact of communication technologies and processes on relations of community. The founders of the field of sociology implicitly addressed the role of communication in the destruction of traditional communities, as a component of the intrusion of urban industrial society. Early theorists of
mass communication similarly saw the role of mass media as central in the severing of traditional community relations, resulting either in impersonal individualism or integration into mass society.

Later research on immigrant groups in the U.S. in the early 20th century, as well as on sub-cultures in the 1970s, shows that mass media do not result in the irresistible absorption of all sub-groups into mass society or into atomistic, interchangeable individuals functioning in impersonal exchange situations. The persistence of bonds of neighborhood, friendship, and even kinship in the midst of urban pressures indicates that the impact of mass communication is not deterministic. Opportunities and exclusions exist which provide for the co-existence of some of the elements of traditional community in the urban context, either by choice or by externally-imposed exclusion or segregation.

The phenomenon of computer-mediated human communication has led to the creation of ongoing social relations which are conducted beyond the limited spatial boundaries of traditional communities or the broader confines of the city or even the nation-state. The proliferation of "virtual communities" is an indication that in addition to shared interests providing the basis for nontraditional forms of social interaction, certain elements of traditional community, such as kinship, racial and ethnic links, are persisting beyond the bounds of spatial proximity. This development has profound implications for our definitions of what constitutes a community in the contemporary context. While this phenomenon has gained a great deal of attention with the development of technologies such as the World Wide Web, virtual communities can also
be identified as being maintained via the use of communication means as mundane as mail, telephone or transportation networks. The next chapter presents a review of theoretical work on the nature of monetary forms and the ways in which they function as communication processes in the development and transformation of various conceptualizations of community.
CHAPTER 3
THEORIES OF MONETARY FORMS, SPACE AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

This chapter presents the argument that monetary forms can be usefully studied as communication processes, and that this explicit focus provides insight into the impact of monetary forms on traditional relations of community. In developing the argument that monetary forms are communication processes with effects on community, the chapter follows the approach of the previous chapter. First, theories of the destructive effects of money on traditional community relations are presented. Next, the chapter addresses certain theories which contend that traditional cultural relations are retained in the usage of money, despite efforts at standardization and uniformity. Finally, the chapter presents theories that discuss the role of money as a virtual medium or abstract essence which allows the communication of different concepts and meanings across space. This provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of affinity credit card programs as communication processes, for purposes of examining the conditions underlying their development and their relation to community.
Monetary Forms as Destructive of Community

There are two major discourses in the literature which describe monetary forms as destructive of traditional community relations. These two discourses have been described as the discourse of "suspicion" and the discourse of "liberation" (Leyshon & Thrift, 1997). The discourse of suspicion is based on three judgments: that money is out of control, that those who deal in money and credit are placed "beyond the pale," and that money is a corrosive force in human societies, especially as part of the rise of individualism (p. 32). An early exponent of this view was Aristotle, reflecting the theme of the general condemnation of money and trade in the light of an ideal of household self-sufficiency and production for use. Trade was only deemed to be natural to the extent that it was oriented to restoring equilibrium between households with a surplus and those with a shortage. Profit-oriented trade was deemed unnatural under this view, and is deemed destructive of the bonds between households. This perspective was picked up by St. Thomas Aquinas and adopted by the Christian Church in the Middle Ages, and ultimately was adopted into the labor theory of value that was applied by Karl Marx (Leyshon & Thrift, pp. 32-34; Parry & Bloch, 1989, pp. 2-3). Harris (1989) describes this current in European anthropological discourse as the "romantic" or "nostalgic" perspective, in which the appearance of money is treated as the sign of alienation, individualism and the breakdown of social and communal values (p. 234).

At the other extreme is an alternative "liberating" discourse which sees money as a more benign influence on social life, despite the fact that it
loosens the bonds of traditional community in order to allow members to enjoy the happiness and prosperity which result from the individual pursuit of monetary self-gain. This view is based on the argument that condoned money-making as a relatively harmless vice that could be positively harnessed to the public good as a curb on more dangerous passions (Parry & Bloch, p. 3). The liberating view of money is identified with Montesquieu, Spinoza, Steuart, and Smith (Leyshon & Thrift, pp. 34-35). Harris (1989) describes this view of money as signaling the advent of rationality in social behavior and the sign of civilization, freeing humans from the shackles of dependency (p. 234).

Between the two extreme discourses on money, the "suspicious" and the "liberating," is a "schizophrenic" view on monetary exchange which has been identified most directly with Georg Simmel (Leyshon & Thrift, 1997, pp. 35-37). The discussion below begins with the view of money as liberating, then moves on to the discussion of money as suspicious. Simmel's work is discussed under both categories. Throughout the discussion, references to money as a communication process are highlighted.

**Money as Liberating**

A major tradition in the theorization of money views the breaking down of the feudal hierarchy as a progressive development. According to this view, money quantifies the formerly qualitative relations of traditional communities. Money serves as the signifier of progress by dissolving bonds of personal dependency and liberating the individual to choose how to earn a living (Harris, 1989, p. 238). This perspective views
money as a neutral medium that provides equality to social relations, freeing them from caste or hierarchical restrictions.

Theorists of money's role as liberating rely on assumptions of its neutrality. Two kinds of monetary neutrality can be identified: logical and political (Dodd, 1994). Logical neutrality, found in classical and neoclassical views of money, suggests that when the economy is in equilibrium state, the money supply mediates production and exchange of goods, making no difference to real economic values. Political neutrality suggests that money can express inequities of wealth and power but can never generate them (p. 3).

Examples of the neutrality of money are most visible in orthodox economics. A number of economists have celebrated money's rationalizing character, including Charles Cooley, Alfred Marshall, Wesley Mitchell, and Joseph Schumpeter (Zelizer, 1994, p. 9-10). The rise of industrialization has been noted as the factor that allowed capital, in the form of money and commercial paper, to serve as the major medium for communication and control of the world system (Beniger, 1986, p. 169).

In offering an anthropological perspective on the manner in which money serves a liberating or civilizing function, Codere (1968) develops a model of money as a symbolic system. In this model, money can be integrated with other symbolic systems which are in "logical developmental order": M = money-stuff; N = number/counting system; A = amounts/weights and measures system; and W = writing system. An M-system is the most basic, while the MNAW-system is the most sophisticated (pp. 560-563). Codere provides an example of the conflict
between systems, in which the Tiv people of Nigeria were forced by the British to use a MNAW money, but conceptualized it at the "lower" MN level of symbolic power. Codere notes that the Tiv, along with other African kingdoms, did not fully understand or accept the "shatteringly simplifying" idea of British money, and held onto their own ways of symbolizing money (pp. 572-73). Codere contends that money as a symbol has the same moral neutrality possessed by anything in the technological and symbolic world (p. 575).

Another example of the argument that money's communication aspect is logically neutral is exhibited in the sociological work of Talcott Parsons (1967). Parsons makes an explicit claim that money is a communication medium, but limits its role in the social system to its "utility." He describes money as a "mechanism of communication," a "highly specialized language," and a "generalized symbolic medium of inducement" (p. 273). Money is symbolic, according to Parsons, because it "has no value in use but only in exchange, that is for possession of things having utility. The use of money is thus a mode of communication of offers to purchase or to sell things of utility with and for money." (pp. 306-07). Parsons contends that money not only resembles language, money is a very specialized language, i.e., "a generalized medium of communication through the use of symbols given meaning within a code" (p. 357). As a symbolic medium, money represents the economic utility of the "real assets" for which it is exchangeable, but it represents the concrete objects so abstractly that it is neutral among the competing claims of various other
orders in which the same objects are significant. Thus, money becomes the great mediator of the instrumental use of goods and services (p. 508).

Ganssmann (1988) asserts that Parsons' analysis of money is constrained by two limitations. First, Parsons' dependence on orthodox economic theory results in a failure to explain how money as a symbol developed, how its use was institutionalized, and how confidence in it can be maintained. Second, Parsons' definition of money is limited by his argument that it is symbolic of utility or value, because a symbol cannot represent itself or measure itself (Ganssmann, 1988, pp. 293-294).

A forceful argument in favor of applying a communication perspective to money and its liberating impact on community is found in the work of Marshall McLuhan. In Understanding Media (1964), McLuhan devotes an entire chapter to money, coincidentally subtitled, "The poor man's credit card." He describes money as a social metaphor or translator, like writing. He states that

In nonliterate societies money relates to the other organs of society quite simply. The role of money is enormously increased after money begins to foster specialism and separation of social functions. Money becomes, in fact, the principal means of interrelating the ever more specialist activities of literate society. (p. 138)

Money is clearly identified here as a communication medium which is a key factor in the transformation from traditional community to complex, "literate" society. Extending the argument of the role of money from traditional community to other strictly bounded socio-economic systems, McLuhan states that

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Men left the closed world of the tribe for the "open society," exchanging an ear for an eye by means of the technology of writing. The alphabet in particular enabled them to break out of the charmed circle and resonating magic of the tribal world. A similar process of economic change from the closed to the open society, from mercantilism and the economic protection of national trade to the open market ideal of the free-traders, was accomplished in more recent times by means of the printed word, and by moving from metallic to paper currencies. (pp. 138-39)

McLuhan notes that money, which for centuries was the principal transmitter and exchanger of information, is now having its function increasingly transferred to science and automation (p. 142). However, he asserts that money "always retains something of its commodity and community character" (p. 132).

Georg Simmel's work has been defined by some as excessively objectivist, by others as overly philosophical or abstract, and by others still as constituting a synthesizing, integrative, or transcendental framework. The inconsistencies in his philosophy of money have been described as "schizophrenic" (Leyshon and Thrift, p. 36). However, it is clear that he views money as responsible for the elimination of traditional community relations and the restructuring of social networks based on other criteria. Giddens (1990) describes Simmel's work as the most extensive and sophisticated analysis of the connections between modernity and money. His foundational work on the subject, originally published in 1900, is The Philosophy of Money (1978/1907) ("POM"). Simmel emphasized that to understand money as a social institution requires understanding the total social framework in which it is embedded (Turner, 1992).
Zelizer (1994) argues that Simmel, like Marx and Weber, was captivated by the power of money to transform modern society, assuming that money was at the forefront of the process of rationalization, and that it was constantly advancing into and overcoming all social spaces. She focuses on Simmel’s emphasis on the manner in which the money economy breaks the personal bonds of traditional arrangements, freeing individuals to select terms and partners of economic exchange (p. 7). Similarly, Parry and Bloch (1989) assert that rather than seeing money as a reflection of other structural factors of a modern economy and society, Simmel saw money as an active agent which constitutes “the major mechanism that paves the way from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft” (p. 4). They understand Simmel as arguing that under the authority of money, the modern spirit of calculation and abstraction prevailed over an older world of feelings and imagination. Their interpretation of Simmel’s work is captured by the following statement:

Money acts as a kind of acid which inexorably dissolves cherished cultural discriminations, eats away at qualitative differences and reduces personal relations to impersonality. It naturally follows that traditional cultures that must come to terms with money will treat it as a dark satanic force tearing at the fabric of society. (Parry & Bloch, p. 6)

In the introduction to POM, Simmel prefaces his discussion by stating that he will engage in a study of the interaction between reality and the essence of money. In terms of the first two parts of POM, Simmel states that
The one part seeks to make the essence of money intelligible from the conditions and connections of life in general; conversely, the other part seeks to make the essence and organization of the latter intelligible from the effectiveness of money. (p. 54)

Simmel emphasizes that he is not merely conducting a study of economic "reality." He describes money as a mechanism for the presentation of the interaction between the material and the ideal. The significance of the POM for Simmel is not in money as such, but is instead in its ability to capture or reveal fundamental human values.

Simmel positions money as fundamental in human symbolic processes by stating that

The ability to construct such symbolic objects achieves its greatest triumph in money. For money represents pure interaction in its purest form; it makes comprehensible the most abstract concept; it is an individual thing whose essential significance is to reach beyond individualities. Thus, money is the adequate expression of the relation of man to the world, which can only be grasped in single and concrete instances, yet only really conceived when the singular becomes the embodiment of the living mental process which interweaves all singularities and, in this fashion creates reality. (p. 129)

In contrasting his definition of money to other perspectives, especially those based on historical materialism, Simmel claims that to the extent that money has other qualities than those he identifies, it is "not money proper" (p. 130). He asserts that "the metamorphosis of use-value to exchange-value in society based on commodity production, as described by Marx, is a development that seems unable to reach its consummation" (p. 58)
Simmel argues that only money, in its pure form, has attained this final stage; it is "nothing but the pure form of exchangeability" (p. 130).

Simmel identifies several roles of money: as symbol, as tool, and as instrument for transformation of interpersonal relations and creation of freedom. Simmel concludes that the significance of money is only to express the value relations between other objects (p. 147). He contends that this shift of money to mere symbol without an intrinsic value corresponds to an age of growth of intellectual abilities and of abstract thought (p. 152).

Simmel notes that although money is the

[Reification of the pure relationship between things as expressed in their economic motion. . . . It is not the objects but the people who carry on these processes, and the relations between the objects are really relations between people. . . . The dual nature of money, as a concrete and valued substance and, at the same time, as something that owes its significance to the complete dissolution of substance into motion and function, derives from the fact that money is the reification of exchange among people, the embodiment of a pure function. (p. 176)

Simmel here acknowledges money's concrete role in exchange, but emphasizes the "dissolution of substance" as exchange occurs and values are communicated. Simmel notes that

[One of the essential services performed by money is to make values more mobile. The more the significance of money as a medium of exchange, a standard of value, and a method of storing value increases in relation to its material value, the more easily it can circulate in the world in a form other than metal. (p. 192)
This observation has important implications for the spatial analysis and implications of money. Simmel continues to underline the nonmaterial significance of money by noting that

The conservation and transfer of values have traditionally been regarded as the principal functions of money, but these are only crude, secondary manifestations of its basic function. This function obviously has no inner relation to the material value of money, and indeed it becomes evident, through this function, that what is essential in money are the ideas incorporated in it, which point far beyond the significance of its material representatives. (p. 198)

Simmel here considers the decline in the significance of material, substantial forms for money to be a function of its fundamental existence in the non-material realm. He describes it as "the essence of mental activity to bring unity out of diversity" (p. 198). He argues that

The spatially extended substance is only a symbol of money, because the disconnectedness of what exists as substance contradicts the nature of money as an abstract representation of interaction. Only to the extent that the material element recedes does money become real money, that is a real integration and a point of unification of interacting elements of value, which only the mind can accomplish. (p. 198)

Here, Simmel clearly states his view that money is a unifying mechanism, which is used to integrate in the mind the segregated things which exist in the physical world of the senses. The social relations inherent in exchange acquire their interrelatedness through money; not in its physical existence, but in a mental or metaphysical context. This is a point of criticism by
historical materialists who argue that Simmel's view of money represents an inappropriate abstraction from the concrete relations of capitalism. Simmel further describes money as "the purest form of the tool;" an institution through which the individual concentrates activities and possessions in order to obtain goals that could not be directly obtained. The nature and effectiveness of money are not contained simply in its physical form, such as a coin. In addition, money's qualities are "invested in the social organizations and the supra-subjective norms that make this coin a tool of endlessly diverse and extensive uses despite its material limitations, its insignificance and rigidity" (p. 210). Simmel's expansive view of money's qualities appears to be generally consistent with the definition of monetary forms as incorporated in this study to include monetary instruments, institutions and their practices, and interpretations.

The close relationship between money and the development of modern science is not lost on Simmel. He asserts that within the historical-psychological sphere, money "by its very nature" becomes the perfect representative of a cognitive tendency in modern science as a whole: the reduction of qualitative determinations to quantitative ones (p. 277). Simmel describes money as "the example, expression or symbol of the modern emphasis on the quantitative moment" (p. 279). This observation shows that despite Simmel's philosophical view of money, he shares the rationalistic perspective of most commenters that money's quantitative nature eradicates previously existing qualitative relations and characteristics.
Finally, Simmel views money as having a contradictory role in terms of freedom and interdependency. He notes that money makes possible the "plurality of economic dependencies" through infinite flexibility and divisibility, while it also is conducive to the "removal of the personal element from human relationships" due to its "indifferent and objective nature" (p. 297). He acknowledges the added dependency resulting from the increased complexity of society and specialization of skills. On the other hand, individuals in contemporary society at the same time are "remarkably independent of every specific member of this society" in contrast to "primitive people," because significance has been transferred to the "one-sided objectivity" of an individual's contribution, which can easily be produced by any number of other people with different personalities who are "connected only by an interest that can be completely expressed in money terms" (p. 298, emphasis in original). Simmel views this development as "the most favorable situation for bringing about inner independence, the feeling of individual self-sufficiency" (p. 298).

In this view of freedom, Simmel explicitly distinguishes his perspective on the liberating aspect of money from the suspicious view which prevails among historical materialists. Simmel argues that the laborer is freer than a slave, since, unlike the laborer, the slave cannot choose to change masters even if willing to endure worse living conditions. Simmel argues that the fact that this "emergent freedom" based on money has "little continuous influence upon the material situation of the worker should not prevent us from appreciating it. There is no necessary connection between liberty and increased well-being" (p. 62).
Simmel views a worker as subordinated to an objective purpose pursuant to the requirements of production, not as a person. Once the prescribed amount of work is contributed -- on a money basis -- the worker is "free" (p. 335).

Simmel describes money as a "condensed latent form" of a claim to the achievements of others (p. 342). Like other commenters on money, Simmel describes it as giving the individual a "new independence from group interests" which he states is manifested not only in the differences between a barter and a money economy, but also within the money economy itself (p. 342). To the extent that interests are focused on money and possessions consist of money, the individual will develop a sense of independence in relation to the social whole. This is because the individual is free to establish business relations and cooperation wherever desired. This is in contrast to traders in general merchandise who have to look much more for cooperation and employees within spatially adjacent groups (p. 343).

In addition to increasing the independence of the individual, Simmel contends that the money economy changes the content of the associations among people, replacing the medieval corporation which embraced the whole individual with innumerable associations which either only take money contributions from their members or tend to pursue merely monetary interests. Simmel sees money as allowing people to join a group without having to give up any "personal freedom or reserve" (pp. 343-44). While some commenters, past and present, have deplored this socially distancing effect of money, Simmel celebrates this
depersonalization as a means of overcoming socially constructed barriers and prejudices.

Only money could bring about such associations which in no way prejudiced the individual member; only money could create, in its pure form, the association for particular purposes -- a type of organization that united individual's non-personal elements in a project. Money has provided us with the sole possibility for uniting people while excluding everything personal and specific. (p. 345)

Simmel explicitly articulates a necessarily dual role for money: one in which money not only destroys certain types of relations but also creates a new level of unity in social relations. Unlike Marx, he does not assume that those relations are inherently exploitative or class-based. Simmel states that

The disintegrating and isolating effect of money is not only the general precondition and corollary of this conciliatory and unifying quality; under specific historic conditions, money simultaneously exerts both a disintegrating and a unifying effect. . . . If, among several interests that determine the cohesion of the group, one of them has a destructive effect upon all the others, then this interest will survive the others and become the only bond between the different elements whose other relationships it has destroyed. It is not only so because of its immanent character, but precisely because it destroys so many other kinds of relationships between people, that money establishes relationships between elements that otherwise would have no connection whatsoever. (pp. 345-46)

Despite the fact that Simmel does not focus on class-based exploitation in the disintegrating and subsequently unifying character of money, he acknowledges that it is the "complete heartlessness" of money that leads it
to perform its unifying social role in a manner that make the resulting associations progressively more "souless" (p. 346).

Simmel argues that money is as necessary for the "widening of the social group" as it is for the "objectification of the contents of life" (p. 348). According to Simmel, the widening of the social group is enhanced by the "perfect mobility" of money, which forms bonds that combine the largest extension of the economic sphere with growing personal independence. This effect is not possible in a barter economy because of the technical difficulty of transporting values over long distances, thus restricting exchange to a relatively small number of individual economic spheres.

The sacrifice of traditional community that is required for this expansion of social relations is inevitable for Simmel. He states that money serves to

grant separation and mutual independence to those elements that originally existed as a living unity. On the one hand, this disintegration concerns individual personalities and thereby makes possible the convergence of similar interests -- however divergent and irreconcilable -- in a collective form. On the other hand, this disintegration also affects the communities and makes internal and external communicalization difficult for the now sharply differentiated individuals. (p. 350)

Simmel contends that money will lead to the breakdown of traditional relations and communities, severely restricting their ability to maintain themselves on previous commonalities, while creating new associations based on similar interests. Here, Simmel appears to leave little room for the maintenance of any of the traditional relations of community, a point
that is strongly criticized in the discussion below by scholars like Zelizer, as well as Parry and Bloch.

However, Simmel does not express a sense of absolute desirability for the restructured relations created by money, contending that these relations lack a certain sense of importance and meaning. This phenomenon he describes as similar to the search for style and symbolism in the arts, which he views as a symptom of the longing for a new and more perceptible significance in things. He notes that the money value of things does not fully replace the qualities that cannot be expressed in money. He contends that this realization forces humans to search at times for a form of money that is "far removed from the everyday kind" (p. 404). This acknowledgment that the new relations that are created in a standard money economy fail to satisfy all needs for meaning in exchange is important in understanding the conditions leading to the creation of affinity credit card programs, and also hint toward limitations that might exist even in those affinity-based financial networks.

Simmel describes money as serving a function of unifying and distancing similar to that of other communication processes. He states that

[Money] carries out the function of imposing a distance between ourselves and our purposes in the same manner as other technical mediating elements, but does it more purely and completely. . . . Money interweaves this sequence as the means of means, as the most general technique of practical life without which the specific techniques of our culture could not have developed. Indeed, even in this respect, money exhibits the duality of its functions through whose unification it repeats the form of the greatest and the deepest potentialities of life: on the one hand, it is an equal member or even a first among equals in the series of human existence, and on the other, it stands above
them as an integrating force that supports and permeates every single element . . . . It is one of those factors that are the constituents of life and yet, on the other hand, it expresses the unity and the basis of our whole existence . . . . (p. 485)

Money here is described not only as a phenomenon which is one of the many elements of human existence, but also as a unifying force that integrates all other elements. This argument provides a strong basis for viewing money as a communication process for purposes of examining the conditions of contemporary communities.

Money as Suspicious

The critical view of money in Western scholarship may have originated with Aristotle's view that the only appropriate use of money was for household purposes; that money-making for its own purpose was politically dysfunctional (Bretton, 1980, pp. 56-57). This problem was attributed to the fact that: (1) money has its own value system and diverts from concern with government; (2) money enables the individual to exist outside formal legal structures; and (3) money enables individuals to create means of influence and control, in competition with political and governmental structures (p. 107).

An aspect of this suspicious view of money arises in psychology in theories that have generally treated money as an analog to excreta or linked directly to libido or sexual needs. This approach has been heavily influenced by Freud, whose main contribution was the association of the

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3 However, this view may have been preceded among the "moneyless civilizations" described by Angell (1930), such as ancient Egypt and ancient China, which, despite their complex social development, either lacked a monetary system or limited its use to a select group within society.

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money motive with capitalism in his thesis of libidinous anal eroticism (Freud, 1908/1976). Bretton notes, however, a problem with the common psychological approach of treating money as an unchanging material object of human interest or desire. He contends that psychological theorists fail to note that money changes depending on the context in which it is used, along with its forms, manifestations, and the like (Bretton, pp. 130-31).

Several major social theorists have viewed money as a suspicious or exploitative medium which has a destructive effect on traditional relations of community. These include Karl Marx, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, and Anthony Giddens. Although they have not all viewed the effects of money as equally extensive in society, and while their views differ as to the inevitability of its social penetration, they all describe the portion of society dominated by modern money relations as threatening to fundamental human values.

Marx's view of money reveals a fundamental concern with its communicative effects. In the Excerpt from the Notes of 1844 (1967), Marx notes that the essence of money is that the mediating activity or process by which human products reciprocally complement one another becomes alienated and takes on the quality of a material thing, money, which is external to man. He contends that "this mediator becomes an actual god" because it is the actual power over that which is mediated (p. 267). Marx notes here that exchange relationships based on money, the externalization of private property, replace the personal nature of exchanges in which humans relate to each other as humans (p. 267).
In *The Grundrisse* (1971), Marx's discussion of money emphasizes its fundamental role in separating exchange value from the "natural" properties of goods. He notes that money defined as exchange value has a dual existence -- money is the exchange value that is severed from the commodity. As such, money is separate from the "natural form" of the commodity (p. 59). The exchange value of the product thus creates money alongside the product, with the money having its own objectified existence (p. 60).

Marx asserts that in social conditions which generate or correspond to an undeveloped system of exchange, exchange values and money, individual relationships, while appearing to be more personal, actually are based on determined roles, such as feudal lord and vassal, or landlord and serf. In contrast:

In money relationships, in the developed exchange system . . . the ties of personal dependence are in fact broken, torn asunder, as also differences of blood, educational differences, etc. (the personal ties all appear at least to be personal relationships). Thus, the individuals appear to be independent (though this independence is a complete illusion and should be called indifference); independent, that is, to collide with one another freely and to barter within the limits of this freedom. (Marx, 1971, p. 72, emphasis in original)

Claims that money gives rise to individual independence are based, according to Marx, on flawed abstractions from the material conditions of existence in which these individuals come into contact.

So far from constituting the removal of a 'state of dependence,' these external relationships represent its disintegration into a general form; or better: they are the elaboration of the general
basis of personal states of dependence. Here too individuals come into relations with one another only in a determined role. These material states of dependence, as opposed to the personal states, are also characterised by the fact that individuals are now controlled only by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another. (p. 73)

Marx describes this modern abstraction or idea as the theoretical expression of the material relationships that dominate individuals. These material relationships "have themselves a narrowly limited character, determined by nature, and thus appear to be personal, whereas in the modern world personal relationships occur purely as a result of relationships of production and exchange" (p. 73).

Historical materialists in the Marxist tradition use this perspective to criticize the work of Georg Simmel as either relativist or subjectivist. Bottomore and Frisby (1978) state that Simmel's discussion of money seldom takes up the relationship between money and capital, which is symptomatic of his lack of interest in the sphere of production as opposed to that of distribution and circulation (p. 26). Simmel is seen as most often presenting the problem as one of "extracting the supra- or ahistorical essence or nature of social phenomena from their historical concrete existence" (Bottomore & Frisby, p. 30). The Philosophy of Money is understood to remove the interconnections of phenomena from the level of their interconnectedness, thus making Simmel's critique a critique of culture rather than its economic, social and political context (Bottomore & Frisby, p. 33).

Regardless of the resolution of the debate over the state of freedom or dependency created after the introduction of a money economy, Simmel
and Marx share the view that money destroys traditional community relations. Parry and Bloch (1989) state that, unlike Simmel, who sees money itself as the principal catalyst for the transformation of social life, Marx links it to what he views as the more fundamental phenomenon of production for exchange -- this being what ultimately creates the need for an abstract money medium. However, Marx and Simmel both see money as associated with, and promoting, the growth of individualism and the destruction of solidary communities (Parry & Bloch, p. 4). Parry and Bloch see in Marx's condemnation of money and market exchange a romantic nostalgia:

[F]or a world in which production was for use and the interdependence of the human community had not been shattered by exchange. However exploitative the old order, it was not -- like capitalism is -- based solely on explicit, relentless, egotistical calculation. If the labor theory of value invited a critique of capitalism (and of the abstract money medium with which it is associated) on grounds of equity, the new mode of production also gave rise to a grave misgiving -- also shared by many non-Marxists -- that it denied those "moral bonds which unite men together," which Durkheim emphasized as the basis of all social solidarity. Exchange and the abstract money form from which it is inseparable, thus stand condemned as agents of individualization, and of the dissolution of the communal bonds which obtained in the world of production for use. (Parry & Bloch, pp. 4-5)

Bretton (1980) states that as a sociologist, Marx emphasizes that money has redirected man's purpose on earth by bringing within the reach of the individual material objects and fulfillment of human desires which were absent in the original state of nature. Bretton describes Marx as understanding the exigencies of monetarized society clashing with man's
innate characteristics and with individual and societal needs, forcing a radical re-ordering of all social relationships and of the systems formed to accommodate these (p. 121). In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Marx states that:

Money is the pimp between man's needs and the objects, between his life and his means of life. But that which mediates life for me, also mediates the existence of other people for me. For me it is the other person. (as cited in Bretton, 1980, p. 121)

Other scholars also have presented a negative perspective on the role of money as a mechanism which distorts traditional social relations. Dodd (1994) notes Habermas' argument that money has been at the heart of the process of the separation of economic life (social system) from the values and activities associated with politics and tradition. The internal colonization of the lifeworld refers to the process by which institutions and imperatives associated with the system expand and break into institutions and values associated with the lifeworld. This colonization process is mediated by money and power, and profoundly conflicts with the form of reasoning on which, in Habermas' schema, the lifeworld is based. Internal colonization distorts lifeworld consciousness because instrumental rationality suffocates the lifeworld, where communicative rationality should predominate (Dodd, pp. 70-71). Dodd contends that Habermas' theory is flawed because it fails to examine the effects of internal colonization for the status and constitution of money itself (p. 75). In linking money, or rather its analysis in social theory, to the process of internal colonization, Habermas ignores the presence of lifeworld
principles in the ongoing transaction of money (Dodd, pp. 76-77).
Habermas' binding of monetary transaction to narrow rationality separates it from the lifeworld in order for the depth and richness of the lifeworld to be retained. Habermas' dichotomization of system and lifeworld in modern society, associating money almost exclusively with the system, makes Habermas unable to grasp the profound ambivalence of money's status in modern society (Dodd, pp. 77-78).

Anthony Giddens (1990) argues that in the sense of an embedded affinity to place, as well as in terms of kinship, "community" has largely been destroyed. Where it remains in limited contexts it is seen to have less importance than it did in traditional societies (p. 117). The bonds of friendship of pre-modernity can be seen as having been deinstitutionalized in modernity (p. 119).

Giddens (1990) describes money as a fundamental element in the development of modernity. He identifies money as one of the two disembedding mechanisms associated with modernity which involve the extraction of social relations "from local contexts of interaction and restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (p. 21-22). He classifies money as a "symbolic token," a medium of interchange which can be exchanged without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them at any point. As a means of "bracketing time" and lifting transactions out of a particular exchange context, money is a means of "time-space distanciation" (p. 24). To Giddens, money is above all an "informational medium" (1987, p. 156).
Niklas Luhmann (1979) incorporates Talcott Parsons' concept of "generalized media of communication" in identifying money as one of the devices in addition to everyday language which is a symbolically generalized code of selection. Through the generalizing capacity of money as such a medium, structures of expectation and patterns of motivation are formed which make it possible for selections made by one individual to be relevant to another (pp. 48-49). The trust which people place in the monetary system, rather than in people, is central to Luhmann's view of money as a generalized medium of communication. This system trust he describes as automatically built up through continual, affirmative experience in using money does not require specific built-in guarantees and is thus easier to acquire than personal trust in new and different people all the time (p. 50). Luhmann contends that

> Although system trust is shown to be more or less absorbed, more or less latent, it is fundamentally different from the 'naive' experience of familiarity with the everyday world. In system trust one is continually conscious that everything that is accomplished is a product, that each action has been decided on after comparison with other possibilities. System trust counts on explicit processes for the reduction of complexity, i.e. on people, not nature. (p. 58, emphasis in original)

This type of conscious, comparatively-derived system trust, which includes the trust demonstrated by those who participate in the monetary economy, is in contrast to the forms of trust which dominated "simple" social systems. Luhmann argues that in those earlier systems

> [A] secure mode of living which went beyond trust in specific other individuals was established – in so far as it existed at all – by means of religiously based assumptions about real existence, nature and the supernatural, by means of myth, language, and

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natural law. In other words, the right ordering of things was taken as normative and established as trustworthy. In this sense the world was removed from human disposition and its complexity assumed to be already reduced. No impersonal forms of trust were required. Whenever it was necessary to communicate, or to explain, this order of things, this was achieved via the authority of gods, saints, or knowledgeable interpreters trusted as persons. (p. 48)

This view of the transition from religiously-based systems which operated beyond the realm of personal trust to forms of system trust that depend on explicit human processes for reducing complexity reveals once again the theoretical distinction between traditional, pre-monetary socio-cultural networks and the rationalistic intellectual thrust that accompanied the development of money into the modern world. Luhmann describes the "great civilizing processes of transition to system trust [which] give humanity a stable attitude towards what is contingent in a complex world, [making] it possible to live with the realization that everything could be otherwise" (p. 58).

Maintenance of Community Despite Monetary Introduction

The views on the destructive nature of money on traditional relations of community are challenged by scholars in the "culturalist" tradition. Viviana Zelizer (1994) strongly criticizes what she refers to as "mainstream ideology" concerning money. According to this mainstream ideology, money is a single, interchangeable, absolutely impersonal instrument -- the very essence of rationalization in modern civilization. In this conceptualization, money also destroys, necessarily replacing personal bonds with calculative instrumental ties, corrupting cultural
meanings with materialist concerns. In contrast to this view, Zelizer contends that

As use of money has increased, people have reshaped their commercial transactions, introduced new distinctions, invented their own special forms of currency, earmarked money in ways that baffle market theorists, incorporated money into personalized webs of friendship, family relations, interactions with authorities, and forays through shops and businesses. (p. 2)

Zelizer acknowledges the recent growth of work analyzing the social meaning of commodities which has roots in Veblen's writings at the turn of the century. However, she notes that this work is restricted by its focus on the symbolic meanings of commercial goods, leaving the cultural independence and power of money unquestioned (pp. 4-5).

Zelizer lists five prevailing interpretations of market money in the last century. First, the functions and characteristics of money are defined strictly in economic terms. It is homogeneous, liquid, and lacking in quality. Even when symbolic meanings of money are recognized, they are restricted to the economic sphere (e.g., Parsons, Giddens, Habermas) or treated as a largely insignificant feature. Second, all monies are treated the same in modern society, the only possible difference being in quantity.

Third, a sharp dichotomy exists between money and nonpecuniary values. Money is profane, utilitarian, and qualitatively neutral. It is not qualitatively distinct. Fourth, money concerns are seen as constantly enlarging, quantifying and corrupting other areas of life. It is a vehicle for the inevitable commodification of society. Fifth, money has the power to
transform nonpecuniary values, but the reverse process is ignored or rejected (pp. 11-12).

While acknowledging that monetization of social life has spread uniformity, precision and calculation, Zelizer also notes that this process has been uneven, involving controversy, resistance, and setbacks. Zelizer notes that since the early 19th century, vigorous measures have been taken by the United States government to create a standardized national currency, including the taxing of thousands of state-issued paper currencies, suppression of private issue of tokens, paper notes and coins by stores and business, the elimination of the personalization of money by individuals, and the authorization of the printing of "greenbacks" in 1862, the country's first currency without gold backing (p. 13). Despite these measures, the standardization of money was not a smooth, consensual process. Defining American currency became one of the most explosive political and social issues of the late 19th century (p. 14). The struggle over the cultural character of money was revealed in Congress' opposition to President Theodore Roosevelt's decision to remove "In God We Trust" from U.S. gold coins. According to Zelizer, this conflict is a refutation of claims of money's homogeneity and qualitative neutrality.

Zelizer argues that while the U.S. government worked to establish a single currency, people began actively creating all kinds of informal monetary distinctions based on uses and meanings -- a process Zelizer refers to as "earmarking" (p. 18). According to Zelizer

[A] link is missing in the traditional approach to money. Impressed by the fungible, impersonal characteristics of money,
classic theorists emphasized its instrumental rationality and apparently unlimited capacity to transform products, relationships, and sometimes even emotions into an abstract and objective numerical equivalent. But money is neither culturally neutral or socially anonymous. It may well "corrupt" values and convert social ties into numbers, but values and social relations reciprocally transmute money by investing it with meaning and social patterns. (p. 18)

Zelizer asserts that people make efforts to embed money in particular times, places and social relations. She develops the following model of money as shaped and reshaped networks of social relations and varying systems of meaning:

(1) Money not only serves as a key rational tool of the market, it also exists outside the sphere of the market and is profoundly influenced by cultural and social structures.

(2) There is no single, uniform, generalized money, but multiple monies. Money used for rational instrumental exchanges is not free from social constraints but is another type of socially created currency.

(3) The classical listing of money’s functions and attributes is unsuitably narrow.

(4) The assumed dichotomy between utilitarian money and nonpecuniary values is false.

(5) Money does not have free and unchecked power. Cultural and social structures set limits on money. (pp. 18-19)

Zelizer notes work by anthropologists on the differentiation of monies, but this work deals almost exclusively with "primitive monies" in non-market societies. Anthropologists generally make a sharp distinction between "primitive monies" and "modern" market money. Zelizer argues
that a fully sociological model of money must show how, how much, and why, even in the heart of capitalism, different networks of social relations and systems of meaning mark modern money, in ways that are as influential as the rationing of primitive money. Newer money has more invisible boundaries than "primitive" shells, coins, or brass rods (pp. 22-24).

In advancing her socio-cultural model of money, Zelizer rejects a psychological explanation that maintains that money is marked by individual random preferences. She emphasizes that it is a social process, in which money is attached to a variety of social relations, rather than solely to individuals (p. 25).

Zelizer contends that classical thinkers failed to recognize the difficult social process involved in the invention of market money, and by assuming its inevitability, absolutized market money. As a result, they did not look at invention of "new" monies. As the physical and legal status of money standardized, uses multiplied (p. 205). Zelizer's research shows that earmarking of monies occurred even in the most vulnerable areas of social life, those relations and exchanges supposedly peculiarly susceptible to the dollar's rationalization. These areas were domestic transactions, gift exchanges, and charitable donations (pp. 201-202).

Zelizer sees an increase in the differentiation of monies in the future with the development of electronic money, the introduction of a single European currency, and the like. Banks which increasingly rely on automatic transfers still have special "club accounts" to set aside money for holidays via computerized transfers. Computerized earmarking actually
makes differentiation easier, even as it permits greater rationalization and control (p. 215).

While Zelizer's study argues that cultural distinctions maintain viability and actually result in differential uses of money, her empirical research focuses on the way that money is interpreted and used in domestic, charitable, and gift exchanges. She references examples of how banks are maintaining special accounts for cultural purposes, but does not analyze the process underlying the creation of "multiple monies" by financial institutions and other organizations, such as is the case with affinity credit card programs.

Another perspective on the cultural characteristics of money rests not with the way money is interpreted by users, but instead incorporates the ways in which the institutions charged or authorized by the nation-state (or its subdivisions) to create and issue currency and coin use macro-cultural icons to communicate various concepts to the public. For example, as Zelizer notes, there was tremendous debate in the United States Congress over President Theodore Roosevelt's short-lived executive order to remove the inscription "In God We Trust" from U.S. gold coins (p. 17). Such debates over the cultural content of money are not unusual, although they have generally been neglected in theories of money which contend that money is purely a quantitative or utilitarian medium which erases qualitative characteristics. In fact, most forms of money have an array of cultural symbols inscribed upon them, in addition to the numerical (e.g., "One Dollar" or "1") or institutional notations (e.g., "The United States of America"). The presence on American money, for
example, of images of cultural icons in the history of the nation (e.g., George Washington, Abraham Lincoln), as well as various national symbols such as the Great Seal of the United States, or images of national landmarks, are often overlooked as direct indicators of the fundamentally communicative role of money, as employed by the political and economic institutions which create and mandate the usage of various monetary instruments. These macro-cultural symbols reveal the role of money, not only as an indicator of quantity, but also as a pre-electronic mass medium for the promotion of particular images of national culture. One of the reasons why social science discussion has overlooked the macro-cultural symbolic aspects of money may be because much of this discussion is to be found in religious, mystical or esoteric literature (e.g., Hieronimus, 1989; Ice & Demy, 1996; Epperson, 1990; Lalonde & Lalonde, 1994).

This study moves beyond Zelizer's focus on individual uses and meanings of money to the institutions at the heart of the design and development of contemporary consumer financial instruments, to determine how traditional community relations are being constructed, communicated and interpreted in this process. This study also pursues cultural aspects of monetary instruments that operate at the level of the community criteria of race or ethnicity which may exist within or beyond the bounds of the nation-state. Clarification of the communicative nature of money is vital in establishing the basis of such an examination. Like most communication processes, the essential nature of monetary forms makes them well suited to such purposes.
The Essence of Money as Communicative

Claims that the introduction of monetary instruments into traditional communities strips away the qualitative characteristics of those social arrangements are undermined by the existence of various non-quantitative characteristics of monetary instruments. Contemporary monetary forms can be viewed as having "magical" qualities or "essences" that have been considered to be the province of pre-monetary societies or limited to "special-use" monies in traditional societies. Money is viewed as a link between the material world and a transcendental or abstract world.

For example, Smelt (1980) identifies the origination of money in sacred objects with "magical" characteristics which became involved in exchange and sees contemporary monetary instruments as having a dual nature as essence and symbol (p. 206-207). Adopting a phenomenological perspective, Smelt contends that money has a super-objective, transcendental essence, in which money reverses the flow of the phenomenological epoché, or the transcendental reduction of the world. The phenomenological epoché, as normally conceived, refers to a subject becoming aware of its own awareness, freeing itself from the bounds of the natural attitude -- which makes judgments about things in the world -- and becoming aware of the "noematic content" (the "what is intended to be") of experience. As a result, the subject becomes a transcendental subject (p. 208). Money, in contrast:

[R]evolves the direction of the epoché, since the transcendence flows from the object (money) to the subject, regardless of the
subject's attitude, rather than being achieved by the subject through reduction of the natural attitude.

By reversing the flow of the *epoché*, money loses or reverses the self-knowledge and increased awareness that can be the product of the *epoché*. The essence of money is social, not individual and hence is refractory to the individual's quest for self-awareness. ... By reversing the flow of the *epoché*, money also enables it to be applied onward to other objects, reducing them to monetary terms. The individual no longer has to struggle to know other objects, money can capture them for him, but he must forsake his own awareness to achieve this. (p. 208)

In contrast to its role as essence, Smelt also identifies money's role as symbol:

[T]he transcendental essence of money is applied to the world through the system of number specified in the individual bits of money. These individual coins or notes are money as symbol and symbolize a certain measure of money as essence. (p. 209)

Smelt argues that money's power in modern society results from the duality of its nature which links the transcendental to the real. He also contends that this duality is money's irremediable flaw. There is no final dialectical synthesis to the thesis and antithesis of money as essence and symbol. Money is arrested at this uttermost point of its development.

Money as essence stands outside the particularities and subjectivities of social interaction and offers a stable fulcrum for the use of money as symbol in interaction. Money as essence and money as symbol are viewed by Smelt as interwoven and in tension with each other (p. 209).

Smelt agrees with Simmel that money enables objectified social relations. However, Smelt disputes Simmel's view that money -- while objective -- is neutral. Smelt contends that one must look beyond money-
individual relations to the relation created by money between individual and society (p. 210).

Smelt proposes a fundamentally communicative role for money. He asserts that money, by objectifying problems of social interaction with "numerical information" and "objective impulses," connects the individual and family sphere to the economic. It "vertically integrates" the individual with the economy. Smelt posits an interactive or dialogical view of the nature of monetary communication by noting that "[m]oney acts both as a channel into the individual's consciousness for the forces of society and as a socially channeled means of expressing that consciousness out upon society" (p. 210-11).

While Smelt notes the communicative character of money, his emphasis on its quantitative nature resembles the approach taken by mainstream scholars, both orthodox and critical, who contend that the numerical character of money eliminates the cultural, qualitative relations which were predominant in traditional community life. However, unlike the case with currency and coin, Smelt acknowledges that credit does not possess a definite number. Since usage of credit requires thought, self-control, and access, the parameters are qualitative rather than quantitative. The quantitative element is thus obscured (pp. 220-221).

Dodd (1994) also presents an argument for the essential nature of money as communicative. He contends that one reason why Simmel's view is useful for establishing a sociology of money is that Simmel's examination of the objectification of culture provides a theoretical framework in which an interpretative analysis of money could begin.
Simmel places the act of exchange in the center of his study of the ephemeral social relationships which define modern and especially urban life (Dodd, p. 52). To Dodd, the greatest strength, rather than weakness, of Simmel’s definition of money as a pure instrument is that it does not focus on a specific monetary form that exists (p. 57). Dodd argues that our ideas about money are intrinsically connected to how we use it, our propensity to spend, invest, save, etc. These ideas are linked institutionally with the agencies responsible for the administration of money, to the question of trust. In this respect, it does not matter, e.g., whether the belief that the state should be responsible for validating money is technically correct, if that belief is sufficiently widespread, it is significant enough to disrupt attempts to denationalize money or establish monetary union, for it will affect how money is actually used. (p. 57)

Dodd finds that Simmel’s preoccupation with ideas about money and their consequences for modern culture make a powerful case that the analysis of money must contain a set of interpretative techniques sensitive to how money is perceived, to the range of dispositions and expectations which inform its use. This claim is central to Dodd’s argument that monetary networks are networks of information. However, he does not limit this information role to that of “lubricant” to circulate money efficiently. Information is actually “integral to how money actually works, to the pattern of its use and emission in society, no less than the institutional framework in which it is administered, saved, invested and spent” (p. 58). Dodd adds that the impact of monetary networks as information networks is not limited to the average consumer. He states that
To be sure, dealers in financial markets and governments and central banks responsible for the formulation and implementation of monetary policy draw on theories and forecasting models in a more conscious and deliberate way than those who use money for everyday purposes. But if anything, this reinforces the case for interpretative analysis at these levels. 

... [I]nformation plays a pivotal role in policy formulation and professional speculation in a way which is chronically unrelated to its objective accuracy. (p. 58)

This observation that interpretations of professionals dealing with monetary networks are of importance is a central justification for the methodological decision in the present study to examine the interpretations of officials in banks and affinity organizations to understand the conditions underlying affinity credit card programs.

Dodd's view is also consistent with the conceptualization of monetary forms presented by Leyshon and Thrift (1997), which includes not only monetary instruments, but also institutions, practices and interpretations.

According to Dodd, the information implicit in monetary transactions provides the most fundamental point of distinction between monetary exchange and barter. Rather than arising from a comparison of monetary and non-monetary forms, this distinction arises from examination of the network of social relations integral to each as a type of exchange (xxiii). Since with barter, the most basic information must be sought out, articulated, and negotiated, it cannot be anonymous in the way money exchange is, because of the specific nature of the barter relationship (xxvi). It is the type of information involved in each of these types of exchange, rather than the relative quantity of information, that makes
barter a personal, and monetary transaction an impersonal, form of exchange (p. xxvi). The anonymity of monetary transactions derives not from the characteristics of particular monetary objects, nor from their range of functions, but from basic information concerning the abstract properties of monetary networks (p. xxvi).

Dodd emphasizes that

[T]o understand what is distinctive about money requires reference to the network of social relationships which makes its transaction possible, not to the object exchanged or the exchange relationship itself. . . . The information transferred through monetary transaction reflects the sociological conditions in which the network is established (e.g., the political means employed to validate money or prevent counterfeiting, and the institutional mechanisms for generating a payments system). This information is implicit in the decision to place trust in money. (xxiii-xxiv)

Dodd presents five abstract properties that even the most minimally extensive monetary network must possess:

(1) The network must contain a standardized accounting system into which each money form is divisible;

(2) The network will rely on information from which expectations regarding the future can be derived, assumptions that it can be re-used later;

(3) The network will depend on information regarding its spatial characteristics, limits placed on the territory in which specific money forms may be used;

(4) The network will be based on legalistic information, such as rules regarding contracts; and

(5) The network presupposes knowledge of the behavior and expectations of others (xxiv).
The key for Dodd is that information binds the monetary network together. Thus, he argues that detailed analysis of the content of this information should lead to closer understanding of the specific sociological conditions in which monetary transaction takes place. These conditions he considers to be a matter for empirical study (xxv).

Regarding the information that is contained in monetary networks, Dodd considers unsustainable the notion that information is simply "transmitted" and "received," as if its meaning is constant and unimpaired throughout the process. In what is essentially a communication theory of monetary networks, Dodd states that

Both the meaning and the effectiveness of information transmitted by transactors, and thereby its entire character in the first place, is chronically dependent on the process by which it is interpreted. To transmit and receive information in this context is not simply to project an independent body of facts through space and time, but to bring those facts into being as facts.

The signals transmitted by monetary authorities are essentially pointers relying on the expectations and interpretations of other transactors in order to assume meaning and take effect. (p. 113)

In presenting his overall view of monetary analysis in sociology, Dodd states that money's "indeterminacy" is its sole determining feature, and that money is the only material or symbolic object which possesses this as its defining characteristic. (p. 152). The ontological status of money derives, in Dodd's view, from its "transparency" as an economic instrument. This must be clear before the specific epistemological
requirements of monetary analysis can be understood (p. 153). Dodd states that

[T]he abstract idea of money as a transparent medium is at the heart of perceptions which define how and why it is used. These perceptions have a substantive bearing on how money operates. . . . Money, wherever and whenever it is used, is not defined by its properties as a material object but by symbolic qualities generically linked to the ideal of unfettered empowerment. (pp. 153-54)

Dodd acknowledges that in practice money never does provide its holder with completely unlimited possibilities for its use. However, he contends that the ideal of unfettered empowerment, of complete freedom to act and assimilate at will, is at the heart of the conceptualization of money in general as a transparent symbolic medium (p. 154). Dodd asserts that while other economic instruments are associated with these ideas and activities, "only money is synonymous with them, coextensive with the very idea of economic empowerment itself. Without this symbolic feature, money is not distinguishable" (p. 154).

The role of information is viewed here as central to the understanding of money and monetary networks. Dodd states that monetary networks depend on the existence of specific kinds of information, which are inextricably linked with the symbolic features of money. Under this view, ideas and perceptions do not only inform how it is used; they are essential to its being used at all (p. 154). In fact, Dodd argues that
The pivotal role of information in the reproduction of monetary networks over time has a fiduciary function which theories of money focusing on its character as a commodity, its value in utility, or its relation to a historically specific mode of production simply cannot grasp. Information plays a substantive role in the constitution of monetary networks which cannot be reduced to the function of a lubricant within a preexisting monetary order. . . . Information is, on the contrary, the defining feature of monetary networks, for they are networks of, not just containers of, information. (pp. 156-57)

Dodd asserts that the principles of economic logic are an integral part of the social and cultural framework on which money's existence and circulation in society depend, contradicting Habermas' argument that the principles of instrumental rationality on which market systems depend are opposed to the life-world. Instead, those principles are generated through and within the processes of normative integration and communicative reasoning that Habermas associates with a separate dimension of society (p. 165).

Dodd also vigorously challenges the traditional distinction made between the concept of the "real" economy and the "monetary" economy. He contends that this distinction relies on a juxtaposition of the material and symbolic dimensions of economic activity which cannot be and should not be separated, even in principle. In fact, he asserts that

Ideas, expectations, and symbolic associations play an integral role within, rather than simply being a reflection upon, real economic activity; on the way in which individuals use and handle money, on the way money works in society, on the way it is administered by governments, and on the consequences its operation has across society. Information does not inform or express aspects of real economic activity as a series of ideas.
mediating the material world with more or less objective accuracy. In fact, information is part of that world, which is therefore neither material nor symbolic but something other; an other which cannot be grasped within the language of economics or any other language that derives its structure from the dualism of the material and the symbolic, of concepts and the reality they are supposed to depict. (p. 157-58)

Virtual Monetary Forms

Leyshon and Thrift (1997) apply a flexible view of space in their discussion of the geographies of money. They state that

[T]he history of money and credit has been a geography . . . and that geography has been and is constitutive of what money and credit now are. However, the importance of geography in the evolution of money has not always been recognized. In particular, there has been a failure to be suitably sensitive to the interplay between money, space and place, to see that monetary forms, practices and institutions are contingent in both space and time, and that money has often evolved in order to solve more general problems of time-space coordination; that is money allows social relationships to be extended across space and time. To understand money, then, we must understand its historical geography. (pp. 22-23)

Leyshon and Thrift note that each monetary form has its own geography, and that the transformation from one monetary form to another has important geographical implications. However, they distinguish premodern money, commodity money, money of account, and state credit money, from "virtual money." They define virtual money (or book entry money) as

[M]oney reduced to a numeraire — Walras in action. Money becomes an activated double book entry, a spontaneous acknowledgment of debt that is no longer a commodity. This new system of fleeting instants is based on quasi-private
institutions and on the full range of instruments of fictitious capital. (p. 20, emphasis in original)

Leyshon and Thrift argue that virtual money arose out of the use of the telegraph and other developments in electronically mediated telecommunications, as communication in monetary systems became increasingly indirect and instantaneous. They use the invention and growing sophistication of the credit card as an example of virtual money. The enhanced need for trust in the virtual monetary systems is satisfied by the use of expert systems, which, as noted by Giddens (1990), are an example of a disembedding mechanism, like the symbolic tokens of money themselves (Leyshon and Thrift, p. 30).

**Virtual Monetary Forms and Virtual Communities**

While the academic discussion regarding virtual communities has grown in concert with the development of computer-telecommunication networks that link people into spatially extended networks, there has been little corresponding discussion regarding virtual communities in the specific context of virtual monetary forms. McLuhan (1964) makes a prophetic statement regarding the impact of credit cards on the traditional relations of community. He contends that

[From coin to paper currency, and from currency to credit card there is a steady progression toward commercial exchange as the movement of information itself. This trend toward an inclusive information is the kind of image represented by the credit card, and approaches once more the character of tribal money. For tribal society, not knowing the specialisms of job or of work, does not specialize money either. Its money can be eaten, drunk, or worn. . . . (pp. 137-38).]
McLuhan's observation of the central role of information in contemporary monetary exchange is consistent with the theoretical argument presented in this study. However, the nature of the information exchanged in contemporary monetary networks cannot be viewed as totally unspecialized. McLuhan fails to predict that credit cards would ultimately become specialized in terms of particular "tribes," such as ethnic and racial groups, cultural organizations and the like. McLuhan also does not acknowledge the fact that the greatest scholarly criticism of actual "tribal money" has been its specialization, the lack of universal exchangeability which characterizes "modern" money. Affinity credit card programs provide an example of a form of money which possesses both "tribal" and "modern" characteristics. The merger in affinity credit card programs of "community-specific" logos, marketing strategies and donations with the broad usability of a generalized credit card network offers an example which contradicts many established theories of the corrosive effects of money on traditional community relations.

The preceding discussion provides a compelling theoretical justification for the communication-based analysis of affinity credit card programs conducted in this study. Affinity credit card programs fit directly within the definition of virtual money set forth by Leyshon and Thrift. The dependence of this new type of monetary instrument on advanced computer and telecommunication networks makes it a valuable object of study for communication scholars.

Furthermore, Leyshon and Thrift's definition of monetary forms as incorporating not only the monetary instrument, but also institutions,
practices and interpretations, is consistent with the level of analysis adopted in this study. Dodd's argument that monetary analysis must begin with the information which is created within monetary networks also provides justification for the focus of this study on the practices and interpretations of the institutional actors involved in particular affinity credit card programs. The arguments regarding money's transcendental essence, informational nature, and transparency support the empirical examination of the themes, meanings and interpretations which are being communicated through affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks, and how these themes relate to constructions of Black virtual communities.

Summary

This chapter has addressed the theoretical basis for a view of monetary forms as communication processes, which can be used to obtain insight into the constructions, expressions, and interpretations of virtual community as embodied in Black-oriented affinity credit card programs. The chapter addressed literature which argues that the introduction of money into traditional community results in the destruction of those pre-existing relations. The chapter also presented literature that contends that users of money "earmark" it with multiple meanings which reflect enduring social and cultural distinctions. The chapter then presented theories which identify the essence of money as communicative and informational, and noted the emergence of virtual monetary forms. The next chapter describes the nature of credit card programs in general and affinity credit card programs in particular.
CHAPTER 4
AFFINITY CREDIT CARD PROGRAMS AS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY MEDIA

Introduction

Credit cards play a central role in the economic life of contemporary society. New credit card offerings are being developed on a consistent basis, and are being marketed relentlessly to the public. Marketing strategists are employing a wide array of approaches to gain and maintain market share among credit card holders. This chapter provides a historical overview of general credit card programs and addresses some of the literature on the nature of credit cards. The chapter then moves on to provide a descriptive account of affinity credit card programs, along with a discussion of the literature that exists on the subject.

General Credit Cards

The study of credit card programs is important because it answers a call for research on money that looks beyond cash, currency and demand deposits, to newer monetary forms, especially "the cashless society," and to incorporate the organization of finance and the role of private corporations in the creation and control of money (Baker & Jimerson, 1992, pp. 687-88). The study of credit card programs can be seen as a step in the direction of
electronic fund transfers, and a means of delving more deeply into the
effects of this evolutionary process (Crawford, 1994, p. 219). Credit cards
are also a means of looking into the role of financial institutions and other
private corporations in the creation of "near money" (Kurtzman, 1993, pp.
82-83).

Development and Status

As discussed above, the introduction of new monetary instruments
into an economic system has historically been related to major
transformations in the traditional character of social relations. One of the
most dramatic and widespread recent examples of the spatial
fragmentation and strategic targeting in the financial services industry is
the tremendous growth of the credit card industry. Credit cards have had a
tremendous impact on the economic and social system since their
introduction in their current form nearly fifty years ago. (see, e.g.,
Feinberg, Westgate, & Burroughs, 1992; Fowler, 1995; Galanoy, 1980;
Hendrickson, 1972; Mandell, 1990; Russell, 1975; Simmons, 1995).

In 1949, Diners' Club, Inc: introduced the first independent credit
card plan. This plan involved an agreement between the club and its
members and between the club and participating merchants. The
developers of the program capitalized on the recognition that credit was a
commodity that could be sold. The success of Diner's Club card led to the
introduction of the American Express card in 1958, and the Hilton Credit
Corporation's Carte Blanche card in 1959.

In 1951, the First National Bank of Long Island became the first bank
to offer its customers a credit card plan. However, such bank-issued credit
cards did not become a major force until the late 1950's when Bank of America and the Chase Manhattan Bank issued their cards. By licensing its BankAmericard nationally, Bank of America initiated a national network, a much needed convenience for the growth of the credit card industry. The competing Interbank system, which later became Master Charge, was established soon afterward (Fowler, 1995, p. 2-3). In 1969, the Interbank system purchased the rights to "Master Charge" from another bank card association, with most Interbank members changing over to the Master Charge card (Mandell, 1990, p. 31).

Today there are more than 60 million credit card accounts in the United States alone, and seven out of ten households possess at least one credit card. A wide range of credit card options is available for consumers. The major bank credit cards are Visa, which changed its name from BankAmericard in 1976, MasterCard, the name that MasterCharge adopted in 1980, and the Discover Card, established by Sears in 1986.4 Although the term "bank" credit card is commonly used, it obscures the growing diversity of institutions and organizations offering such services. "Bank" credit cards are issued by finance companies (through commercial banks that may be subsidiaries), savings and loan associations, and credit unions. Citibank became the world's largest issuer of bank credit cards in the world by mailing out 27 million pieces of mail promoting its Visa card after laws were passed in 1977 permitting banks to do business in states other than

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4 In contrast to bank credit card associations like Visa and MasterCard, which sign up banks that offer cards to consumers, companies like American Express and Discover offer cards directly to consumers (Morris & Siegel, 1992, p. 38)
In terms of structure, Visa and MasterCard are consortiums; cooperative organizations made up largely of member banks and other financial institutions. The member banks actually issue the cards and advance credit to the cardholders (Ritzer, 1995, p. 37). When the card is used, MasterCard and Visa computer systems perform a clearinghouse function, approving the charges and directing them to the bank that issued the card (Simmons, 1995, p. 152).

In 1989, net profits from bank credit card operations reached $4.11 billion, twenty-six percent of the total bank profits of $15.73 billion for that year. Even though credit card profits fell in the ensuing recession, credit card operations remain a crucial foundation for bank profits (Crawford, 1994, p. 204-05). The central economic role of credit cards globally is reflected in the statistic that total charges on cards issued by worldwide credit card companies were 1.025 trillion dollars in 1993. Of that amount, Visa charges were $527.49 billion, MasterCard charges were $320.62 billion, and American Express charges were $124.06 billion. Worldwide at year-end 1993, there are 331.1 million Visa cardholders, 210.3 million MasterCard cardholders, and 35.4 million American Express cardholders (Simmons, 1995, p. 150).

In addition to credit cards are other cards, such as Travel & Entertainment (T&E) cards, including American Express and Diners Club, which require the cardholder to pay in full each month; and charge cards, offered by department stores and oil companies which, like credit cards, offer revolving credit with interest, and generally are limited to the purchase of products from the company issuing them (Morris & Siegel, 1992, pp. 38-39).
Spatial Implications

Credit cards have a spatially distancing effect because of their usefulness outside the spatial community in which the issuing bank is located or where the cardholder lives. Credit card issuers market their cards on the basis that they are honored by merchants at a wide range of locations locally, as well as across the world. Furthermore, the proliferation of automated teller machines (ATMs) also enhances the non-territorial nature of credit cards. Many credit cards can now be used at ATMs to obtain cash advances against the credit limit. The growing interconnectedness among ATM systems across the country is another reason why credit cards are furthering the separation between bank credit offerings and any bank's particular physical location (Mandell, 1990, pp. 121-130). The ability to make credit card transactions over telephone and computer networks furthers the mobility of credit card use.

Scholarly Literature

Most of the literature on general credit cards is in the marketing or consumer behavior literature (Friedman, 1987; Garcia, 1980; Goldstucker & Hirshman, 1977; Martell and Fitts, 1981). This literature has focused on factors such as the development of user profiles, descriptions of how various types of cards differ, on explorations of broad economic issues, and on how credit card users differ from non-credit card users. The emphasis in most of this literature is on the utilitarian aspect of credit cards (Feinberg, Westgate & Burroughs, 1992).

Analysis in the economics literature on general credit cards is surprisingly sparse, given their extensive penetration throughout society.
and their central role in the contemporary consumer financial system. One of the reasons for this lack of attention may be due to the fact that behavior of users and issuers of credit cards has been observed to be inconsistent with the assumptions of neoclassical economic theory. It has been noted that the apparent inflexibility of credit card interest rates relative to the cost of funds indicates that the market for bank credit cards appears to be noncompetitive, despite the fact that it is unregulated, has thousands of independent firms, many of them recent entrants, and has millions of consumers (e.g., Ausubel, 1991). Ausubel (1991) observes that the prices paid by banks for credit card receivables indicate that banks earn above-normal profits on those assets. He attributes the lack of competition to the failure of consumers to anticipate the high probability that they will pay interest on their outstanding balances. In explaining away the potential challenge to economic orthodoxy, Ausubel contends that "many consumers may not understand how interest rates work and underestimate the consequences of borrowing" (p. 71, n. 42).

Rather than resolving the threat to the competitive model by attributing it to a lack of consumer information, Brito and Hartley (1995) argue that the credit card market is actually competitive when compared to competing costs involved in obtaining credit. For example:

Credit cards are very useful as a low-cost method of financing transactions and arranging short-term loans. Despite large interest rates, rational consumers would frequently pay interest on outstanding credit card balances rather than pay the transaction costs associated with arranging loans from banks or other financial institutions. (p. 429)
Brito and Hartley also contend that the reason that "competitively determined" credit card interest rates are not likely to be very responsive to changes in the cost of funds is because the demand for credit card debits from a "rational consumer" is more sensitive to interest rates other than those for credit cards, such as the opportunity cost of money and the interest rate on loans competitive with credit cards. Finally, Brito and Hartley assert that relatively inflexible credit card interest rates can be consistent with a competitive equilibrium. They contend that

relatively inflexible credit card interest rates can be consistent with a competitive equilibrium in which entry costs are very low, and a marginal entrant to the industry earns zero profits. Premiums of about 5 percent for portfolios of credit card receivables are also consistent with an equilibrium in which all banks earn zero profits. The relatively large premiums that appear to have been paid for some portfolios of credit card receivables in the recent past, however, probably reflect the fact that not all banks have identical pools of customers. (p. 429)

These efforts to respond to claims that credit card markets are "irrational" is important because approximately 75 percent of customers "revolve" credit card balances, using cards even though interest charges are incurred (Brito & Hartley, p. 401 n.5).

Affinity Credit Card Programs

Development and Status

With the emergence of highly competitive conditions in the credit card market by the mid-1980's, banks and credit card marketers developed the "affinity" credit card concept as a mechanism to target new cardholders
using established social networks or "affinity" groups, such as professional associations, special activity groups, cause-related charities, alumni associations, and fraternities (see, e.g., Macchiette & Roy, 1991; Ritzer, 1995; Schlegelmilch & Woodruffe, 1995; Worthington & Horne, 1992, 1995). Affinity cards generally call for a bank to contribute to a not-for-profit organization a percentage of the amount charged to the card and/or a certain amount for each card issued to a member of the affinity group. The contribution to a not-for-profit organization distinguishes affinity cards from "co-branded" cards, which provide additional benefits to cardholders (e.g., air miles, purchase discounts) but do not offer advantages to a third-party, not-for-profit organization (Schlegelmilch & Woodruffe, 1995).

The first affinity card was introduced in the U.S. in 1983 by American Express, with the $1.7 million in proceeds from card use and "registration" -- twice the amount expected -- donated to the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation. This success, combined with the liberalization of regulations concerning what could be shown on the face of a credit card, the saturation of the general credit card market, and the stagnant environment for donations to not-for-profit organizations led to explosive growth in affinity card programs. In the U.S. there are an estimated 2,000 different types of affinity cards which account for 10 percent of all credit cards issued (Schlegelmilch & Woodruffe, 1995). For a card-issuing bank, the advantage of leveraging the affinity group's endorsement in marketing its credit card to the affinity group's members is an attractive benefit. A study by Visa indicated that affinity card solicitations received
two to three times more responses than did regular cards (Macchiette & Roy, 1991, p. 36).  

Affinity credit card programs are not without risks. There are wide variances in degrees of affinity or member loyalty within different organizations and groups (Mann, 1989). One study revealed evidence of an inverse relationship between charity size and member loyalty: the larger the size of the affinity group, the lower the level of affinity (Schlegelmilch & Woodruffe, 1995). Other evidence indicates that the members of some groups are more concerned about receiving individual benefits than having all benefits go to the affinity group (Graham, 1988, p. S-6).

A study by Worthington and Horne (1996) of university alumni affinity credit card programs states that the strongest relationship is that between the card issuer and the cardholder, with the affinity group often unaware of which of its members are cardholders. The next strongest relation is between the university and the card issuer. Surprisingly, given the stated "affinity" which forms the incentive for such programs, the weakest relationship (in the context of the affinity card program) is that between the cardholder and the affinity alumni groups. The authors use an arranged marriage analogy to describe the process, in which the "parent" corresponds to the alumni group, the "child" to the alumni association members, and the "suitor" to the card issuer. Although the

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6 However, a Market Facts survey found that affinity card response rates were 2.1%, while non-affinity cards have a 3.2% response rate (Graham, 1988, p. S-1).
"suitor" makes the initial offer to the "parent," if successful, the "suitor" begins to dominate the relationship with the child.

The nature and level of "affinity" between an affinity organization and its members appears to be of importance in the effectiveness of such programs. Marketing researchers have identified two affinity factors for market segmentation. One is "affinity strength," which refers to the internalization, identification, and personal acceptance of the values, norms and fundamental mission of the group, as well as the social bonding among members. The other factor is "social disclosure," defined as the level to which a group member or constituent expresses affiliation, and overtly manifests group identification to the community at large (Macchiette & Roy, p. 37-39). For an affinity card issuer to obtain this information, "intimate knowledge of the relationship between the association and its members is essential" (p. 42). Thus, in order for bank card issuers to identify and segment attractive groups for affinity card relationships, detailed information about the nature of that group and its members must be obtained.

The growing competition even within the affinity card arena is leading marketers to attempt to collect even more precise information in order to acquire and maintain affinity card relationships. Some marketers argue that the challenge is to tailor cards to even smaller segments and bundle them with customized enhancements. Database marketing combined with segmentation is now a strategic tool, where top card issuers have state-of-the-art PC-based retrieval systems that integrate cardholder information and lifestyle demographics (Duffy, 1990, p. 45-46). It has been
theorized that because of the saturation of the "cause-related" affinity groups, the next surge of affinity card segmentation will be highly targeted by ethnicity, lifestyle, and geographic region (Graham, 1988, S-6).

Examples of these highly targeted affinity credit cards are increasingly visible in recent years. Banks have established affinity cards programs in cooperation with a number of different special groups. These include the American Hellenic Educational and Progressive Association ("Atlantic rolls out Greek-American Visa," 1988); the "Rainbow Visa" card, issued by Wilmington, Del.-based Travelers Bank USA, providing support for gay and lesbian organizations and causes ("Affinity card targeting gay," 1995); and the "Adelante Mastercard" ("In a saturated market," 1993) supporting Hispanic organizations.

Among these specially targeted affinity cards are those that have developed in the last few years targeted at various African American organizations. For example, the "Unity Visa" card, issued by the Black-owned Boston Bank of Commerce, contributes to a number of charities which benefit African Americans. Unity Visa is the first affinity card issued nationally by a Black-owned institution (Block, 1995, p. 14). Other affinity cards targeted toward Blacks include several developed by Key Bank and Trust (formerly known as Key Federal Savings Bank), a specialist in secured credit cards.7 Key Bank and Trust has announced the

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7 A secured credit card is a basic credit card with a line of credit backed by money deposited to an interest-bearing savings account. In other words, the money is held as security. The savings account is not used for credit card payments unless the cardmember fails to make timely payments or closes the account with an outstanding balance. Secured credit cards are designed for people who don't qualify for standard, unsecured credit cards (Key Federal Savings Bank, 1994).
development of affinity card programs with Black Expo USA; the America's Black Colleges Program; and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), a Pentecostal denomination with a predominantly Black membership (Block, p. 14).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the general credit card field, and a specialized sub-area, affinity credit card programs. It has presented some of the scholarly research that has been conducted to understand the operation of credit cards, and has also discussed the rationale for the development of particular forms of affinity credit cards. The next chapter will set forth the methodological approach for this study of Black-oriented affinity credit card programs.
CHAPTER 5
METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach

This dissertation is based primarily on a qualitative methodological approach, although quantitative data is incorporated for specific aspects of the study. As discussed in previous chapters, this study views affinity credit card programs as monetary forms, defined by Leyshon and Thrift (1997) as consisting of a particular set of formal instruments of money, a particular set of financial institutions and practices, and a broadly conceived set of interpretations of what money is and its effects (p. 3). This approach is also influenced by Dodd's (1994) argument that monetary networks are networks of information, and as such require examination not only as monetary instruments, but also in terms of monetary institutions and the interpretations of those who maintain those institutions (p. 58). This focus on institutions, interpretations, and processes makes a qualitative orientation a fundamental requirement for obtaining a deep understanding of the affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks.

This qualitative orientation corresponds to what Andrew Sayer (1992), in his presentation of a "critical realist" methodological approach, describes as an "intensive" research design. In contrast to "extensive"
research, which is concerned with discovering some of the common properties and general patterns of a population as a whole, in "intensive" research the primary question concerns how some causal process works out in a particular case or limited number of cases (p. 242). Extensive research typically uses methods such as descriptive and inferential statistics, numerical analysis and large-scale formal questionnaires of a population or "representative sample," focusing on taxonomic collectivities, which are groups whose members share similar or formal attributes but which need not actually connect or interact with one another. In contrast, intensive research uses mainly qualitative methods such as structural and causal analysis, participant observation and/or informal and interactive interviews, focusing on groups whose members may be either similar or different but which actually relate to each other either structurally or causally (p. 242-44). This study incorporates an intensive research design to examine the structural and causal relations underlying affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks.

An intensive research approach keeps the context of the object of study in the forefront. According to Sayer, the practice of placing context in the background of extensive research studies, while placing the primary emphasis on variable analysis of taxonomic groups

[Encourages a blindness to or "scrambling" of structures, causal groups and contexts, rendering society as atomistic, unstructured and unhistorical. Contexts or causal groups are rarely just background; exploration of how the context is structured and how the key agents under study fit into it -- interact with it and constitute it -- is vital for explanation. (p. 248)
The emphasis in intensive research on substantial relations of connection and causal groups results in causal explanations of the production of certain objects or events, although these explanations are not necessarily representative of or generalizable to a larger population. However, although "contingent" causal relations discovered are unlikely to be representative, "necessary" causal relations are generalizable to other contexts wherever their relata appear (p. 243). "External" or "contingent" relations are those in which the nature of the object is not dependent on the particular relation for its existence, while "internal" or "necessary" relations exist when the link between the related entities is necessary for the existence of one or the other entity in the relation (p. 89). For example, the buyer-seller relationship is necessary, since one cannot exist -- in that specific role -- without the other. One can at best be a potential buyer or seller without a relational counterpart.

Sayer (1992) provides an example of an application of his framework that is directly applicable to the theoretical framework applied in this study:

Money, and the institutions and practices associated with it, are extremely important in our society . . . . A necessary condition of the use of money is that users should have some understanding of what the act of exchanging little metal discs and specially printed pieces of paper for commodities means or "stands for." The users must have some concept of money and also of related phenomena such as rights of ownership, exchange, etc. Hence these social phenomena are "concept-dependent." (p. 30-31)

While this study does not place empirical emphasis on individual holders of affinity credit cards, the focus which is placed on the practices and interpretations of the institutions which create and market affinity credit
cards to African Americans is consistent with Sayer's advocacy of an emphasis on money, and the institutions, practices, and meanings associated with it. He emphasizes that "practices, material constructions, and systems of meanings are reciprocally confirming" (p. 33).

This need to understand the nature of relations of objects of study is why it is important in this study to understand the nature of the beneficiary organizations involved in affinity credit card programs targeted toward Blacks. A lack of a sophisticated understanding of the functions and relations underlying affinity credit card programs could lead to misleading interpretations about the causes of certain actions by the key actors. The powers and liabilities of beneficiary groups involved in Black-oriented affinity card programs must be analyzed in order to properly capture the reasons for the establishment of affinity credit card programs, and for understanding the various practices of these affinity groups in the context of the affinity card programs.

Similarly, the mechanisms or ways of acting of issuers of affinity credit cards must be considered in detail. To assume that all credit card issuers are identical is to ignore the various characteristics that reveal their nature and help explain why they function in particular ways in response to various conditions. For example, merely observing that credit card marketers are all governed by the profit motive is not sufficient to explain why some companies primarily offer secured affinity cards, why others offer unsecured affinity cards exclusively, and why some have not developed affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks, while others have developed a specialization in targeting Black markets.
Research Design and Methods

Limited Case Study Design

This dissertation adopts an intensive, comparative case study approach. As stated above, the extensive/intensive research design distinction allows a clear-cut association of variable analysis with extensive designs, and case study methods with intensive ones (Morrow, 1994; Sayer, 1992). Morrow contends that case study methods coupled with nonstatistical comparative case studies are most compatible with the research problems identified with critical theory and its concern with intensive research designs (p. 253). This dissertation examines the nature of two affinity credit card programs in detail, presents the causal mechanisms which exist necessarily based on their nature, and compares the contingent conditions which influence whether the causal mechanisms are activated and, if so, which influence the effects which have resulted in the programs thus far.

Research Methods

Triangulation is an important consideration for qualitative research. Triangulation involves "a comparative assessment of more than one form of evidence about an object of inquiry" (Lindlof, 1995, pp. 238-39). A research study can triangulate data using multiple sources from one technique, multiple methods applied to the same problem, and multiple investigators. Divergent outcomes which may result from triangulation are not necessarily in the method or source itself, it may be that phenomena behave differently through the specific media of our methods. A commitment to multiple modes of data generation leads to "thickly
described" cases, which allow users to compare them to the known attributes of other sites of social life (Lindlof, p. 239). This study uses multiple sources and multiple methods for triangulation purposes.

Data Sources

- Corporate-Issued Documents
  This includes annual reports, press releases, newsletters, publicity packets, and direct marketing materials announcing introduction of an affinity credit card program.
- Media Reports
  Includes stories in trade or popular press about one of the affinity credit card programs being studied.
- Mass media advertisements
  Includes paid advertisements in mass media concerning an offer for one of the affinity credit cards in this study.
- Organizational officers
  Includes interviews with officers of the credit card issuers, affinity groups, and other partners in the affinity card programs in the study.
- Affinity credit cards
  Involves collection of data concerning the text and images on the particular affinity credit cards involved in the study.

Data Collection Methods

- Documentary research
  Involves the collection of relevant documents from affinity groups, affinity card issuers, trade and popular press.
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews
Involves in-person or telephone interviews with key decision-makers employed by the credit card issuers, marketers and beneficiary organizations which are included in the case study, to pursue in more detail the information revealed in the documentary research. The goal is to give them an opportunity to speak about their organization's reasons for entering into affinity credit card relationships, to share the meanings and interpretations which apply, and to provide explanations for the practices which are used for such programs.

Data Analysis Methods

In addition to using multiple data sources and multiple methods of data collection, this study also uses multiple modes of data analysis. Analysis of interview transcripts and documents is conducted using a qualitative computer data analysis program, as well as traditional approaches to documentary analysis.

- NUD•IST qualitative computer program

Qualitative researchers who generated a large volume of data, from interview transcripts, documentary sources, ethnographic field notes, and the like, until recently were limited to using "cut-and-paste" techniques to organize the text passages and notes into categories for purposes of analysis. However, meaning and context could be lost, giving rise to serious methodological problems, when a researcher was forced to remove a cut-out text passage from its original context (Kelle, 1995; Lee & Fielding, 1992). In research studies with hundreds of pages of data, such data management and manipulation problems are not uncommon. Recently, a number
computer programs have been developed to assist researchers in the analysis of qualitative data.

For purposes of analysis of interview transcripts and other unstructured data, this dissertation incorporates NUD•IST (for Non-numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing), a program designed for the storage, coding, retrieval, and analysis of text. The program is described as "one of the best for plain code-and-retrieve or code-based theory-building work" (Weitzman & Miles, 1995, p. 238). The structuring of the database is based on a hierarchically organized "index system" of codes, together with a collection of code search operators. The program allows the user to look at a hierarchical tree diagram of the coding scheme, which the user can navigate and explore the codes and referenced text either graphically or with commands from pull-down menus. In addition to this hierarchical index (code) system, which can be "pruned" and rearranged, the program also maintains a document system. The data can be explored from either one, the latter organizing the users investigations on the basis of documents first, codes second, while the former works on a codes first, documents second basis (p. 238-39).

In this study, the use of NUD•IST was limited to its more basic functions, such as conducting text searches for various terms for purposes of thematic development, coding themes as they were identified in the data, creating nodes which allowed for categorization of coded text, and using the Index Tree to obtain a visual representation of the relationships within the coded data and associated nodes. More sophisticated functions of the NUD•IST program were not necessary for purposes of this study.
Traditional documentary analysis

In addition to the use of the NUD•IST computer program, this study incorporates non-computerized interpretative and critical approaches in analyzing documents which cannot be feasibly incorporated into NUD•IST data files, such as photos and images from documents. This level of review also includes analysis of donation amounts where available for a particular affinity credit card program. In addition, this traditional form of data analysis examines data which was searched for and extracted using NUD•IST text searches, but then was further examined without the use of the computer program.

Organizations selected for case study

The two affinity credit card programs which are the focus of this study were officially announced in the trade or popular press, and were marketed toward members or supporters of Black-oriented organizations. Two additional affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks which had been announced in the press were either never introduced or were no longer in existence by the time the empirical study was initiated. While not incorporated systematically as part of the empirical examination like the other programs, evidence about the conditions surrounding the third program is introduced as needed for comparative purposes.

1. Unity Visa Card Program
   • Card Issuer and Marketer: Boston Bank of Commerce
   • Eligible Beneficiary Organizations:
     • Children's Defense Fund
     • Jackie Robinson Foundation
2. America's Black Colleges Program
   • Card Issuer: Key Bank and Trust (formerly Key Federal Savings Bank)
   • Marketer: America's Black Colleges Program
   • Eligible Beneficiaries: students attending any of the 115 Historically Black Colleges and Universities

3. Church of God in Christ card (planned but not introduced)
   • Card Issuer: Key Bank and Trust
   • Beneficiary: Church of God in Christ

Multiple Foci of Observation

As discussed above in Chapter 1, this study incorporates an approach which integrates a range of different "media metaphors" (Meyrowitz, 1993, 1994) or what could be described as multiple "foci of observation." The five foci of observation incorporated in this study are:

(1) an "institutional" focus;
(2) a technological "medium" focus;
(3) a "patterns of access" focus;
(4) a "content" focus on the communication products; and
(5) an "interpretative" focus.
Consistent with Meyrowitz's advocacy of the integration of medium theory with other perspectives, the application of multiple perspectives in this study is not only important in providing a more complete view of the communication processes under examination, it offers an explicit statement of the foci of observation which are being incorporated in the research in order to avoid confusion about the conclusions which are drawn from the theoretical and empirical analysis. The five communication foci incorporated in this study include two of the three set forth by Meyrowitz, medium and content, while distinguishing the institutional, interpretative, and patterns of access foci which he mentions, but does not identify as distinct media perspectives in their own right. Because the central focus of this study is on the conditions of community as communicated in contemporary monetary relations, culture is not drawn out as a separate focus, but is rather left embedded in each of the other foci of observation as one of the questions which require empirical resolution.

The institutional focus of observation in this study entails emphasis on the banks, marketers and affinity organizations which developed and maintain the affinity credit card programs under examination. The analysis here describes the political and economic nature of these organizations, their history, their structure and ways of acting which are necessary as a function of their institutional nature. Another component of the institutional focus is the role of race and community in the structure of the institutions participating in the affinity credit card programs in question. The institutional focus is examined as a distinct focus of
examination rather than as one of the content themes because of its fundamental role in the very structure of the affinity programs, prior to the development of a particular communication or marketing strategy. However, some institutional themes are revealed in the analysis of the content themes discussed below. Interpretative data that helps to inform the institutional analysis is incorporated in this section.

The medium focus of observation emphasizes the technological aspects of affinity credit card programs, which includes the credit card network and the affinity credit card instrument as the catalyst of a credit card transaction, rather than as a content-containing communication product. The medium focus considers the distinct characteristics of affinity credit card media in comparison to other media and other purposes. The goal of this focus is to examine from a technological medium standpoint how the concept of community operates as a condition in Black-oriented affinity credit card programs. Where appropriate, the interpretative focus is incorporated into this section to add to the empirical findings based on medium analysis.

The communication relevance of patterns of access has been addressed from an economic standpoint in terms of communication codes (Pilotta, in press) and also from the standpoint of patterns of access to social information in the shaping of social roles (Meyrowitz, 1994, pp. 58-59). The patterns of access focus of observation may seem at first glance to be integrated with the medium focus of observation. The distinction for purposes of this study is that the medium focus of observation emphasizes the technological media of affinity credit card programs, whereas the
patterns of access focus highlights the informational, marketing and economic conditions which influence whether and how certain individuals and groups obtain access to information about, acceptance into, and communication as members of affinity credit card programs. The distinction between a medium focus and a patterns of access emphasis can be seen in the situation in which the same technological medium is used in different ways to target members or supporters of upscale organizations and affinity groups, as compared to members and supporters of groups which serve lower-income individuals. The pattern of access to marketing information about an affinity card targeting wealthy individuals marketed in Forbes will differ from the pattern of information access to an affinity card marketed in Field and Stream. Such pattern of access issues have a direct influence on opportunities for and the nature of membership in a particular affinity card program or virtual community.

Related to the previous pattern of access issue is another which arises even if an individual obtains information about a particular affinity credit card program. The terms and conditions for card eligibility based on financial status will establish patterns of access determining which applications will be accepted and which will not. A low-income cardholder, or one with poor credit, who happens to read Forbes will likely be ineligible for the type of card that is targeted toward the income level of the average reader of that magazine.

Finally, a third pattern of access issue arises once an applicant becomes an affinity credit cardholder -- a member of what can be described at some level as a "virtual affinity card community." The nature of "intra-
community" communications between card issuer, marketer, cardholder, and affinity organization provides the basis for particular patterns of access to information about the operation of the program, the successful distribution of donations, the level of dialogue between the various parties, as well as other related matters. Analysis of this "intra-community" pattern of analysis issue provides additional input into the construction and maintenance of virtual community which is involved in the affinity credit card programs under examination. Interpretative data is used here to enhance the patterns of access analysis.

The content focus of observation, based on a media conduit metaphor, is the most common focus of communication media study (Meyrowitz, 1993, p. 56). In this study, the content focus covers a wide range of communication products, and is organized around a number of themes, some of which are present in the theoretical literature, and some which were revealed in the process of data collection and analysis. The themes which are analyzed are the following: (1) community, which includes the subthemes of race, power, education, and youth; (2) quantitative; (3) instrumental-utilitarian (excluding community-creating uses) and (4) spatial distanciation. Because this dissertation focuses on the presence and role of the concept of community in affinity credit card programs, the content focus on communication products examines the ways in which the concept of community arises in the content of the affinity credit card programs, how the concept is being defined, and the ways in which the concept of community is juxtaposed with the other themes which arise pursuant to a content focus. Interpretative data is

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incorporated in this section to expand on the themes revealed by the content analysis.

A clear understanding of the interpretative component of this study is important in understanding the methodological approach taken in this empirical examination. The relationship between this researcher and the humans who create and maintain the affinity credit card programs under examination is a social relationship; the "object" of study is a social object, functioning on the basis of sharing understandings that can be changed. As Sayer (1992) notes, this type of relationship can be described as a "dialogic" relationship between the subject and its object, or a subject-subject relation as opposed to a subject-object relation (pp. 26-27). Thus, the interpretations of both this researcher and those of various actors involved in the affinity card programs are incorporated into the analysis. Interpretative data or observations which are not attributed to a particular affinity credit card actor are based on the observations and understandings of this researcher.

In order to integrate the respective interpretative perspectives -- those of this researcher as well as those of the affinity card actors -- the discussion of interpretations is incorporated throughout the analysis of the other four perspectives. While the theme of community is discussed from the institutional, technological medium, and patterns of access perspectives, the different themes which are evident in the affinity card programs are most extensively identified and examined from the content perspective during analysis of the texts of the communication products. The interpretative focus of observation is integrated throughout the
analysis of the data emerging from these foci because of its centrality to the nature of the overall socially-constructed affinity credit card programs under examination. The interpretative data which is examined in conjunction with the other four foci will consist primarily of quotations or observations by key actors involved in the respective affinity credit card programs, whether obtained in first-hand personal interviews for this study, in media reports of interviews with the press, or in quotations which are part of corporate communications.

Following the individual analyses of the five foci of observation, this researcher will provide an interpretation of the overall findings from the five inter-related perspectives. This approach offers a more holistic understanding of the nature of community which is being constructed and communicated through affinity credit card programs than could be obtained using any single focus of observation.

Methodological Limitations

There are a number of limitations on the empirical scope of this study. The Ohio State University Behavioral and Social Sciences Human Subjects Institutional Review Board expressly prohibited identification in the final report of any individual or organization that declined to be interviewed in this study. Another condition required that informed consent be obtained before the inclusion in this dissertation of names or titles of specific individuals who were interviewed for this study. Absent such consent, participants are required to remain anonymous. A copy of the preliminary and final conditions imposed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board is presented in Appendix A.
Because of the conditions imposed by the Humans Subjects Institutional Review Board, this study does not provide a comparative discussion of the process of requesting approval for interviews with key officials or for access to organization-generated information. The lack of inclusion of particular information sources in this study should not be used as an indicator of a lack of participation by any particular organization. Only a portion of all of the data collected for this study is incorporated in the empirical analysis.

Another limitation of the study is the inability to incorporate individual cardholders as data sources for the study. Although such access would provide an opportunity for broad-based surveys or interviews to analyze interpretations of the affinity credit card programs by individual cardholders, personal information about cardholders is extremely valuable proprietary information and is not available to outside researchers for independent purposes. Furthermore, release of such personal information could lead to court actions for violation of cardholder privacy rights. Thus, the empirical examination is limited to the institutional level and does not incorporate information from individual cardholders.

An additional empirical limitation relates to the lack of direct access to most aggregate data about the efficiency of a particular affinity card program, in terms of response rates, card usage, demographic information and the like. This data is also proprietary and is unavailable directly to an outside researcher, possibly for fear that the information could end up in the hands of competitors. However, some financial data was obtained for the study and is incorporated in the analysis below.
Despite these empirical limitations, the research sources which have been incorporated into this study are broad and diverse enough for the value of the analysis and conclusions to remain methodologically sound. As indicated by Dodd, Sayer and Leyshon and Thrift, intensive study at the institutional level of practices and interpretations regarding affinity credit card programs not only reveals a great deal of valuable information of its own. Such observations can also be used to obtain indirect information about the behavior and interpretations of cardholders. This approach is used to determine how the concept of virtual community is being constructed and communicated by institutions which are marketing Black-oriented affinity credit cards, and to infer from that data ways in which cardholders themselves might be defining or responding to these affinity credit card appeals.
CHAPTER 6
DATA ANALYSIS OF AFFINITY CREDIT CARD PROGRAMS
TARGETED TO BLACKS

Introduction

This chapter presents findings and analysis of the affinity credit card programs which are the focus of this study, the Unity Visa card program and the America's Black Colleges Visa Program. Another affinity credit card program which was announced but not introduced, the Church of God in Christ Visa program, is also discussed for comparative purposes. The analysis of these programs is conducted along five areas of focus or abstraction: (1) institutional; (2) technological medium; (3) patterns of access; (4) content of communication products; and (5) interpretative, with the interpretative discussion integrated with each of the other four foci. Within each focus of observation, each of the affinity credit card programs is addressed individually, then the programs are compared to each other according to the particular area of focus. The ultimate emphasis within each area of focus is the nature and relations of community being constructed, communicated, and interpreted by the institutions which are involved in the creation and operation of the affinity credit card programs under examination. Interpretative data is incorporated at each area of
focus to reveal the understandings and human agency which are implicated in various actions.

Following the presentation of each focus of observation, the chapter concludes with a discussion which re-integrates or synthesizes the individual analyses. This discussion not only brings the abstracted analyses back into an integrated communication framework, it also provides a broad-based perspective of the nature of community relations which are being constructed in affinity credit card programs derived from a range of different perspectives.

Institutional

This section focuses on the institutions which constitute the following affinity credit card programs: UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa, with brief references to the canceled Church of God in Christ (COGIC) Visa program for comparative purposes. While the discussion provides a general overview of these institutions, the primary issue of interest is how the concept of virtual community is reflected from an institutional standpoint. The analysis in this section begins with an individual examination of the institutions which are involved in each affinity program, and then concludes with a comparative discussion.

UNITY Visa Card Program

The UNITY Visa credit card program was launched in early 1996 by the Boston Bank of Commerce, New England's only Black-owned bank. This card directs 1% of every dollar charged to the cardholder's choice of African American charities, which include: Children's Defense Fund, Jackie Robinson Foundation, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, National Urban
League and Local Affiliates, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, United Negro College Fund, and the UNITY Foundation. Although the card was available nationally during the program's seven months in operation during 1996, direct mail and telemarketing efforts were concentrated in the Northeast. A national marketing campaign has been planned beginning in 1997 ("Bank's card program pays $35,000," 1997).

The Boston Bank of Commerce (BBOC)

The BBOC is a Massachusetts chartered commercial bank offering a broad range of banking services. The BBOC operates primarily in the Greater Boston metropolitan area and surrounding communities, with specific focus on Roxbury, Mattapan, the South End, Jamaica Plain and Dorchester. The BBOC has commitments to provide banking services and maintain facilities in these areas, some of which are low-income and have a largely minority population. These areas were negatively affected by adverse trends in the real estate market which adversely affected the BBOC. For this and other reasons, the BBOC experienced operating losses in 1994 and previous years. In July 1995, the BBOC completed a sale of common and preferred stock to five investors in the amount of $1,457,000, with the principal buyer purchasing common stock for $1,000,002 (Arthur Anderson Financial Statement, 1995). The BBOC is a $70 million asset community bank ("Bank's card program pays $35,000," 1997).

Kevin Cohee and Teri Williams, an African American husband and wife team, were the principal purchasers of stock in BBOC in 1995. Cohee, the new chairman of the bank, is a former consultant specializing in acquisition of radio and television stations by minorities. Later, he was a...
financial analyst at Salomon Brothers, Inc. Williams, the new senior vice president of marketing, was one of the youngest vice presidents at American Express and managed a $20 million portfolio and directed marketing campaigns to over 1 million gold cardholders. The idea for the UNITY card program was developed after Williams' work on a study for American Express on the viability of designing a credit card program targeted to African Americans, an idea that American Express decided not to pursue. In 1988, through a leveraged buy-out, Cohee and Williams obtained Military Professional Services, Inc. (MPS), a firm that marketing Visa and MasterCard credit cards to military personnel. By 1991, Cohee and Williams sold the majority share of MPS to First Chicago National Bank. In 1995, using proceeds from the MPS sale, Cohee and Williams made their investment in BBOC (Unity Visa Press Release, 1996).

Unlike the situation in many affinity credit card marketing arrangements, the Boston Bank of Commerce was totally responsible for the development and implementation of the marketing strategy for the UNITY Visa credit card. The BBOC conceived the UNITY card concept, designed the marketing strategy, and then contacted specific organizations to ask them if they would like to participate in the program by being listed as beneficiary organizations. The benefiting organizations were not integrally involved in designing the marketing literature, the card itself, or identifying prospects for card solicitations (S. Stedman, NAACP LDF interview, March 27, 1997; J. Parham, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund interview, March 26, 1997; G. Davis-Watkins, National Urban League interview, March 27, 1997). The Boston Bank of Commerce contacted
prospects for the UNITY Visa cards primarily through direct mail and telemarketing during the first year, which was described as a test market period ("Bank's card program pays $35,000," 1997). A nationwide marketing campaign is planned for 1997, although there were several media reports on the UNITY Visa card launch in national magazines and newspapers, such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Dollars & Sense, Emerge, and American Banker, during late 1995 and early 1996.

A central focus of the UNITY Visa card program and the Boston Bank of Commerce is the fact that the UNITY Visa program is the only national credit card issued by an African American owned bank, and the only one that allows the cardholder to select to donate to their choice of several charities that support Black causes. This appeal to race and community is not only the result of the view that there is a socio-cultural value for such a credit card targeted to African Americans. It is also the result of competitive economic considerations in which targeting a specific niche market allows a smaller bank to compete where it could not do so in the general marketplace. As Williams notes "you can effectively compete with the larger banks by focusing attention on segments in the marketplace...[y]ou can't be all things to all people" (Levine, 1996).

In addition to the institutional appeal to racial community is the institutional appeal of the Boston Bank of Commerce and the UNITY Visa program to financial security, based on articulation of the fact that all deposits with the Boston Bank of Commerce are insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) (UNITY Visa solicitation letter, Appendix I). This is important for cardholders who desire confidence that
the BBOC and its resources are secure, especially those who may have apprehensions about obtaining a financial product from an African American owned community bank because of concerns about capital limitations or doubts based on negative stereotypes. The FDIC insurance notification is aimed at providing reassurance that the UNITY Visa card program is as safe as any other credit card program, while at the same time providing the additional function of supporting African American community institutions.

**NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Educational Fund (LDF)**

The LDF was founded in 1940 under the leadership of the late Thurgood Marshall. Although initially affiliated with the NAACP, the LDF was always an independent organization; since 1957 LDF has been completely separate from the NAACP, with its own budget, board of directors, staff and program. One of LDF's most significant early victories was the landmark 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which not only outlawed segregation in public schools, but also initiated the dismantling of all forms of government-sanctioned racial discrimination (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Annual Report, 1995).

As a non-profit organization, nearly 80% of the LDF's funding comes from charitable giving. The organization has few other sources of revenue. Thus, the UNITY Visa card program provides a benefit in terms of the charitable donations which the LDF obtains directly. In addition, the UNITY Visa card provides an efficient, cost-effective means of allowing the LDF to extend its visibility in the market of African American
professionals. Furthermore, the UNITY Visa card extends the visibility of the LDF among the larger American public. The LDF's charitable donations come from a wide range of sources: individuals, foundations, and corporations; the same sources of revenue that are used by many other charitable organizations (S. Stedman, NAACP LDF interview, March 27, 1997).

**Children’s Defense Fund (CDF)**

The CDF exists to provide a strong and effective voice for all the children of America, with special emphasis on the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF's goal is to educate the nation about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before problems arise in their health, educational, family or social lives. CDF gathers, analyzes, and disseminates information on key issues affecting children. CDF also monitors the development and implementation of federal and state policies. The organization provides information, technical assistance and support to a network of state and local child advocates, service providers, and public and private sector official and leaders. In 1994, the Children's Defense Fund's revenues of $16.6 million were obtained from the following sources: foundations - 61.5%; special events - 11.7%; individuals - 9.0%; corporations - 6.7%; publications - 5.6%; other gifts - 4.6%; and other revenue - 1.6% (Children's Defense Fund Annual Report, 1994).

**The College Fund/UNCF (UNCF)**

Established in 1944, the UNCF is a not-for-profit entity which provides institutional grants of support to forty-one privately supported
Black colleges and universities, where more than 54,000 students are enrolled. The UNCF also supports precollege programs, college scholarships, and faculty awards. While historically Black colleges make up only three percent of all institutions of higher education in the U.S., they graduate approximately 33 percent of all African Americans with B.A.s and 43 percent of all African Americans who go on to earn Ph.D.s. In 1996, the total amounts raised in campaigns and investment activity totaled just over $101 million (The College Fund/UNCF Annual Report, 1996).

**Jackie Robinson Foundation (JRF)**

The JRF was founded in 1973 by Rachel Robinson, widow of Jackie Robinson, who in 1947 broke the color barrier in major league baseball. Jackie Robinson was also the first Black vice president of a major American corporation, and an activist in the Civil Rights Movement. Each year JRF supports approximately 130 Jackie Robinson Scholars at over 60 colleges and universities nationwide. In addition to a four-year scholarship award, JRF Scholars receive a range of support services which contribute to JRF's 92% graduation rate -- the best in the country (UNITY Newsletter, July 1996, p. 3).

**National Urban League and Local Affiliates (NUL)**

The NUL was founded in 1910, and has been a leader in social services and civil rights in America. The NUL is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, community-based organization headquartered in New York City, with affiliates in 115 cities in 34 states and the District of Columbia. The mission of the NUL is to improve the economic well-being of African American
families and communities, and to promote the academic and social well-being of African American youth. The NUL carries out its mission by conducting research, devising programs to help individual and communities help themselves, and joining with others to champion the racial harmony and inclusion which characterize an open society (UNITY Newsletter, November 1996, p. 3).

**Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund (TMS Fund)**

The Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund is a merit scholarship program that provides four-year scholarships to students who attend historically Black public colleges and universities. Since its founding in 1987, the TMS Fund has awarded scholarships totaling more than $1 million. The 38 historically black public colleges and universities that participate in this program are pivotal educators of African Americans. These institutions enroll more than 190,000 students in studies spanning 400 fields. Students at these institutions represent 70% of all students enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities, and each year these colleges and universities educate more than 54% of the African Americans who go on to graduate and professional schools (UNITY Newsletter, November 1996, p. 3). Early support for the TMS Fund was provided by the National Basketball Association and Miller Brewing Company (St. Petersburg Times, January 30, 1987).

The TMS Fund received an invitation from the Boston Bank of Commerce to participate as a beneficiary in the UNITY Visa program and viewed it as an additional prospective source of income. However, the program was not envisioned as a major income source. A great deal of

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importance was placed on the potential for increased name recognition, as well as on the reputation of the other organizations that had been invited to participate (J. Parham, TMS Fund interview, March 26, 1997).

**UNITY Foundation**

The UNITY Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting local programs involved with the African American community. The BBOC created the UNITY Foundation to ensure that smaller, grassroots efforts obtain financial support. The UNITY Foundation is administered by the Boston Foundation, which uses its expertise to effectively distribute UNITY Foundation funds each year (UNITY Newsletter, July 1996, p. 3). In 1996, UNITY Foundation grant recipients included East Harlem Employment Service, the New Community Corporation (New Jersey), Roxbury Youthworks, Metropolitan Career Center (Pennsylvania), Women Entrepreneurs of Baltimore, Inc., Capital Commitment, Inc. (Washington, D.C.), the James R. Clark Memorial Sickle Cell Foundation (S. Carolina), and the Multicultural AIDS Coalition (Massachusetts) (UNITY Newsletter, February 1997, p. 3).

**America's Black Colleges VISA Program**

The America's Black Colleges (ABC) Visa program was introduced in 1994. Originally, the secured part of the card was provided by Key Bank and Trust (formerly Key Federal Savings Bank) while the unsecured part of the program was offered by Indiana National Bank. This arrangement changed, and now Key Bank and Trust is the card issuer for both the
secured and the unsecured ABC card. The America’s Black Colleges Program serves as the marketer for the America’s Black Colleges Visa card.

Key Bank and Trust

As of March 31, 1996, Key Federal Savings Bank had total assets of $241,010,000 (Consolidated Statement of Condition, Unaudited, March 31, 1996). In the beginning of 1997, Key Federal Savings Bank changed its name to Key Bank and Trust, reflecting the change from a federal savings charter to a state commercial charter. Key Bank and Trust operates in Maryland, with six branches around the Baltimore area. It is a community bank that is beginning to get involved in some small business commercial lending. However, it started as a savings bank which specialized in mortgage lending (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997).

The credit card lending by Key Bank and Trust was established on a secured card base, which remains the majority of its credit card offerings. According to an officer of Key Bank and Trust, given its size, the bank is "a little out of proportion, which is another reason [for] going over to a commercial institution rather than a savings institution. . . . [W]e have about 55 million dollars in outstandings. And for a 230-235 million dollar bank, that's a little lopsided. But the credit card division has always been a money maker, so we continue to grow" (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997).

Key Bank and Trust entered the affinity credit card market primarily based on economic considerations. Around sixteen years ago, when Key Federal first got into the secured credit card business, a classified ad about
the product led to a tremendous number of applications. Over the last five years, however, other banks have been entering the affinity credit card market, including Citibank and Chase (Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997). According to an officer with Key Bank and Trust:

[T]he competition has become very fierce which has driven the acquisition costs high. And if you have a $10,000 credit line with $8,000 balances supporting your acquisition costs, it's not a big problem. But when you have a $500 credit card and a $470 average balance per account, there's not a lot of profit to be made. So again ... it was a matter of economics. We need partners to share some of the costs. And in turn we give back some of our profits ongoing. But that was the impetus to get into the [affinity] credit cards. A hook that would reduce our acquisition costs. (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997)

Key Bank and Trust wants to ensure that the contribution of the affinity group or marketer is going to be as significant as the bank's contribution to the program. This contribution generally is reflected in financial terms. According to the bank:

[T]hat shows us some good faith effort on the part of the co-branding or marketer that ... they're willing to contribute as heavily as the bank is. The second piece of whatever we do is we're a great believer in testing. The bank is very liberal in spending money to test a program. ... [W]e will sit down and virtually talk to anyone who wants to walk in our door to discuss co-branding or an affinity program. ... [Y]ou never know who the next person is who might walk in the door or what idea they may have that just may work. So what we try to do now is obviously not put any large funds towards anything, until we test the market and see ... what's going to happen, what can happen. (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997)

The marketer of the ABC Visa card, America's Black Colleges Program, approached Key Bank and Trust with the idea of developing the
affinity card program. In the context of the ABC Visa card program, Key Bank and Trust has allowed the marketer of the card to take the lead in developing and marketing the card. The philosophy for Key Bank and Trust is to allow a partner with specialized knowledge of the target market to develop the marketing strategy for that market. For example:

[1]If I'm going to market to the Hispanic community, the first thing I say is I don't know anything about the Hispanic community. So I am not going to be the one directing how we market. I'm going to either employ someone or have a consultant, or have one who is in that situation tell me what to do. . . . I don't know how to market to the Black population. . . . So, obviously, the marketer [for the America's Black Colleges Visa], Alvin Lee, is Black. And anything that we have done with our advertising company on America's Black Colleges, Alvin was brought in, and sat at the table and made the decisions with us. . . . (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997)

However, after experience with a range of affinity programs, Key Bank and Trust has developed experience and expertise that allows it to make independent determinations regarding affinity credit card proposals that have limited potential for success. For example,

[1]If a marketer comes to us . . . with several scenarios and we were able to take one of those scenarios and right off the bat we knew because of our experience in the affinity business that this scenario is not going to work . . . you're going to get basically zero return on your dollars on this. . . . It may have worked eight years ago. It's certainly not going to work in 1997. So when it comes to things that are germane to the Black community, we will defer to them. But when it comes to the bank marketing side, that's when we have to step in, if we see that there's going to be some friction or if we see that something is just not going to work. (D. DeMarco, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997)
Thus, there is no rigid, pre-determined formula for the manner in which Key Bank and Trust structures its affinity credit card relationships with marketers and beneficiary organizations. As the bank has gained experience with Black markets, it has been able to make increasingly independent decisions about the likelihood of success for new affinity card proposals targeted to those markets.

America's Black Colleges (ABC) Program

The America's Black Colleges Program is Maryland-based, not-for-profit corporation, which develops cause-related marketing programs in conjunction with corporations providing consumer products and services, with a portion of the profits designed to generate scholarships for students attending the 115 historically Black colleges and universities. The ABC Program was developed in 1988. The whole idea grew out of the attraction that was identified with the use of affinity groups and affinity marketing. Alvin Lee had an extensive career in credit cards at American Express before becoming the Executive Director of the ABC Program. In presenting the motivation for the ABC Program, he states that

In the late '80s we saw the emergence of affinity credit card marketing. Therefore, we started a credit card program initially which really targeted the Black colleges across the country. We consolidated the potential of all 115 Black colleges under one umbrella because we could get the economies of scale because we were speaking not as the revenue and potential of one college; we were talking about the revenue potential that could be generated from 115 colleges. We were talking about a generic theme of support of Black higher education versus the targeted theme of supporting graduates from one particular college. So we became generic in approach in terms of support for Black higher education. (A. Lee, ABC program interview, March 6, 1997)
The ABC program is the marketer of the ABC Visa card and approached Key Bank and Trust with the idea for the affinity credit card program. As the marketer, the ABC Program is distinct from the charities or affinity groups that are beneficiaries of donations from the ABC Visa card. An affinity card marketer such as the ABC program receives compensation for providing services and expertise to the affinity card beneficiaries, the 115 Black colleges, and the affinity credit card issuer, Key Bank and Trust.

115 Black Colleges and Universities

The donations derived from the ABC Visa card provide scholarships to students to attend one of the 115 historically Black colleges and universities. Beneficiaries typically receive $1000 scholarships. Typically there are between six and nine awarded per year. Additional information is identified as confidential, included the precise percentage of card charges that are donated for scholarships. In 1994, the first year of the ABC Visa card program, three $2000 scholarships were awarded (Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997; Bouza, 1994, Appendix M).

Comparative Discussion

The information provided for both programs reveals that the creation of affinity credit card programs is designed to provide benefits for all of the institutions involved. All of the institutions associated with the UNITY Visa card: the BBOC and the seven beneficiary organizations, along with those associated with the ABC Visa card: Key Bank and Trust, the ABC Program, and the 115 Black colleges and universities, have the goal of some financial benefit from the program. One obvious necessary condition for the establishment of an affinity credit card program targeting
the Black community is the expectation of financial benefits, both for the
card issuer, the marketer (if a party separate from the card issuer), and the
beneficiaries. As noted in the interview with Key Bank and Trust, it
provides a marketing "hook" to attract and retain cardholders, which
reduces the cost of acquiring new cardholders. It also allows the sharing of
marketing costs with an affinity partner, at least in the ABC Visa context in
which Key Bank and Trust and the America's Black Colleges Program
work together on card marketing. In addition, the merger of a credit card
with donations for scholarships for students attending Black colleges
expands the number of prospects who might elect to apply for and use a
Key Bank and Trust credit card, as well as increasing the number of people
who might support contributions to Black college students. This empirical
analysis did not evaluate the possibility that affinity credit card use might
reduce the amount of direct donations by a cardholder to a particular
beneficiary organization.

However, the likelihood of potential income from affinity credit
card programs is necessarily related to the existence or creation of some sort
of affinity or commitment to the goals of a participating beneficiary group
by its members or supporters. As was noted by the official from the
Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, in making the decision to
participate in the program, that organization focused in large part on the
nature of the other beneficiary organizations which were aligned with the
UNITY Visa program. Being associated with those organizations was
deemed to be a positive feature, whether or not an immediate or major
financial benefit was derived from the program. Such an association has
the potential to generate goodwill for an organization, showing its involvement with other organizations oriented toward providing services to Black communities. The value to beneficiary organizations is not only in potential new income from donations through the card program, but also in increased name recognition and the identification of new members and supporters. As was noted in the NAACP LDF interview, not-for-profit organizations are engaged in an ongoing search for new sources of funding. And as noted by BBOC, in order for a small bank to compete with larger banks in the credit card market, it is essential for them to target a specific niche and serve that niche better than larger banks. This is what both the BBOC and Key Bank and Trust are doing with their affinity marketing appeals.

This niche marketing strategy from an affinity credit card perspective is more attractive the stronger the level of affinity that exists among members or supporters of the particular affinity group. Although the card was withdrawn before it was marketed to the public, the plan for a Church of God in Christ (COGIC) affinity card through Key Federal Savings Bank had an appeal to affinity at a number of levels. That proposed card not only incorporated an appeal to racial solidarity, which was reflected in the fact that most of the denomination's members are Black. More significantly, because the proposed COGIC card was church-based, it primarily focused on the religious appeal which exists among members of the denomination to expand their financial support of the institution, which reportedly collects $1.3 billion a year in tithes and offerings. As Robert Bouza, president of Key Bank and Trust's bank card operation stated
in 1995, "The loyalty edge is better with this kind of program than with any other I have seen . . . . It would take an awful lot for someone not to use their card [if it helps the church raise funds]" (Fickenscher, 1995).

The key difference between the institutional structure for the UNITY Visa program and that for the ABC Visa program is the lack of a separate marketer in the UNITY Visa context. The Boston Bank of Commerce performs the role of card issuer and card marketer for the UNITY Visa, whereas these roles are split in the ABC Visa context between Key Bank and Trust and the America's Black Colleges Program. The fact that both the senior vice president for marketing at the BBOC and the executive director of the America's Black Colleges Program are African American and worked in credit cards at American Express shows that there are different ways to structure an affinity card relationship targeted toward African Americans. Because the Boston Bank of Commerce is Black-owned and its principal owners bought the bank in large part to introduce the UNITY Visa card, it was not necessary for them to use an outside marketer in order to develop a marketing strategy for Black consumers. They were able to develop their marketing plan independently, without active participation or major input from the beneficiary organizations. In contrast, as the interview with Key Bank and Trust reveals, lack of in-house expertise in terms of marketing specifically to Black communities made it necessary to use an outside marketer who possesses that experience.

The issue of the nature of the primary marketer of a particular affinity card program is also important because of the fact that in both the
ABC Visa and the UNITY Visa card programs, the ultimate beneficiary institutions did not have an integral role in the development and implementation of the marketing plan for the card. One reason may well be the diverse nature of the various beneficiaries. The UNITY Visa program has six beneficiaries which are un-affiliated with the Boston Bank of Commerce. Coordination with that number of organizations, even if it was desired by the Boston Bank of Commerce, may not have been efficient in designing a marketing strategy. Also, as stated above, the fact that in-house officials at the Boston Bank of Commerce have had extensive credit card marketing experience and are African Americans may have obviated the necessity to involve the charitable groups directly in the development of the marketing program.

Similarly, direct inclusion of 115 college and university representatives in the development of the ABC Visa marketing strategy would clearly raise problems of inefficiency. Once again, having the program coordinated through the America's Black Colleges Programs provides a centralized point for coordination of the interests of the respective colleges and universities. This centralized function creates a more effective mechanism for conducting the ABC Visa program.

The planned COGIC affinity credit card program would have constituted a more traditional affinity credit card program design. In that case, the bank would have had a direct relationship with the church headquarters. Officials from the COGIC headquarters, in addition to serving as a centralizing point for the local churches around the country, would likely have had a more direct relationship with the development
and implementation of the marketing plan for the card because of the existence of a distinct, active membership base on which it is dependent for the majority of its revenues. Where the membership or support of a beneficiary organization among individuals is diffuse or not solidly established, the rationale for having the affinity group directly involved in the development and marketing of the program appears to decrease significantly, as in the case of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa programs. Many, if not all, of the UNITY Visa beneficiary organizations obtain the majority of their funding from corporations or foundations, rather than individual donors who are actual members of the organization. And although the tens of thousands of alumni of the 115 historically Black colleges and universities should provide a tremendous "membership" base for the marketing of the ABC Visa card, the inefficiencies in having all of the colleges directly involved in the process, and the lack of a pre-established centralized coordinating entity, led to the necessity for the creation of an organization like the America's Black Colleges Program to perform that integrating and marketing function.

Thus, the analysis of both affinity credit card programs indicates that a fundamental aspect of such programs, when targeted to Blacks, is that the beneficiary organizations must have some link or relation to a Black market or community. In addition, when the beneficiary organizations lack a clearly defined membership or are extremely numerous and lack a central coordinating body, the marketing appeal should come from a source with some experience in marketing to Blacks, and preferably one in which Blacks are either a partner or the sole marketer and issuer. This is
reflective of the growing specialization and segmentation which is occurring in marketing in general, and reveals the central role for professionals and organizations who have experience in and knowledge of the unique cultural characteristics of the groups that are being targeted. This is also a demonstration of the involvement of racial and cultural factors, traits of traditional community, in the marketing of a monetary instrument in a spatially dispersed market. This de-linking of the racial characteristics of traditional community from its spatially-concentrated characteristics in the affinity credit card context is central to the conceptualization of virtual communities as used in this study. It is likely that Black-oriented affinity credit card programs will continue to develop in similar institutional forms as long as the following conditions persist: (1) Black consumers remain an attractive market because of their increasing spending power (estimated $469 billion in 1997), (2) Blacks are perceived to be retaining interests and concerns that are racially and culturally distinctive; (3) credit card markets continue to be saturated; and (4) institutions continue to look for new means of attracting income and communicating with African Americans who are spatially dispersed.

Technological Medium

This focus of observation deals generally with the impact of the technological medium of affinity credit card instruments and the communication and computer networks that underlie credit card operations in general. Thus, this section provides a general analysis of the affinity credit card medium in the context of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa card programs. Because of the equal applicability of most of this
analysis to both affinity card programs, distinctions made between the two programs in this section are minimal.

Affinity credit card programs, as a system, operate based on the integration of several different media. These include the credit card instrument itself, the telecommunication and computer networks which provide credit card processing activities, and the various marketing media that are used for communication with cardholders, some which are one-way (print advertising, direct mail) and others which are interactive (telemarketing and customer service phone lines).

The affinity credit card instrument itself serves two roles, as a catalyst for an exchange transaction and as a visual image designed to represent some central characteristic of the affinity program. From a primarily financial standpoint, it can serve as a physically proximate indicator or catalyst for communication to a merchant regarding whether the cardholder has sufficient credit available for a purchase. This information is obtained through the use of the magnetic strip on the back of the card, in conjunction with the credit card authorization unit in the merchant's possession, which is connected to the credit card processing network which authorizes or declines the transaction.

However, this exchange process does not always require the physical presence of the affinity credit card. Credit card information is commonly provided to merchants over telephone, via computer, or in the mail without the actual card being in the merchant's physical presence. The merchant then engages in the same process of card approval, based on the trust that card usage is authorized. Thus, even in the financial role,
affinity credit card instruments possess both spatially proximate and spatially remote uses.

This financial character of the affinity credit card instrument coincides well with theories of money's utilitarian nature, although, as noted by Smelt and others, credit cards lack the quantitative value specificity of other forms of money. Credit cards possess a maximum credit limit, but the amount that is available at any particular time below that maximum is subject to the decisions of the cardholder. So an affinity credit card, like any credit card, does not provide a pre-determined value for exchange, like a coin or currency would, although once a value is set in the marketplace, an affinity credit card can be "translated" into a particular value if that value is below the credit limit. In a way, the negotiation of financial meaning that can be understood using credit cards is one in which the outer boundaries of the number that can be communicated is pre-set, but the actual exchange value to be applied in a particular situation is flexible.

While the UNITY Visa and the ABC Visa credit cards, as monetary instruments, provide the standard financial benefits of any Visa credit card, they provide an additional element that explicitly incorporates certain elements of traditional community. The cultural or racial component of these cards provides an explicit expression of the social relationships or commitments of the cardholder. As described by Macchiette and Roy (1991), this explicit display of the cardholder's affinity relationship is an expression of affinity "social disclosure," defined as "the level to which a group member or constituent expresses affiliation, and overtly manifests
group identification to the community [or society] at large" (p. 39). This social disclosure dimension operates in conjunction with a second dimension which is referred to as "affinity strength." This refers to the "internalization, identification, and personal acceptance of the values, norms and fundamental mission of the group" (p. 39). Professional associations, alumni associations and cause-related groups are generally considered to manifest both strong affinity strength and strong social disclosure (p. 39).

Applying this concept of social disclosure, a cardholder's use of a UNITY Visa or ABC Visa provide for a number of different types of scenarios through which a cardholder's affinity affiliation can be communicated. When a cardholder pays a merchant for a purchase with one of the cards, there is a disclosure to the merchant of some sort of connection or relationship, whether or not the merchant is aware of the precise nature of the relationship. The social disclosure of the affinity relationship that is communicated via the card to a merchant can also be communicated to non-merchants. Since credit cards are rarely used for transactions between individuals, it is most likely that a non-merchant who observes a UNITY Visa or ABC Visa cardholder's use of the card will be a bystander who is not a party to the transaction. However, this is still a social disclosure which communicates some level of affinity between the cardholder and the affinity program.

Macchiette and Roy (1991) mentions some groups who have strong internal affinity, yet who prefer not to disclose their affiliation to the outside world. They identify members of B'nai B'rith as an example of a
group with strong affinity in which a majority of members selected a plain-faced card, rather than a designer card carrying the association's name and logo. Other groups that fit this category may be marginally controversial (pp. 39-40). In cases where there is a disincentive for social disclosure of a particular group affiliation, the explicit expression of an affinity relationship through the credit card instrument could be viewed by the cardholder as stigmatizing. This could also be an indication of a low level of affinity strength. In either case, the communicative capacity of the card is important in terms of whether, where, and with whom it is used.

The communicative aspects of the card instrument are not limited to merchants or bystanders. When receiving a UNITY Visa or ABC Visa card number over the telephone or computer, a merchant will not be aware of its particular affinity nature unless the cardholder voluntarily shares additional information. However, even here there is an personal communicative process at work; in this case, directly between the card and the cardholder. When engaged in a remote transaction, the user who elects to use the affinity credit card instead of another card still has made the selection of one card over another (or over several others). Even if the affinity card has the lowest interest rate of all of the others, there is the accompanying fact that the card carries certain targeted meanings and provides targeted benefits based on racial and cultural characteristics. Every time the ABC Visa or UNITY Visa card is physically used to make a purchase, the name and logo are reinforced in the cardholder's consciousness. Even if the card number is memorized by the cardholder, he or she likely possesses some awareness of the affinity relationship.
underlying that card usage, especially if the card issuer and marketer actively work to remind the cardholder that use of the card provides benefits for some organization with which he or she shares some affinity relationship, affiliation, or concern.

Finally, the card instrument and the card network allow for communications between the card issuer/marketer and external parties, including the cardholder, bystanders, and merchants, as discussed above. Since the card issuer/marketer develops the affinity card instrument, the card issuer/marketer is responsible for originating or "encoding" the images on the card. Of course, this does not guarantee that the card meanings will be "decoded" by cardholders, merchants, or bystanders in the ways that the card issuer/merchant desires. However, this encoding-decoding process has been well established in the communication field in recent decades, and is actually strong evidence in support of an argument that the credit-card-specific technologies of affinity credit card programs are communication processes.

Credit card issuers/marketers also receive unintentional communications from affinity credit cardholders via transaction-generated information that is produced through the credit card database networks that are used by card issuers for processing and billing purposes. This is referred to as unintentional communications not because the credit card use is unintentional, but because card usage is normally conducted for exchange purposes, not for purposes of sending messages to the card issuer/marketer. Although this information may not be intentional communication by cardholders, it is exceptionally valuable to card
issuer/marketers. The computer databases that record cardholder personal and purchasing information are a central area of communicative importance in allowing the affinity card issuer to examine and interpret the impact of the marketing appeal. These databases allow credit card issuer/marketers to monitor response rates to marketing solicitations, observe demographic characteristics of cardholders, and evaluate usage patterns based on various criteria. These are necessary for finely targeted marketing campaigns that can be adjusted based on detailed information.

In this way, the "surveillance" aspects of the networked computer systems underlying affinity credit card networks function as media allowing credit card issuer/marketers to obtain and interpret the level of effectiveness of their marketing strategies. Because of the central role of culture and community in the ABC and UNITY Visa card marketing programs, the interpretation of marketing data involves an analysis of how the targeted market is responding to the construction of culture and community which is part of the marketing appeal. Both Key Bank and Trust and the Boston Bank of Commerce note that market testing is central to their strategy with

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8 Affinity credit card issuers do not uniformly provide the full range of individual cardholder usage statistics to the ultimate beneficiary organizations, such as details about purchasing behavior, marketing response rates and the like. Because the actual credit card relationship is between the cardholder and the card issuer, privacy and competitive considerations limit the information that can be shared with third parties. In neither the UNITY VISA context nor the ABC Visa context do the beneficiary organizations receive details about actual card usage patterns. (The UNITY Foundation, created by the Boston Bank of Commerce, is an obvious exception to this situation. Similarly, since the America's Black Colleges Program is the marketing partner of Key Bank and Trust for the ABC Visa program, it also receives information about the effectiveness of the marketing effort for evaluation and monitoring purposes.)
affinity card programs (Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997; "Bank's card program pays $35,000," 1997).

A possible contrary argument by orthodox monetary theorists might be that affinity credit cards are being used primarily or exclusively for economic exchange purposes, and that the racial/cultural components are superfluous, incidental factors that have minimal, if any, impact. Such an argument is limited in a number of ways. First, this study is focused on the nature of affinity credit card programs and their mechanisms or ways of functioning, which exist necessarily as a result of their structure. It also highlights the contingent conditions which determine whether the mechanisms are actually activated. The particular effects of an affinity credit card program are subject to a wide range of contingent conditions, such as the quality of the marketing program, the level of affinity of an affinity group, the financial terms and conditions of the affinity card program, general views about credit and debt in society, and so on. These conditions are not the central focus of this study, nor do they address the underlying factors which determine the nature and necessary conditions of affinity credit card programs.

Second, a communication approach allows for -- in fact, assumes -- that affinity credit card programs involve negotiation of multiple meanings. The fact that some people listen to the radio or watch television for relaxation does not preclude the possibility that they are also interpreting and being influenced by the images which are presented. Viewing affinity credit card programs as communication media opens up more possibilities for theoretical understanding and empirical analysis.
The computer and communication networks that underlie credit card programs, including those based on the affinity concept, allow for remote exchanges which are far more extensive than those available with coin or currency. Credit card transactions with cards that are part of the Visa network, such as the two cards which are the subject of this study, can be used worldwide, anywhere that any other Visa card can be used. According to the majority of the literature discussed above in Chapter 3 on the relation between money and human relations, the spatial distanciation which results from this process should entirely eliminate any residual elements of traditional community that remain after the destructive impact of coin and currency that helped inaugurate "modern" Western society.

As described above, affinity credit card technological media have important implications for the communication and constructions of community that occur in a virtual spatial context. Proximate community by its very nature permits easier monitoring of social behaviors and activities by leaders, making contrary actions more difficult, though certainly not impossible, to engage in. One of the key elements of "traditional" community is the ability of leaders, as well as members, to reinforce established values in everyday life, as well as to bring social pressure to bear on members who attempt to function outside of the established rules and norms of the group. This communication process is a key part of the maintenance of values and culture, and is much easier to manage in a spatially concentrated area.
The spatial dispersal of communities increases the complexity of maintaining traditional norms and values. However, as noted by Wellman (1979, 1996), Kotkin (1992), Pilotta (in press) and Oliver (1988), many of the elements of proximate communities, such as racial and cultural elements, have been or have the potential to be retained or reestablished in virtual contexts. While consumer surveillance technologies were primarily developed for the purposes of enhancing marketing efforts, their role in interpreting the effectiveness of cultural and community messages is integral to that process in the affinity card context. To the extent that shared interests and shared socio-economic efforts constitute a form of community, affinity credit card programs such as the UNITY Visa and the ABC Visa program represent efforts in that direction. Kevin Cohee, chairman of the Boston Bank of Commerce enthusiastically notes the link between the communication and the economic characteristics of the UNITY Visa card program by stating that, "The power of our community linked nationwide with an efficient mechanism for disseminating information and raising capital will be one of the greatest things that has ever happened to the African American community. . . . We would like to create a financial network of customers which supports the economic development and empowerment of African American communities nationwide" (Washington, 1995, p. 10).

While the affinity credit card programs examined in this study provide a medium for the construction and communication of a form of virtual community, the form of community that is created is limited if the programs are only defined by the credit card instrument and the computer
and communication processing technologies through which they operate. One limitation is the ability of cardholders to communicate with the card issuer/marketer. The issuers and marketers of the ABC Visa and UNITY Visa are able to incorporate voice, print, and images in their marketing efforts to prospects or cardholders. While consumer surveillance technology allows prospects and cardholders to communicate with affinity issuers and marketers via action or inaction, and allows indirect communication to the respective beneficiary organizations through their membership or non-membership in the card program and subsequent donations, the structure of the credit card system itself provides limited opportunities for cardholders to communicate directly with the card issuer, unless they are making phone calls or writing letters with complaints or suggestions about the program.

Even more significant in terms of the quality of the virtual community which is being constructed is the fact that the opportunities are limited through these affinity card programs for person-to-person communication. Although the BBOC publishes a newsletter for UNITY Visa cardholders on the UNITY Visa donation program and other matters of interest to the African American community, and the ABC Visa program issues an annual letter informing cardholders of scholarships awarded as a result of the program, the credit card medium itself does not provide for much, if any, interaction among cardholders, or members of what might be described as "virtual affinity communities." The major opportunity for display of one's membership in one of the virtual communities is when they use the card with a merchant. Since most
individuals do not use credit cards in personal transactions, unlike currency, coins or checks, there is less of an opportunity for the usage of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa affinity credit cards to promote virtual community between cardholders. The form of virtual community most likely to result from this medium would be the relationship between the affinity cardholder and the beneficiary organization, rather than between individual cardholders. The beneficiary organization would be enhanced by the financial benefits it obtains whenever the affinity card is used, and the affinity cardholder would have his or her emotional or psychological commitment to the organization reaffirmed whenever the card is used because of the awareness that a donation will follow. Other indirect benefits for the cardholder are assumed to follow with the economic support of the beneficiary organization, allowing it to continue its mission.

Thus, in contrast to Pilotta's (in press) study in which an urban Black community could be identified as existing on a primarily interpersonal (and spatially proximate) level, rather than on the level of economic exchange, the nature of the technological medium of affinity credit card programs creates a structure in which the type of virtual community being constructed functions more on an economic than an interpersonal and spatially proximate level.

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9 The cardholder-beneficiary relationship should be the strongest from a "virtual community" standpoint of incorporating culture, race and identity into the card program. As Worthington and Home (1996) state, the cardholder-card issuer relation is strongest in many affinity programs because the card issuer has so much more information about the cardholder — from a credit card standpoint — than does the beneficiary organization. However, if the beneficiary organization and the cardholder lack affinity or the sense of affinity deteriorates, it will probably weaken not only the beneficiary-cardholder relationship, but also the cardholder-card issuer relationship, resulting in a loss of cardholder loyalty to a particular affinity card.
interpersonal basis. Peer-to-peer interaction between cardholders, as the result of the affinity card program itself, would probably be minimal to non-existent. Interactivity between cardholders and the credit card issuer would likely be indirect, if based on credit card processing technology and analysis of usage patterns or response rates, in the context of prospects. Even if cardholders make a telephone call or write to the credit card issuer, or if the credit card issuer and affinity groups have a social event in which they invite all cardholders to the same location, these actions are based on alternative technological media.

Because the technological media of affinity credit card programs are limited in their ability to construct a form of virtual community that provides the range of interactivity that exists for other technological networks (e.g., telephone, internet), credit card technological media (network and card instrument) are augmented by the use of pre-existing media in order to communicate expectations of community to widely dispersed prospects and cardholders. In the ABC Visa and UNITY Visa context, credit card technological media, which are not fully capable in themselves of providing much opportunity for extensive peer-to-peer or individual-to-card-issuer communication, are being used in conjunction with "traditional" marketing media, such as print ads, direct mail or telemarketing, while encouraging cardholders to use similar means to express their concerns, issues and ideas with the card issuer or a particular beneficiary organization. Although the creation of an affinity credit card technological medium may not satisfy all of the desirable qualities for the development of a thriving virtual community, if it has the potential to
provide resources to organizations committed to developing the capacity of Black virtual communities, there is an incentive to use other media to make a strong appeal for the support of these affinity card programs. In this sense, the credit card technological medium may serve more as a catalyst for the construction of virtual community, based on the incorporation of other media, and then as a sort of infrastructure for the maintenance of that virtual community once it is established. The content section presents in detail the views of officials with card issuers, marketers and beneficiary organizations regarding the role of the respective affinity credit card programs as media which also function as a means for the reconstruction or maintenance of spatially-dispersed Black communities.

Patterns of Access

There are three key patterns of access applicable to the affinity credit card programs that are the focus of this study. One pattern of access issue in this study involves the marketing, i.e., communication, media used to provide targeted prospective cardholders with access to information about availability of a particular affinity credit card program. A second pattern of access issue involves the conditions that must be met for individuals who have obtained information about affinity credit card programs to become cardholders and begin receiving the benefits that come from being part of the UNITY Visa or ABC Visa "virtual community." For example, a mass media television advertisement during the Super Bowl would provide a broad-based level of access to information about an affinity card program, but a $100,000 minimum income eligibility requirement would significantly restrict access to the card. Because of the economic basis of the
credit card business, financial characteristics of prospects are necessarily related to membership in a particular affinity credit card virtual community. A third pattern of access issue involves the "intra-community" communications between cardholders and the card issuer and/or marketer.

UNITY Visa Card Program

Unlike many affinity credit card programs, the issuer of the UNITY Visa card, the Boston Bank of Commerce, did not use the mailing lists of its beneficiary organizations in marketing the card. Instead, the Boston Bank of Commerce acquired its own database of prospects and used direct mail marketing and telemarketing during the initial limited roll-out of the card. Teri Williams, senior vice-president of marketing, states that the bank will conduct a nationwide marketing campaign in 1997, following the first year's limited roll-out of the UNITY Visa ("Bank's card program pays $35,000," 1997; J. Parham, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund interview, March 26, 1997; G. Davis-Watkins, National Urban League interview, March 27, 1997).

The use of direct mail for UNITY Visa solicitations allows the construction of a limited pool of pre-qualified prospects for membership in a prospective UNITY Visa virtual community. Based on data available from list rental services, the BBOC had the capability to construct its UNITY Visa virtual community on the basis of income, spending habits, cultural/racial characteristics and residential factors. Of course, because the UNITY Visa affinity credit card is marketed on a segmented basis, this
direct mail strategy necessarily precludes access by who do not meet the
pre-established criteria set by the BBOC for the UNITY Visa card.

However, despite the focus of the UNITY Visa program on direct
mail marketing and the lack of a mass media advertising strategy during
the first year, the pattern of access to information about the program was
not entirely limited to the pre-selected individuals contacted via direct
mail or telemarketing. Press coverage of the development and availability
of the UNITY Visa card was quite extensive in various media outlets,
including mainstream publications such as The Boston Globe, The Bay
State Banner, and The New York Times; business publications such as The
Wall Street Journal, Banker and Tradesman, and The American Banker; as
well as Black-oriented magazines such as Jet, Ebony, Dollars and Sense,
Emerge, Upscale, and Vibe. Most of these media reports reporting on the
UNITY Visa program included a toll-free number for the general public to
use to request an application for a UNITY Visa card. This reveals a
marketing strategy of using public relations as an alternative to mass
media advertising. It supplements the direct mail marketing strategy at
negligible cost, and broadens the awareness among the public of the
UNITY Visa program, thus increases the pool of potential applicants for a
UNITY Visa card. Consequently, it increases awareness of the UNITY Visa
program and increases the possible membership. However, the bank
retains its right to admit new members to the program, through the
evaluation of credit card applications and credit reports of applicants.

The pattern of access for applicants is conditioned on their satisfying
specific criteria established by the BBOC. These criteria are part of the
bank's confidential credit card approval procedures and are not available to the public. The only credit card option in 1996 was an unsecured UNITY Visa card, thus there was no security deposit option available for people to obtain a card who did not meet the minimum income requirements for an unsecured card. This condition thus places an economic limitation on the individuals who could become UNITY Visa cardholders. The Boston Bank of Commerce states that a secured version of the UNITY Visa will become available in the future, which will expand the range of individuals who qualify for a UNITY Visa card and for membership in that particular "virtual community" of cardholders. This is a key reason why the UNITY Visa card was not initially offered through mass media advertising, because, as Teri Williams states, "we didn't want to turn people away who couldn't meet the credit criteria" ("Statistics tell," 1996, p. 23). Thus the initial offering was a pre-approved mailing followed by telemarketing. This was done through the purchase of lists based on buying behaviors, lifestyle information and demographics that were indicators of consumers who would be interested in the card, as well as developing a strong referral system by asking existing BBOC customers for names of likely prospects (p. 23).

The pattern of access for UNITY Visa cardholders takes several forms. On a quarterly basis, cardholders receive the "UNITY Newsletter" which provides information on the UNITY Visa card; gives updates on the progress of the UNITY Visa Donation Program, its charities, and its charter members; and discusses social, political, and cultural issues that impact African Americans. When one of the charitable organizations is featured
in the UNITY Newsletter, or another organization, there is a telephone number that cardholders can use to contact that organization directly. The February 1997 issue of the UNITY Newsletter contained the announcement of the 1996 UNITY Visa donations for each of the beneficiary organizations.

The Boston Bank of Commerce obtains information about cardholders through credit card database systems, which are used to prepare monthly billing statements and to provide data for the analysis of the status of individual accounts and the overall UNITY Visa program. The first issue of the UNITY Newsletter provided the corporate address and asked readers to write to the Boston Bank of Commerce with comments or ideas for the newsletter or the UNITY Visa card (UNITY Visa Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 1). While later issues of the newsletter do not include this explicit request for input, the address of the BBOC is still listed. In addition, each issue of the newsletter also includes an 800 number "for responsive Customer Service."

During the first year of existence of the UNITY Visa card, the beneficiary organizations did not receive ongoing status reports from the Boston Bank of Commerce.10 The UNITY Newsletters and an award check in early 1997 constituted the primary means by which the Boston Bank of Commerce communicated with the UNITY Visa beneficiary organizations. Beneficiary organizations could also receive contacts from cardholders.

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10 An obvious exception is the UNITY Foundation, which is a non-profit organization created by the Boston Bank of Commerce to provide funds to grassroots organizations.
based on the phone numbers that accompanied features of the different organizations, although this means of receiving communications from cardholders was not emphasized by organizations which were interviewed for this study. An official from one of the UNITY Visa beneficiary organizations noted that it would be interesting to pursue the possibility of following up with promotional literature from the charity based on a strong response to a feature in the UNITY Newsletter on that particular organization (S. Stedman, NAACP LDF Interview, March 27, 1997).

However, this was not part of the marketing strategy during the first year of the program. The communications with UNITY Visa cardholders, in that context, were solely determined by the Boston Bank of Commerce.

**America's Black Colleges Visa Card Program**

The ABC Visa program used a wide range of marketing strategies in its initial marketing appeals. The ABC Visa marketing strategy was developed by the America's Black Colleges Program, the marketer of the card. The marketing strategy included the following methods: direct mail marketing to alumni of a number of the historically Black colleges; on-campus distribution; mass media advertising, application inserts in major print media across the country, including Black-oriented publications such as *Ebony, Jet;* and *Essence;* point of sale displays in retail establishments; conventions and conference distributions. The marketing strategy was based on a dual approach. One broad target group was the 35 million Blacks in the U.S. in 10 million Black households. Of this target group, the primary focus was alumni from historically Black colleges. The other broad target was non-Blacks who are also supporters of Black higher
education (A. Lee, America's Black Colleges interview, March 6, 1997; Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997). This broad-based strategy created an extensive pool of prospective cardholders and members of the ABC Visa virtual community.

The range of qualifying criteria for an ABC Visa card also was designed to maximize the number of eligible cardholders. The ABC Visa is available in unsecured as well as secured form. As Alvin Lee, executive director of the America's Black Colleges program states:

"Effectively it increases the potential you have for success. People with bad credit who apply for regular cards are going to be matter-of-factly turned down so there must be a vehicle for people who know they have bad credit yet who want a credit card. By having a dual approach, we are able to increase the total number of people who can contribute to our objective of increasing funding for scholarships for Black colleges. By having a single approach, we are limiting ourselves to people who just have good credit or at least think they have good credit." (A. Lee interview, March 6, 1997)

Details on the qualifications for the two cards reveal the variation between the financial conditions of people who would qualify for each of the two options. The unsecured ABC Visa card has the following requirements: (1) minimum annual income of $17,500; (2) lived at current address for at least two years (cannot be a PO Box or General Delivery; (3) worked at current job for at least one year; (4) two-year credit history with at least three major lenders; and (5) excellent credit history (America's Black Colleges unsecured Visa card brochure, Appendix F). These requirements are significantly more stringent than those for a secured ABC Visa card, which has the following qualifications: (1) a minimum annual
income of $8,500; (2) no length requirement for living at a current address (cannot be a PO Box or General Delivery); (3) no length requirement for working at current job; (4) not currently overdue on any bills; and (5) all court proceedings (involving credit) must be finalized. The more lenient qualifications for a secured ABC Visa card are available to an applicant who provides a minimum deposit of $250, for a maximum initial credit line of double the initial savings account deposit, up to a maximum credit line of $5,000. Interest is paid on savings accounts with balances of $300 or more (America's Black Colleges secured Visa application/brochure, Appendix E). The availability of both secured and an unsecured Visa options provides the opportunity for people at distinct financial levels to become members of the ABC Visa card program.

Patterns of access to information within the ABC Visa card network involve a mix of print media and electronic media. Cardholders obtain information about activities of Key Bank and Trust or the ABC program as they arise via inserts which can accompany monthly billing statements. These inserts must meet the specifications of Key Bank and Trust, which is responsible for the monthly statement mailings. The key element of ongoing information about the ABC Visa donation program that cardholders receive is an annual letter from the president of Key Bank and Trust's credit card operation to cardholders announcing scholarship awards, the student's name, their university, the amount of the scholarship, and the date it was awarded (Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997).
Key Bank and Trust receives information about cardholders in a number of different ways. While not emphasized by Key Bank and Trust, a major ongoing pattern of access to information about cardholders is through the credit card processing and billing systems which are used for preparation of monthly bills for ABC Visa cardholders and for internal bank decisionmaking on the status of individual ABC Visa card accounts and the overall program. A more ad hoc pattern of access occurs around the end or beginning of the year when the scholarship announcement letter is mailed out to cardholders. Cardholders in the past have actually telephoned Key Bank and Trust to ask when the scholarship announcement letters are going to be mailed out. According to an official with Key Bank and Trust:

They want to find out . . . they really get involved. And it's two things -- there's a side of it where they want to check up on us to make sure that we're doing what we said we were going to do, and the other side is people who are generally concerned. And they want to know exactly what they did -- civic-minded individuals who say, OK, I may not get involved and I may not do anything else outside my house but I want to know how my funds have impacted someone else. (D. DeMarco, Key Bank and Trust interview, May 7, 1997)

America's Black Colleges Program, the marketer of the ABC Visa card, obtains information about the status of the program through reports from Key Bank and Trust. Although the first letter that prospects receive about the program comes from Alvin Lee, the executive director of the America's Black Colleges Program, ongoing communications with cardholders generally come from Key Bank and Trust, unless there is a special insert included with a billing statement announcing other
opportunities available through the America's Black Colleges Program. Similarly, the 115 historically Black colleges that are eligible to receive scholarship funds for students do not necessarily have a direct, pre-existing communication relationship with ABC Visa cardholders. However, since the scholarship awardees and their universities are named in the annual letter from Key Bank and Trust, cardholders can take the initiative to contact one of the universities to follow-up on the progress of a student, or to establish a direct relationship with that particular institution.

Comparative Discussion

Both the UNITY Visa program and the ABC Visa program make use of a wide range of media in providing access to information in their initial marketing appeals. While some of the marketing efforts are based on direct mailings, there are also efforts which utilize targeted mass media. The ABC Visa program has print advertising in a range of magazines which have a predominately Black readership. While the UNITY Visa program did not use mass advertising during its first year of operation, it did use public relations strategically to obtain mass media coverage of the launch of the program, in both mainstream and Black-oriented publications.

Both the UNITY Visa program and the ABC Visa program impose financial conditions on access to cardmembership, a standard practice for

\[^{11}\] Such a pre-existing relationship would exist for alumni or previous supporters of a particular university. However, new ABC Visa cardmembership for a person who has had no previous relationship with one of the 115 historically Black colleges or universities will not necessarily result in that person being contacted directly by a particular university for direct financial support.
credit card issuers. The ABC Visa program allows for a broader pool of income levels to obtain access to the card because it offers both a secured and an unsecured card. The announcement that the UNITY Visa plans to offer a secured card in the future indicates that they intend to expand the number of prospects who are eligible to qualify to obtain a UNITY Visa card and become a member of their virtual cardholder community.

Patterns of information access between cardholders and the affinity card issuers are not based on the same technological means. Cardholders obtain information about the program and other matters via mailings from the card issuer, and their most consistent means of communication with the card issuer is through the level and nature of their card usage. While both programs provide phone numbers for customer service or questions about the status of the program, neither the UNITY Visa program nor the ABC Visa program is explicitly designed for on-going, interactive communications with cardholders. In this sense, this pattern of access results in a type of virtual community which is based more on marketer and card issuer articulation of community consciousness than on active interaction among the parties, and the cardholder's major act of community participation is cardmembership and card usage. Ironically, this economically-centered form of community, which in the Black-oriented affinity context is often defined as necessary for the maintenance of Black community institutions, is itself conditioned on a level of cultural or racial community that must be pre-existing or must be created before a prospect will become an active cardholder. If this level of cultural or racial community can be established, financial benefits should accrue not only to
the card issuer and marketer, but also to the selected beneficiary organizations. The culturally-based establishment of this financial infrastructural relationship has the potential to strengthen existing community relationships or to create alternative relationships between beneficiary organizations and their members and supporters who are affinity cardholders.

Content of Communication Products

Several of the potential themes which seemed likely to appear in affinity credit card programs were evident when all of the data sources were evaluated. Over fifty documents were analyzed for the two programs, including direct mail materials, print advertisements, media stories, and personal interview transcripts. These documents were imported into the NUD•IST qualitative data analysis program, allowing for searching, coding, development of categories and theories, giving rise to the themes which will be discussed below. Although the NUD•IST program was valuable in facilitating the qualitative analysis of a large number of unrelated, unstructured documents, the discussion below did not fully utilize the more sophisticated aspects of the program. Therefore, the analysis below will not specifically mention the manner in which the NUD•IST program led to the development of the respective themes. It should be noted, however, that the identification, analysis, and relations between the themes discussed below was greatly facilitated by the use of the NUD•IST program.

The following four major themes were identified and analyzed in relation to the UNITY Visa and the ABC Visa program: (1) community,
including subthemes of race, power, education and youth; (2) quantitative; (3) institutional-utilitarian; and (4) spatial distanciation. These themes were extracted either because of their centrality in the theoretical discussions about the relations between money and community or because of their prominence in the data sources which were examined.

Unity Visa Card Program

Community Theme

The theme of community is prominently displayed in all of the advertising and marketing materials for the UNITY Visa card program. Various terms were included in the theme of community for purposes of this study, and these terms occurred in various contexts. In the solicitation letter to UNITY Visa card prospects, the word "community" is mentioned fourteen times. The heading in bold-print reads "Get the new credit card that contributes to the African-American community -- the UNITY Visa card." In this letter, the concept of community is repeatedly emphasized:

We invite you to join a powerful network of people across the country committed to the future of the African-American community. Join Dr. Alvin Poussaint, Julius W. Erving, Russell Simmons, Sharon Pratt Kelly and many others by obtaining a UNITY Visa card -- the first credit card that allows us to garner our spending power and channel it back into the African-American community. The new UNITY Visa card is the first and only national credit card to be offered by an African-American owned bank. (UNITY Visa solicitation letter, Appendix I)

As noted in the earlier section on institutional matters, the Boston Bank of Commerce not only emphasizes the UNITY Visa card's role in contributing to the African American community, the Boston Bank of

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Commerce clearly identifies itself as a part of that community by using the pronoun "us" and highlighting its status as an "African-American owned bank."

The UNITY Visa solicitation letter continues the focus on community by stating that each time the UNITY Visa card is used, the bank automatically donates 1 percent of the amount charged to the cardholder's choice of seven charities "that support the African-American community." Cohee links the community theme to the spending power of African Americans, stating that

The combined annual spending of African Americans is over $200 billion a year. As you can see, African Americans are a very powerful economic force in this country and around the world. With the UNITY Visa card, we can channel this spending power back into the community. As a UNITY Visa cardholder, your contributions, together with the entire network of cardholders, will make a powerful difference in assisting community service organizations fulfill their mission. (UNITY Visa solicitation letter, Appendix I)

In describing the emerging role of the Boston Bank of Commerce, Cohee distinguishes a geographically proximate or localized Black community from a spatially extended Black virtual community. He states that

The Boston Bank of Commerce has never been just another bank. We have always been committed to serving the needs of the African American community for affordable housing, small business development and community services. And now, we are expanding our services to address the national African-American community by bringing our financial expertise to UNITY Visa, the card that allows African Americans to support our community institutions. (emphasis in original) (UNITY Visa solicitation letter, Appendix I)
In this solicitation letter, the UNITY Visa card is being identified as an instrument or medium which allows the "national African American community" to contribute to its community institutions. Contrary to the definition of community used in this study, which requires some form of shared economic commitment among members, whether spatially proximate or dispersed, Cohee's definition implies that a national African American community can exist without a vehicle like the UNITY Visa card to serve as a financial medium.

While not appearing to define community as necessarily conditioned on the existence of a intra-community financial exchange mechanism, Cohee emphasizes the importance of this element for the African American community at the present time:

With all the government cutbacks and private funding sources drying up, what's really needed in the African American community is a vehicle that will allow people who are geographically dispersed to come together and support the organizations that are the pillars of our community. (Epstein, 1995)

Cohee states in this article that the current mood of the African American community suggests that such a targeted financial product can be successful. He describes the UNITY Visa card program as "a practical, personal way for people to realize the goals of the Million Man March just by doing what they already do." (UNITY Visa Press Release, p. 2, see Appendix K). Although Cohee indicates that a Black community can exist without a well-established intra-community financial interchange process, his description of the importance of such a process to the sustenance and survival of such a Black community approaches a view that the existence
of the Black community, as such, is increasingly dependent on the
development of this facility. Cohee states that

Because we're integrated into society so thoroughly, we don't
have a mechanism for utilizing our spending power to help our
communities. . . . People who have the means of support move
away, while the people who don't [have the means] stay and the
community deteriorates. (Epstein, 1995)

Cohee's statement about the impact of residential mobility among Blacks
on the deteriorating state of Black communities is reminiscent of the view
of William Julius Wilson (1987) discussed in Chapter 1, which identifies
the departure of middle- and working-class Blacks from inner-city
neighborhoods as the key reason for the emergence of a "ghetto
underclass." However, unlike Wilson, Cohee sees the possibility of
overcoming the spatially dispersed nature of Blacks with means and those
without means, through the use of the UNITY Visa card.

Cohee notes that the development of means to redirect resources
back into the Black community is not a sudden realization, despite the
recent developments that have made it more of a priority among African
Americans. While the hundreds of millions of dollars of capital in the
Black community should be used to address many of these problems,
Cohee contends that "it's dispersed into American society and it isn't put
into the community to help" (Epstein, 1995). The UNITY Visa card
provides a conduit to "take Blacks all over the country, capture their
spending power, and redirect it back to the people who need it" (Epstein,
1995). He states that "Black people have been seeking to garner our
spending power and channel it back into the community for more than 100 years" (Meyer, 1995).

The UNITY Visa card program's role as a financial vehicle for intra-community financial circulation, while important, is not the only, and may not even be the major, area of importance for the UNITY Visa card program. While the Boston Bank of Commerce notes the fact that Black spending power has not been harnessed by the Black community, this observation does not address in detail the reasons why spatially dispersed African Americans with spending power -- those who are most likely to currently possess or be eligible for a credit card -- have not been more active in using currently existing means, such as writing a check, to provide direct support for their favorite community organizations. The people who are likely to be pre-approved for an unsecured UNITY Visa card are likely to have a checking account. It is possible that the establishment of an ongoing communication relationship through the UNITY Visa program, via the credit card, the UNITY Newsletter, and other media, could provide the foundation for more of an ongoing "affinity" relationship than has been the case with charitable organizations that attempt to obtain direct donations but may not maintain ongoing contact with prospective or past donors. The fact that the UNITY card allows charitable donations to be made while people maintain their normal spending habits is clearly a strong factor in the marketing strategy. However, the necessity of this appeal raises significant questions about the existing level of community commitment among Blacks which would require the development of a credit card program as not only the most efficient, but arguably the primary
mechanism for the Black community (as defined by the BBOC) to sustain its institutions. Concerns about the level of charitable support by middle- and upper-income Blacks of many Black institutions has been addressed recently (Kaufman, 1996). The role of the UNITY Visa card program in helping to define, communicate, and expand the expectations and meanings of community therefore appears to be a particularly important aspect of the overall marketing effort.

Similarly, the fact that the marketing appeal of the UNITY Visa card rests on the ability of to make charitable donations while maintaining ones regular spending patterns raises the question of whether support of other Black-owned businesses might be an alternative means of circulating resources within the Black community. Although the UNITY Newsletter provides special opportunities for UNITY Visa cardholders to get special deals on certain products of interest to Black consumers, this is not a central component of the marketing appeal of the UNITY Visa program. The emphasis of the marketing appeal by the Boston Bank of Commerce is that cardholders can funnel resources back into the Black community by using the UNITY Visa affinity card, which is issued by a Black-owned bank. Rather than advocating an overall shift among Black consumers to purchasing from Black-owned businesses in general, the marketing literature emphasizes charitable donations which will be distributed to Black beneficiary organizations, even with no modification in Black consumers' spending habits. The only behavioral change required is the use of the UNITY Visa card rather than a competing credit card issued by a non-Black-owned bank.
Cohee highlights the supra-financial role of the UNITY Visa card program for educating and communicating within a virtual community context in his statement that "[t]he power of our community linked nationwide with an efficient mechanism for disseminating information and raising capital will be one of the greatest things that has ever happened to the African American community" (Washington, 1995). In fact, Teri Williams states that the UNITY Visa card was designed to "bring people together." She notes that "[a]lthough there is a lot of diversity in the African American community, being African American is the strongest affinity we have. We wanted to acknowledge that and build on it" ("Credit card aims," 1995).

The presence of community themes based on race dominate the entire UNITY Visa affinity card program. The very name of the BBOC's affinity credit card program, "UNITY," was chosen to describe the spirit and goal of bringing together Black economic power to create "a strong force for positive change." The UNITY colors which are present on the card, black and gold, were chosen to signify, respectively, Black heritage and the gold "richness of our culture and spending power." Finally, the pyramid icon on the card was chosen as a graphic icon for the UNITY logo as a reminder of the "proud history and continuing influence of African thought and civilization on today's world" (UNITY Newsletter, April 1996, p. 2).

The appeal to race and community is reflected in several ways in the UNITY Visa brochure (see Appendix C). On the front of the brochure is the statement "A Credit Card with a Mission." In bold print at the top of the inside of the brochure is the statement, "The power to improve our
community is in your hands... with the new UNITY Visa card." The first paragraph of the brochure states that "[a]s a UNITY Visa cardholder, you will join a powerful network of people committed to turning the massive spending power of African Americans -- over $200 billion a year -- into a force for positive change in the African American community." Here, the UNITY Visa card and BBOC are clearly identified as a part of that Black community.

The racial appeal is also reflected in the photographs which are included in the inside of the brochure. One photo has a Black child with a pencil appearing to be engaged in doing homework. Another photo shows two Black businessmen appearing to do business over lunch. A third photo shows a Black medical worker with other people in what appears to be a hospital environment.

At the bottom of the inside of the brochure is a statement in bold print that "UNITY starts with you" and then an arrow which indicates that the reader should turn the page. One the back cover of the brochure is a list of charter UNITY Visa cardmembers. The prominent Black individuals on the list include Johnnie Cochran, David Dinkins, Julius Erving, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Maynard Jackson, Sharon Pratt Kelly, and Dr. Alvin Poussaint. The inclusion of this list of prominent Blacks as charter cardmembers allows prospective cardholders to see that in addition to benefiting charitable organizations that support Black causes, the card is also held by a significant number of prominent Blacks. This is another effort to appeal to racial identity, pride, and community.
Another mechanism by which the traditional community subtheme of race is communicated to UNITY Visa cardholders is via the quarterly UNITY newsletter. Past newsletters have provided information on the charities which benefit from the UNITY Visa donations, profiled the lives of charter cardholders, listed highlights of 1996 in Black America, provided a list of newly-published Black History books, and included an exclusive discount offer to buy a five-book children’s series from the Black Literary Club.

After its first seven months of operation, to the end of 1996, the UNITY Visa program generated a total of $35,000 for its beneficiary organizations, which indicates that approximately $3.5 million dollars were charged to UNITY Visa cards since the program’s inception. The awards to the various charities reveal that they were not uniformly designated by cardholders for donations. For example, the largest donations were to The College Fund/UNCF, which received $12,500; and to the UNITY Foundation, which received $10,000, which was distributed among eight different grassroots organizations. Smaller donation went to the Jackie Robinson Foundation ($1,000); National Urban League ($1,500); Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund ($2,000); NAACP Legal Defense Fund ($3,000); and Children’s Defense Fund ($5,000) (UNITY Newsletter, February 1997, p. 3, Appendix L).

While the donation amounts for some of the UNITY charities were minimal, even taking into consideration the fact that the program was in its embryonic stages during 1996, for some organizations the potential financial benefit does not represent the most valuable aspect of the
program. As Johnny Parham, executive director of the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, states:

We received an invitation from the Boston Bank of Commerce to be a participant and to us it represented an additional prospective source of income. Of course, we did not envision the program serving as a major source of income. But in this business one of the things you want to do is create name recognition. Also, we were quite attracted by the other organizations that had also been invited to participate. . . . I see the good-will and name recognition as factors that outweigh any kind of income that we'll derive from this. (J. Parham, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund interview, March 26, 1997)

According to this beneficiary organization, the major attraction of the UNITY Visa card program is not the direct financial potential, but the indirect benefits of good-will and name recognition that accrue from being a part of this particular program and network of organizations and individuals. In this sense, the benefit to an organization's image as a member of the UNITY Visa virtual community can be more important, and potentially more financially lucrative in other marketing efforts, than the direct income that results from donations from the UNITY Visa card program.

Another UNITY Visa beneficiary organization describes similar non-financial benefits of the program. Susan Stedman, acting development director with the NAACP LDF, states that the UNITY Visa program allows for more efficient communication with the African American professional market:

It enables [the LDF] to identify ourselves in this case with an expanding market that should and could be the market that we reach more and more as we continue to provide services
nationally. . . . They are primarily African American professionals, and the Boston Bank of Commerce is in a unique position as a primarily Black-owned enterprise to participate in that and to advance that purpose, that mission. . . . And LDF knows that we need to reach many markets, and that is one of them, in a much more efficient way. So it increases our visibility . . . . (S. Stedman, NAACP LDF interview, March 27, 1997)

Another community-development or communication benefit of the UNITY Visa program noted by the NAACP LDF is its role in raising awareness among "the general American public . . . in all of its range and full spectrum, to know that we are there for them, that we're providing the services. And the competition for attention is so intense in everything that this is a great value to us" (S. Stedman, NAACP LDF interview, March 27, 1997).

Another beneficiary views the financial benefit of the UNITY Visa program as the primary reason for participation, and had hoped for a larger return as a result of the first year of the program. The National Urban League's Director of Development, Gena Davis-Watkins, states that they have become more cautious and strategic about the value of their name in all affinity marketing relationships, because of the potential risk of alienating corporate donors which are or could be competitors of the corporation providing the affinity service. Most NUL income has come from institutional giving, such as corporations and labor, but the philanthropic giving by these sources is decreasing. Income from individuals is the largest source of charitable dollars, but has not been fully developed by the NUL and many other Black charities. The UNITY Visa card program is viewed as one of a number of emerging means, such as the
Internet, of establishing awareness and contact with prospective individual donors (G. Davis-Watkins, National Urban League interview, March 27, 1997).

Thus, the community theme for the UNITY Visa card is very prominent in the marketing literature, with the subtheme of race heavily emphasized. The impact of quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes in the marketing materials is discussed below.

**Quantitative Theme**

Quantitative themes are visible throughout the press reports and the marketing literature involving the UNITY Visa card program, although they are never displayed as prominently as the indicators of the community theme. In the letter which accompanies the UNITY Visa card application, quantitative issues arise in the second paragraph. This paragraph emphasizes that the card has "no annual fee" and that it has an introductory annual percentage rate of "only 9.95%." In the third paragraph of the letter it is noted that a donation of 1% goes to the cardholder's choice of charities that support the African American community, and then proceeds to list the charities (UNITY Visa solicitation letter, Appendix I).

Similarly, in the UNITY Visa brochure (See Appendix C), the only quantitative themes which are listed refer to the $200 billion dollar a year African American spending power, the $100,000 worldwide automatic travel accident insurance at no additional charge, and the 1% of the charges to the card that go to the listed charities. However, two of these
quantitative themes are linked directly to the traditional community subtheme of racial group or organization.

The front side of the UNITY Visa card application (see Appendix D) includes requests for quantitative information from the applicant, such as gross annual salary, sources of other income, and monthly rent or mortgage. The front side of the application also provides a listing of the seven charities for selection by the applicant. The front of the application includes none of the financial terms of the card.

The summary of financial terms for the card is listed on the back of the application. These terms include the annual percentage rate of 9.95% for the first six months of membership, after which time the rate becomes variable at 7.2% above the prime rate, not to go below 15.95 percent. In addition, there is a listing of transaction fees on cash advances, late payment fees, overlimit fees, returned payment charges, and documentation fees.

The UNITY Newsletter announcing the 1996 UNITY Visa Donations (February 1996, p. 3) noted that a total of $35,000 was generated for the participating charities. However, the importance of this quantitative total was applied to the theme of community by breaking down the total donation by the amounts awarded to each of the charitable organizations. The $10,000 donation that was designated to the UNITY Foundation was allocated to eight "grassroots organizations." The importance of the community subtheme of race is evident in the newsletter's statement that "the first six of these organizations provide job training to economically and educationally disadvantaged African
Americans." The selection of the latter two organizations, the James R. Clark Memorial Sickle Cell Foundation and the Multicultural AIDS Coalition, also reflects the community subthemes of race (sickle cell anemia is a disease found predominantly in African Americans) and culture into the announcement.

**Instrumentalist-Utilitarian Theme**

The various data sources indicate that the various special benefits and uses of the card have not been as important as the theme of traditional community, but have been included in most of the marketing literature and briefly mentioned in press interviews. The primary utilitarian feature of the UNITY Visa card is its ability to communicate quantitative values for consumption purposes. However, as noted in the previous section, quantitative aspects of the card are always presented in conjunction with community themes, or they are subordinate to community themes, at least in terms of prominence in the marketing materials.

Several of the utilitarian features of the UNITY Visa card which are highlighted emphasize benefits for the individual cardholder. The second paragraph of the UNITY Visa solicitation letter notes that the card is accepted at "over 12 million establishments including stores, hotels, restaurants around the world. It provides all the benefits that come with Visa membership." The individually useful features of the card are also listed in the brochure for the UNITY Visa card, in the second paragraph, which emphasizes that the UNITY Visa provides "all of the advantages you'd expect from Visa, including worldwide acceptance at over 12 million establishments, $100,000 worldwide automatic travel accident insurance,
lost luggage coverage, and ATM access around the world" (UNITY Visa solicitation letter, Appendix I).

However, in both the solicitation letter and the brochure, the presentation of the individually beneficial uses of the UNITY Visa card are embedded between paragraphs presenting useful aspects of the UNITY Visa that pertain to African Americans as a group. The initial paragraph of both the solicitation letter and the brochure which discusses the role of the UNITY Visa program as a means of establishing a network of people channeling the spending power of African Americans into a force for positive change is more than an example of a community theme. The UNITY Visa card is being defined as the vehicle -- or instrument -- for making that vision a reality. In this sense, rather than the utilitarian or instrumental mechanism of the credit card serving as a means of destroying community or qualitative relations, the UNITY Visa card is being promoted as the means of protecting and renewing the African American community. The ability to use the card to select one of seven charitable organizations for the charitable donation, the usability of the card as a means of supporting an African American owned bank, and the usefulness of the card as a means to participate in the UNITY Visa virtual community are all examples of how the utilitarian nature of the UNITY Visa card program is defined as serving both as a means of promoting individual utilitarian values and as an instrument for the development of African American community relations and institutions.
Spatial Distanciation Theme

The UNITY Visa card program, like all credit card networks, is inherently spatially distanciating. However, rather than being described as a means of obliterating the qualitative characteristics of community and integrating Blacks into mainstream society, the UNITY Visa program is described as a mechanism for the maintenance and reconstruction of a virtual community based primarily on African American racial and cultural factors. The chairman of the Boston Bank of Commerce, Kevin Cohee, states that the UNITY Visa is, for the African American community, "a vehicle that will allow people who are geographically dispersed to come together and support the organizations that are pillars of our community" (Epstein, 1995). Here, "coming together" is not used to indicate a physical convergence of people in proximate space. It refers to a virtual union, via the UNITY Visa financial and information network, providing the sharing of resources in a spatially extended community in a way that was at one time limited to the neighborhood or village.

Teri Williams, Vice President for Marketing for the Boston Bank of Commerce, echoes this theme by countering the notion that a community bank in a particular geographic community offers services only to that geographic community. While the BBOC maintains a branch in Roxbury, a predominately minority Boston neighborhood, in addition to its downtown headquarters, Williams notes that "the community is much larger than that." There are also people who live in "Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood or Brookline suburb 'that have financial needs and an
interest in being a part of and supporting the African-American community" (Epstein, 1995).

The president and CEO of the BBOC, Ron Homer, further articulates the manner in which the UNITY Visa program is being promoted as a means for the establishment and development of community across space. Homer states that

This card gives us a way to tie in to people across a spectrum and capture them as part of a community, even if they live and work in the suburbs. . . . To put it another way. . . you can shop in the suburbs in Bloomies and still be giving back. (Jackson, 1995)

The quality of the UNITY Visa card to link people into a virtual relationship based primarily on the basis of racial community is an essential condition for the establishment of the UNITY Visa program. Rather than undermining the relations of traditional community (race being understood as a characteristic of "traditional" community) the affinity credit card program (through the use of a range of different communication media) is described as a mechanism for creating extended and enhanced community relations across space.

**America’s Black Colleges Program**

**Community Theme**

The America’s Black Colleges Visa program emphasizes the theme of community in the marketing materials that were analyzed for this study. The community theme in the ABC Visa program is reflected in a number of subthemes: race, power, education, and youth. However, each of these subthemes is directly linked to the concept of an African American or Black community.
In the solicitation letter from Alvin Lee, executive director of the America's Black Colleges program, the focus of the appeal is on support of students attending America's Black Colleges:

Your participation in the America's Black Colleges VISA program, and that of your family, friends and colleagues, supports black higher education every time the card is used. Please let others in the community, your relatives and friends who share our commitment know about this exciting VISA card program. (America's Black Colleges Visa solicitation letter, Appendix J)

While the message about the ABC Visa card program is directed to "the community," the immediate or direct beneficiaries are individuals who are pursuing an education at a historically Black college or university. However, this support of Black higher education is linked to support of the African American community, as noted in the application brochures describing the ABC secured Visa card (Appendix E) and the unsecured VISA card (Appendix F):

Now you can help our community while you enjoy the convenience of a VISA Card. You can get the America's Black Colleges VISA Card from Key Federal Savings Bank. The bank makes a contribution to Key Federal's America's Black Colleges Scholarship Fund every time one of these cards is issued. Then, every time a purchase is made with one of these cards, a percentage of the purchase price is donated to the fund. The money raised through this program is used for scholarships at more than 115 Black colleges and universities across the country. (emphasis added)

The emphasis on "our community" identifies the recipient of the application/brochure as a member of a community that includes Black colleges and universities. The emphasis on Black colleges strongly implies that the appeal is targeted to African Americans, although it does not
explicitly exclude people of other racial or ethnic groups who might consider themselves to be part of this community. For example, non-Blacks have long served as faculty and administrators at historically Black institutions, have been major financial supporters of these schools, and non-Black students represent an increasing number of students on these campuses. However, the primary community appeal appears to be directed toward African Americans who support historically Black institutions of higher education.

Within the community theme in the ABC Visa marketing materials is the subtheme of power. In the applications for both the secured and unsecured ABC Visa card (See Appendices E and F), the concept of "Black Power" is highlighted by Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress. In her "Letter To The Supporters and Alumni of Black Colleges and Universities," she states that

The America's Black Colleges Program, of which I am pleased to be the national spokesperson, is a concept designed to convert everyday credit card usage into real Black Power. The program provides a special Key Federal VISA Card that sends a contribution to Key Federal's America's Black Colleges Scholarship Fund for every account that is approved and for every time you use this very special VISA card. (emphasis added)

The appeal to "real Black Power" is an appeal to Blacks who experienced or have read about the Black Power Movement in the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The implication is that "real Black Power" requires economic empowerment, and that the ABC Visa Card provides a vehicle which allows Blacks to "convert" their normal credit card usage into
racially-based economic empowerment, focused in this case on supporting historically Black institutions of higher education.

Another example of the attempt to establish a link between power and the ABC Visa card is the heading of a print advertisement that appeared in the America's Black College Directory, which provides information about many of the colleges which are members of the America's Black Colleges Program. The advertisement, which appears on the back cover of the Directory, has the following heading, "Introducing the Power Source of the Future" (see Appendix G). Below the heading is a photograph of the ABC Visa card, with Shirley Chisholm's name present as the cardholder. At the bottom of the text of the ad, which describes both the secured and the unsecured versions of the ABC Visa, is the statement that the cards "give you the power to help our young people get the higher education -- and the future -- they deserve" (America's Black College Directory, Appendix G). The community appeal of this power reference is more implicit since it does not explicitly mention "Black Power" or the Black community. The text reference to giving "you" the power to help "our young people" could be interpreted as targeting non-Blacks as well as Blacks who are concerned with supporting students attending historically Black colleges and universities. However, the fact that this ad is located in the America's Black Colleges Directory is an indication that its target market is primarily African American, and that the reference to power is probably intended to refer to the power of the Black community that would receive this publication.
As underscored by the very name of the program, the America's Black Colleges Visa card program places critical emphasis on the community subthemes of education and youth. One print advertisement for the ABC Visa card presents a photo of a young Black woman carrying textbooks and the heading "Your credit can help me earn credits" (Appendix H, Ad #1). Another print advertisement features a photo of a young Black male carrying books and the heading, "Here's the One Credit He Needs to Graduate" (see Appendix H, Ad #2). The race and community context for the ad is enhanced by the fact that each of these advertisements includes a photo of the ABC Visa card with the name of former U.S. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm as the cardholder. While mentioning that the ABC Visa card is available in both secured and unsecured form, there is no mention of any of the financial terms of the card. The emphasis of the ads is on the fact that use of the card allows the cardholder to make contribution "to help the students of America's Black Colleges."

Other print ads for the America's Black Colleges Visa card shift the visual image from young adults to child-created drawings. One print ad recreates a drawing made by a 8-year-old child of what appears to be an adult woman dressed for work with a purse (See Appendix H, Ad #3). The heading of the ad is, "Presenting the Visa card that helps dreams come true." Another print ad uses the same concept, with the drawing of a 6-year-old of a fireman (see Appendix H, Ad #4), and the same heading that refers to the ABC Visa card as the card that helps make dreams come true. The text of the advertisement continues the references to education, by
stating to the reader that, "Now you can get the credit you deserve, and help our children get the education they deserve."

The education and youth subthemes are dominant in all of the marketing materials which were reviewed for this study. In fact, not only does the name of the America's Black College's Program illustrate the central nature of these subthemes, but the development of the logo for the card also was based on this consideration. As Alvin Lee, executive director of the America's Black Colleges Program, states:

We wanted a logo which spoke of the program. Having two students in caps and gowns in silhouette was the perfect vehicle we thought to express the program because we were talking about students and graduation. So the whole idea was to have a depiction so that it looked like students going through the whole education process successfully and completely. (A. Lee, America's Black Colleges Program interview, March 6, 1997)

This image of Black college students completing their education successfully is reinforced by the photo which is presented on the front of both the secured and unsecured ABC Visa card applications (Appendices E and F). It shows a young Black male and female with cap and gown holding diplomas in hand in front of what appears to be a university building, under the heading "Get the Visa Card That's a Real Learning Experience." The education subtheme is also promoted by the listing of each of the 115 historically Black colleges on the back panel of the application brochure.

**Quantitative Theme**

The quantitative theme, while present in some of the America's Black Colleges Visa marketing materials analyzed in this study, is not
dominant in comparison to community themes or subthemes. The quantitative theme was reflected in the conditions for card eligibility, in the financial terms of the card, and in some of the information made available about scholarship donations. However, this quantitative, mostly financial information is rarely far removed from and never is presented in opposition to information concerning the theme of community, or its subthemes of race, power, education, or youth.

In the print ads that include the photos of the Black female (Appendix H, Ad #1) and Black male college students (Appendix H, Ad #2), there is no discussion of the interest rate or annual fee for the ABC Visa card. The ads note the option between an unsecured and a secured Visa, but offer no information about terms or conditions. The only information that is price-related refers to the fact that applications for the card are available for free. The community theme, and its subthemes, are almost the exclusive emphasis of these advertisements.

In contrast, the two ads analyzed featuring children's drawings (Appendix H, Ads #3 and 4) each contained detailed information about the conditions for the secured credit card. This information is presented in fine print at the bottom of the respective advertisements below all of the other information about the ABC Visa card program and its contributions to Black colleges. The financial requirements noted include verifiable income of at least $165 per week, $250 minimum security deposit, interest paid on deposits of $300 or more, and a maximum credit line for the secured card of $5,000.
Unlike the ads which included the photos of the young Black male and female students, the ads with the children’s drawings in them do announce that the bank donates $7.00 to Key Federal’s America’s Black Colleges Fund every time a card is issued. These ads also state that a percentage of the purchase amount is donated to the fund, but this percentage is not announced publicly by the bank. These two ads do not mention the availability of the unsecured ABC Visa cards like the ads with the photos of what appear to be college students.

The most extensive presentation of quantitative themes is presented in the combined brochure/application for the secured (Appendix E) and unsecured ABC Visa cards (Appendix F). After the panel containing the letter from Shirley Chisholm in support of the America’s Black Colleges Visa program, which does not mention any quantitative details of the program, the next panel of the brochure sets forth, in full size print, several qualifications for the unsecured and secured cards, respectively. The quantitative financial requirement for the unsecured card is a minimum annual income of $17,500 or $340 per week. The quantitative financial requirements for the secured card is a minimum annual income of $8,500, or $165 per week.

Quantitative financial terms for unsecured ABC Visa cardholders are also listed in the application/brochure for that card. The unsecured card has no annual fee for the first year, an annual percentage rate of 16.9%, with credit lines starting at $1,000, and free $100,000 travel insurance, as well as free Alamo Rent A Car Membership. Other fees listed include a
late payment free of $15, an annual membership fee after the first year of $25, an ATM access fee of $1.00, and no cash advance fees.

The quantitative financial terms for secured ABC Visa cardholders are listed in the secured application/brochure. For the secured card, there is no annual fee for the first year, a credit line double the initial security deposit, as well as free $100,000 travel insurance and Alamo Rent A Car membership. The application/brochure also notes the minimum $250 deposit, and the fact that interest is paid on savings accounts with balances of $300 or more. For balances between $300 and $1,000, the nominal savings balance rate is 4.0 percent, and the annual percentage rate is 4.06 percent. For balances over $1,000, the nominal savings balance rate is 4.5 percent, and the annual percentage rate is 4.57 percent. The application/brochure notes that interest is compounded and credited quarterly.

The quantitative financial information about the unsecured and secured ABC Visa cards is presented inconsistently in the marketing materials reviewed. In some advertisements, no quantitative information about eligibility requirements or card terms and conditions is discussed. In other ads, quantitative information is presented in fine print at the very bottom of the text. In the application/brochure, detailed information is provided about the quantitative terms of the card offerings, but this information is preceded and followed by information about the role of the card in supporting education and youth within the Black community through donations to the Key Bank and Trust-America’s Black Colleges Scholarship Fund. These examples illustrate that quantitative themes are
integrated with qualitative community themes in the America's Black Colleges marketing strategy. In fact, in the materials reviewed for this study, quantitative themes generally are presented in a subordinate position as compared to community themes.

**Instrumental-Utilitarian Theme**

The America's Black Colleges Visa fulfills at least two major utilitarian functions which are described in two of the ads for the card: "The only card in America that makes a contribution to help the students of America's Black Colleges every time you use it" (Appendix H, Ads #1 and #2). Another ad refers to this dual function by the statement that "Now you can get the credit you deserve, and help our children get the education they deserve" (Appendix H, Ad #4). The ABC Visa is thus a regular credit card which can be used for any purpose for which other credit cards are used, and, at the same time and in the same action, the card serves as an instrument which directly provides for contributions to the America's Black Colleges Scholarship Fund.

The unsecured and secured application/brochures both list a range of utilitarian benefits of the card, in addition to exclusively quantitative financial considerations such as purchasing power or annual fees. The cards provide access to worldwide Automatic Teller Machines and provide for $100,000 of free travel insurance and free Alamo Rent A Car membership. In addition, the secured ABC Visa card can be viewed as an instrument providing a low-grade savings vehicle for cardholders who might not otherwise save money.
However, the individualistic utilitarian benefits of the card are consistently linked with the role of the card as an instrument for providing a donation to students attending America’s Black Colleges. As such, the card program operates as a means to support the community-based themes of race, power, education, and youth. Rather than operating to destroy community relations, the utilitarian and instrumental features of the ABC Visa are designed specifically to enhance racially defined educational institutions. The joint marketing appeal used in the ABC Visa materials examined for this study shows the essential relation of the concept of community to the card’s utilitarian appeal. Without the presence and resonance of the community appeal, the ABC Visa card loses an essential element of its uniqueness in the African American marketplace.

Spatial Distanciation Theme

As with all credit cards, the America’s Black Colleges Visa card instrument is part of an inherently spatially distanciating financial and technological network. The card was marketed nationwide through a wide range of approaches. The America’s Black Colleges Visa strategy has been designed for nationwide appeal, while emphasizing the community subthemes of education, youth, race and power in conjunction with the financial benefits which are directed to individuals and institutions. As Alvin Lee, executive director of the America’s Black Colleges Program states:

[W]e started a credit card program initially which really targeted the Black colleges across the country. We consolidated the potential of all 115 Black colleges under one umbrella because we could get the economies of scale because we were speaking
not as the revenue and potential of one college; we were talking about the revenue potential that could be generated from 115 colleges. We were talking about a generic theme of support of Black higher education versus the targeted theme of supporting graduates from one particular college. So we became generic in approach in terms of support for Black higher education. And individual colleges subscribed to that because they were all part of the same puzzle. (A. Lee, America's Black Colleges Program interview, March 6, 1997)

This generic theme of support for Black higher education in a nationwide appeal is the basis for the construction of a virtual community of America's Black Colleges cardholders, developed from the community of supporters and alumni of historically Black colleges, most of whom are African American. The spatially distanciating nature of the ABC Visa credit card network, rather than destroying community, provides a mechanism for the re-integration or renewal of community relations in an alternative framework. The community-based appeal to education of youth at historically Black colleges transcends the boundaries of neighborhood or locality, which is reasonable considering the fact that college graduates and supporters often reside in locations far from the particular educational institutions. However, the America's Black Colleges program proposes to provide a vehicle for the networked communication of community values, both cultural and financial, across these distances in a very targeted manner.

Despite the manner in which the ABC Visa program, like other affinity credit card programs, can be viewed as a process for the construction and maintenance of virtual communities, banking law and regulation continue to limit the definition of communities to
geographically proximate areas. Key Bank and Trust officials noted that there was some conflict with banking regulators over whether the bank would receive Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) credit for the credit cards accounts which are part of the ABC Visa program.

I go into my America's Black Colleges file and I say, how many people are in the Baltimore area? I want CRA credit for this. . . . And we've been getting it; we had to fight for it. They didn't want to give us any credit for it. But the last two audits that came in, we got credit. [The president of the bank] fought it. Every year he fought it. So understand . . . these are my demographic, these are my geographic borders, these are accounts I have within these geographic borders. Why can't I have credit for it? (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997)

The Community Reinvestment Act defines community by geographic boundaries around branch locations. Key Bank and Trust does not request CRA credit for credit card accounts beyond these areas, regardless of the number of ABC Visa cardholders that might exist in a "virtual" ABC Visa cardholder community. The request for CRA credit was very narrowly focused by Key Bank and Trust:

I took zip codes, I took the system, and I said give me the number of people I have in these geographic areas for America's Black Colleges . . . because that's a specifically Black program. And all I want is credit for the people in . . . Baltimore, the zips, our geographic area in these branches. And they continually said no, it doesn't count, it doesn't count. Well, why? And the president argued it, and finally won. We're getting some credit for it over the last couple of years. And then the other thing too [is the scholarships made in the geographic area]. (T. Juranich, Key Bank and Trust interview, March 7, 1997)

This struggle to obtain CRA credit for ABC Visa credit card accounts and scholarship donations was limited to the geographic areas around Key
Bank and Trust locations, consistent with current banking laws. The debate was limited to an attempt to expand the type of financial product under the CRA to include affinity credit card programs. The spatially extended definition of community under examination in this dissertation is much broader than the spatially proximate view of community which currently dominates the banking industry under the Community Reinvestment Act. Although a detailed analysis of this legal issue is beyond the scope of this study, it is reasonable to assume that with the increasing availability of new financial services which are independent of spatial boundaries, such as credit cards and on-line financial products banking law and regulation will be forced to revisit prevailing definitions of community. The challenges inherent in this process of community redefinition are in many ways analogous to those that have emerged in the debate over standards of obscenity and indecency on the Internet (see, e.g., Hadley & Samarajiva, in press).

Comparative Discussion

The presentation of content themes for the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs contains a number of revelations. The analysis shows that, for both programs, while quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatially distanciation themes are present in the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa affinity credit card programs, these themes are consistently presented in conjunction with the theme of community or the community subthemes of race, education or youth. In direct marketing materials as well as print advertisements, community themes are generally presented more prominently than the other themes, in contrast to major
scholarly theories might predict a different approach to the marketing of a monetary instrument. While the UNITY Visa program explicitly emphasizes community in its marketing efforts, as compared to the ABC Visa program, which highlights higher education, youth, and to a lesser extent, power, both programs place the emphasis of their affinity marketing appeals on a foundation of racially-based community. The spatially dispersed community targeted by the America's Black Colleges Visa marketing efforts has the potential to be more racially inclusive because it places more emphasis on targeting supporters and alumni of Black colleges -- which includes a significant number of non-Blacks -- as opposed to the strategy of the UNITY Visa program, which is to highlight and develop self-reliance within African American communities.

However, as evidenced by the targeting of print ads in Black magazines, the lead role taken by the America's Black Colleges program in handling the marketing of the card because of its expertise in marketing to Black consumers, the use of Shirley Chisholm as spokesperson to promote the ABC Visa card, and the very decision to focus the ABC Visa program on support for Black students at historically Black colleges rather than Black students at all colleges or all college students indicates the importance of the racial aspect of community, at least from the standpoint of Key Bank and Trust and the America's Black Colleges Program. This more narrowly-focused conception of racial community is more traditional than a more broad-based, generic sense of community, in which members share an interest in the education of students at Black colleges, but who may share no racial or cultural characteristics.
The prominent role of the theme of community and its subthemes in the marketing materials for the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa suggests that this theme is the leading feature in the marketing of these two programs. From a marketing standpoint, this finding is not surprising, since affinity credit card programs in general were designed to appeal to the connection and commitment that individuals feel to particular affinity groups. However, the use of themes based on qualitative relations of community to market a monetary instrument is strongly inconsistent with major theories about the destructive effects that money has -- or should have -- on such traditional-style relations. While the quantitative nature of affinity credit card programs like the ABC Visa and the UNITY Visa is not as restrictive as it is for currency and coin forms of money, which have a pre-determined value (albeit subject to fluctuations), the instrumental-utilitarian and spatially distanciating aspects of affinity cards are significantly more extensive than for preceding monetary forms. The fact that quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatially distanciating themes are being used to support the marketing of affinity cards based on traditional themes of community supports a conclusion that those traditional relations are perceived to be stronger in this context than monetary theory would anticipate. This finding is particularly relevant in terms of the expectations of affinity credit card programs targeted toward Blacks, whose sense of community has been described by some scholars as distorted or underdeveloped.
Synthesis of Individual Perspectives

Synthesis of the five individual perspectives analyzed above provides the basis for causal explanation of the establishment and operation of affinity credit card programs targeted to Blacks, as well as the nature of the relations between the affinity credit card programs examined and the constructions, expressions, and interpretations of contemporary Black communities. As discussed in detail above, the theme of community was in evidence throughout each perspective. From each focus of observation, race was either the dominant or the exclusive community characteristic that was revealed. Examples include the institutional focus on a Black-owned bank (Boston Bank of Commerce) or a Black marketer (America’s Black Colleges Program), and the technological medium focus which highlighted affinity credit card networks based on a community-targeted and racially-inscribed credit card instrument. Other illustrations of this emphasis were revealed through the pattern of access focus on media and targeted marketing that increased the odds that Blacks would obtain information about the affinity cards, and the content focus that revealed the community theme not only through race, but also through subthemes of education, youth and power. The potentially conflicting themes – quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation – were found to either be subordinate to the community themes, or were used to support the promotion of the community themes.

Several questions arise from these individual findings and observations that can be used to arrive at causal explanations or meanings.
of these observed phenomena in the context of the UNITY Visa program, the America's Black Colleges Visa program, and contemporary Black community relations. Why are community themes arising at all in these particular affinity credit card contexts? Why did the particular (sub)themes of community arise in the ways they did? What is the nature of the interplay between the community theme and the other three themes that according to most theory should have appeared in opposition to the community theme, or should not have appeared at all? Which of the relations appear to be necessary and which are contingent?

The central nature of the concept of community, primarily among Blacks, in the ABC Visa and UNITY Visa programs supports the expectation that there is a formal or necessary relation between some form of Black community and these affinity card programs. It is clear that the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa programs would not exist in their current form without some conceptualization of Black community on which to base the affinity appeal of the card. However, it is not as obvious what specific conceptualization of a Black community is necessary for the existence of the programs, nor is it clear whether the Black community-affinity program relationship is symmetrical.

Both the UNITY Visa program and the ABC Visa program rely heavily on descriptions, images, and expectations of the Black community in program development and in marketing appeals. However, the empirical examination did not reveal evidence that the programs are dependent on the existence of a "community" of people who are in active engagement with each other. In addition, the structure of both affinity card
programs from the technological medium and patterns of access standpoints reveals that the major relationship is between the card issuer/marketer and the individual cardholder or prospect. The cardholder or prospect need not be a member of a particular beneficiary organization or association in order to obtain information about the card, nor does cardmembership necessarily lead to increased connectedness by a cardholder with a particular beneficiary organization. It appears that in the two major cases examined here, the community appeal is based primarily on racial group membership and on awareness of the reputation and activities of the beneficiary organizations, rather than on regular, active participation in the activities of the beneficiary organization. Although the marketing efforts likely would have targeted members or alumni of some of the beneficiary organizations, this does not appear to be an essential element of these programs. The marketing efforts of the America's Black Colleges Program, for example, focus more on support of Black educational institutions and students through scholarships than on direct support of alumni associations. This more general appeal indicates that direct involvement with a beneficiary organization, while it might be an additional incentive, is a contingent rather than a necessary condition for the existence of these particular programs.

The relationship between the affinity programs examined and the Black communities which are being targeted and described is not consistently presented in the materials examined, largely due to the fluidity and wide range of definitions of community which were identified. For example, in marketing materials for both the UNITY Visa
program and the America's Black Colleges Visa program, there are numerous references to "the" Black or African American community. Some of the UNITY Visa references also refer to Black "communities," which are distinguished, for example, on the basis of geography or income. In the UNITY Visa materials there is also discussion about the deterioration of Black communities because of the lack of a mechanism to channel financial resources back into these communities where needed. These diverse messages even among the card issuers make it difficult to determine whether they view the Black community or communities as currently or potentially dependent on affinity credit card programs for survival, or whether the community or communities will continue to exist independent of the existence of these affinity card programs. Given the very recent emergence of these two affinity card programs and the historical endurance of some identifiable form of Black community in what is now the United States for over 350 years, the most reasonable conclusion is that the existence of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa affinity credit card programs is not necessary for the existence of Black communities, in their most generally understood context as a racially identifiable collectivity with some level of social and economic interaction. Thus, the necessary relation between them is asymmetrical, with the impact of community on the programs existing as a necessary relation, but with the inverse relation operating in a contingent manner.

However, this conclusion that the necessary relation is asymmetric between the two affinity card programs and some definable Black community does not imply that Black communities are economically self-
reliant, nor does it mean that the quality -- or the existence -- of Black communities is not increasingly dependent on the cultivation of internal sources of support that have not been fully exploited up to this time. As noted in the materials presented above, factors such as the decline in public support for race-specific governmental programs, the increased spending power of African Americans of over $450 billion in 1997, and concerns that African Americans have failed to provide the expected level of support for many of their own institutions and communities have led to an increasing sense that a greater sense of the burden of economic development for Black communities and institutions must be borne by Blacks themselves. Thus, even though the two affinity credit card programs examined in this study are not yet necessary for the existence of Black communities or institutions, the continued development of internally-oriented mechanisms to channel resources from Blacks directly back into Black communities and institutions is likely to be increasingly important for the viability of these entities. The concept of economic community that is expressed through the UNITY Visa program and America's Black Colleges Visa program is limited because both generally emphasize the use of the affinity credit card as the means for channeling resources through banks to charitable Black-oriented organizations, providing little if any emphasis on a conceptualization of economic community which would encourage affinity cardholders to modify their purchasing behavior by increasing their level of transactions with Black-owned businesses.

The prominence of the theme of community and its subthemes of race, education, youth and power allows for the examination of the
conceptualization of community that appears throughout the materials for the UNITY Visa program and the America's Black Colleges Visa program. First, in addition to the fact that the themes are generally targeted toward Blacks, they tend to be broad-based and generic in their appeal. These broad-based themes are consistent with the wide range of beneficiary organizations which are supported by both the UNITY Visa program and the America's Black Colleges Visa program. Support for programs that enhance the education of young people is a powerful appeal, particularly for many African Americans because of the extensive practice throughout the history of the United States of either depriving Blacks of the freedom to obtain an education, or ensuring that the education obtained was of the lowest quality. Because Black colleges at one time were the only institutions to admit Black students, they retain a significant level of importance among African Americans. The appeal to education and youth is directly tied to an argument that improved chances for individual and community advancement in the future depend on access to higher education.

The themes of education and youth are directly related to the theme of community, and to its other observed subthemes of race and power. Improved opportunities for education and youth are deemed to provide for advancement of the Black community. The advancement that is possible can be identified in the use of the concept of power. Power can be defined in a number of different ways, another example of an appeal that is not too heavily circumscribed. Some might define power as the ability to provide support of community institutions that help to ensure that Blacks
are fully integrated into American society. Others might identify power with the establishment of a mechanism to allow Blacks to have an independent economic base that will liberate Black communities and institutions from dependency on the government or non-Black philanthropists, corporations or foundations. The flexibility available for the interpretation of this subtheme, as well as the others, reflects a strong orientation toward the construction of a target market that is in some ways broad-based; in others relatively circumscribed by the very affinity targeting process.

Another key finding that must be understood is the nature of the relation between, on the one hand, the community theme and its subthemes, and on the other hand, the quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes that arose in the context of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs. In each case, the community themes were presented in a manner that was dominant to the presentation of the other three major themes examined. This was evident in their locations in the text of brochures and applications, in their images in advertisements, in the names of the respective affinity card programs, and in the logos on the card instruments themselves.

Why is this so? One interpretation might be that this is a response to marketing research indicating that a profitable opportunity exists for card issuers, marketers, and beneficiary organizations to design affinity credit card programs to appeal to Black card prospects and cardholders, through a range of appeals to race, culture, or identity. It could be referred to as the ultimate "commodification" of race or community, in which
one's group identity not only becomes a good which is exchanged in the marketplace, but actually becomes integrated as a component of the medium of market exchange. From this interpretive stance, the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs would be an example of the ultimate transformation of the qualitative values of traditional, race-based community into the very substance of the utilitarian financial mechanism necessary for the operation of a market economy. A variation on this explanation would likely be offered by many exponents of the "community-destructive" theories of money presented above in Chapter 3.

However, this interpretation would fail to address a number of fundamental questions. First, why would these affinity credit cards -- monetary instruments -- be created and marketed based primarily on qualitative values, especially when most monetary theorists would likely view such a combination as impossible or fatally flawed? Saturation in the credit card market provides a justification for why credit card companies might look for new marketing strategies. It does not explain why credit card issuers would base a marketing strategy primarily on the traditional concept of community and related themes. Other arguments, such as the residual existence of Black communities as the result of segregation and discrimination, still fail to address the issue of (1) why centuries of monetary exchange based on currency and coin have not had a more destructive effect on Black (and other) communities, and (2) why marketing research would not lead credit card issuers to rely on purely non-qualitative measures to market cards to African Americans, based on criteria such as interest rate, annual fee, and individually-oriented
utilitarian benefits. Even if it is argued that community actually is non-existent, and that the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs are being used to artificially construct community in order to market affinity credit cards, it directly raises the question of the nature of affinity credit card programs, and how as monetary forms they are able to perform multiple functions that would likely be deemed mutually exclusive according to community-destructive views of money.

An explanation that is more consistent with the findings of this study would acknowledge a multi-functional role for affinity credit card programs. This explanation neither ascribes to affinity credit card programs an exclusively community-centered role, nor does it artificially view affinity credit card programs as purely financial vehicles that merely use appeals to community as a facade. A multi-functional view of affinity credit card programs acknowledges their role as an instrument for the exchange of purely quantitative values, for the expression of non-community-based instrumental and utilitarian values, while at the same time providing a means for these quantitative and instrumental-utilitarian characteristics of the programs to be used for the construction and negotiation of concepts of community, as well as for the channeling of material benefits to targeted community institutions. The spatially distanciated nature of affinity credit card programs is consistent with such as multi-functional role. The geographic extension that is inherent in affinity credit card programs allows for the simultaneous communication of exchange values and community values.
The multi-functional nature of affinity credit card programs is particularly important in the context of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs. Despite the fact that it was consistently shown that the community themes dominated the quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes, these particular themes were still co-present. This is important because it indicates that, despite the presence or significance of the community appeal, there was still some need to provide information about the quantitative benefits and instrumental-utilitarian benefits of the respective affinity cards. Figure 6.1 illustrates this ambivalence or tension regarding the issue of and commitment to community, in particular the relation of the individual to the communities with which he or she identifies.

Some illustrations will help flesh out the multiple values that exist in affinity card programs, as well as in the nature of the general individual-community relationship. In an extreme scenario, an affinity credit card might be developed that would not reveal its interest rate, and members of the particular affinity group would not ask for such information but would simply apply for the card, because of the profound level of community commitment that they possess. A similar extreme scenario could be imagined in which an affinity credit card is offered which has an annual interest rate of 10 percent above any other credit card on the market, but which would be used by members of the particular affinity group strictly because of their unsurpassed commitment to using this approach to support their affinity group. These examples are unrealistic only because
Figure 6.1: Integrated view of the five analytical perspectives and relationships between various content themes found in the examination of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs. The interpretative perspective in this figure is that of the researcher. The multi-functionality of the affinity card programs is reflected by the dynamic relationship between the "Pro-community" and the "Community-destructive" themes.
of the extent that individual values exist in apparent competition with group values. The issue of individual versus community benefits is one that can also be seen in the competition which exists between affinity cards, which provide benefits to third parties, and co-branded cards, in which the cardholder receives individual benefits as the result of card usage. The presentation by the UNITY Visa program and the America's Black Colleges Visa program of the quantitative, individualistic instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation qualities reveals the importance of incorporating within the programs an appeal which has community commitment as the primary component, but not an exclusive one. The central importance of these qualities indicates that they are necessarily related to the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs. While the particular nature of these features is contingent (e.g., interest rates vary, card benefits differ), all credit cards have some fundamental quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation characteristics. And in these affinity card programs, these qualities are necessarily related to conceptualizations of community, which vary but are essential to the existence of the respective programs.

Despite the importance of community in the appeal of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs, certain built-in characteristics of credit card programs place restrictions on the type and extent of virtual community that can be constructed, to the extent that virtual community is defined as being constituted by a network of actual cardholders, along with the card issuer and beneficiary organizations. Cardholder eligibility is limited by the minimum financial constraints
which are imposed on applicants, which inherently limits the number of potential cardholders. Another limitation on the extent and type of virtual community that can be created by the two programs involves the competitiveness of interest rates and other fees in a dynamic credit card marketplace. If the two programs become uncompetitive on a financial basis, or prospective cardholders find that another affinity card provides superior benefits to an alternative affinity group, this could also limit the range or type of cardholders in the two programs.

Similarly, the limitations of the technological medium place restrictions on the type of virtual community that can be created as a result of the programs. The dominance of the cardholder-card issuer link over the cardholder-beneficiary organization link, as well as the lack of means for cardholder-cardholder interaction, makes the likely type of virtual community more along the lines of the "tertiary association" that Putnam (1995) discusses, in which the major act of membership is sending in a check or reading a newsletter. Here, although a new relationship has been created between the card issuer and the cardholder, which includes the provision of information from the card issuer/marketer to the cardholder about various issues that the card issuer/marketer deems important (and which can include matters that pertain to the beneficiary organizations), the primary emphasis of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs is their role in redirecting cardholder financial resources to beneficiary organizations. At this time, the use of the cardholder-card issuer link to intensify an existing relationship or to create a relationship
between cardholder and beneficiary organization is at most a secondary goal of the programs.

Despite the fact that the credit card technological medium is not designed to facilitate cardholder-to-cardholder economic exchanges, this does not mean that there are not a range of communication processes which are involved in the UNITY Visa and America’s Black Colleges Visa context (see Figure 6.2). The card instrument itself can be viewed as providing psycho-cultural reinforcement for the cardholder’s affinity relationship. In addition, social disclosure of one’s affinity relationship is expressed whenever the card is used and can be observed by a merchant or bystander. Credit card issuers and marketers obtain valuable information about the purchasing behavior of cardholders through the transaction-generated information (TGI) that is obtained through the Visa credit card processing network. All of these communication processes involve interpretations of the meanings of the card instrument and the TGI created as part of the credit card processing network.

Similarly, a wide range of communication processes are evident in the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa programs from the patterns of access perspective. These communications were largely dependent on media outside the credit card technologies themselves. Prospecting efforts by card issuers and marketers used a wide range of media, including direct mail, advertisements, and telemarketing. Applications and brochures revealed to prospects the financial conditions for the respective affinity credit cards, and the completed applications are reviewed by the card issuers to determine credit-worthiness. Once prospects become cardholders, they
Figure 6.2: Illustration of communication relationships in the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs. Dashed arrows represent interpretative communication processes as viewed from the other four analytical perspectives. Solid arrow represents electronic links between merchants and the VISA network that were not analyzed for interpretative purposes in this study.
receive updates from the card issuer on the status of the program, donation levels for a particular year, and other matters that relate to the particular cardholder market. Cardholder can contact the card issuer with questions or problems, and can also contact beneficiary organizations directly for more specific information on how the donations are being used, or on other ways to offer support. The beneficiary organizations do not have a proactive communication position as it relates to cardholders. They must communicate through the credit card issuer/marketer, or wait for cardholders to contact them directly, unless they have independent means of knowing which cardholders have supported their organization. This is less likely in the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa program than in other affinity credit card programs in which the beneficiary organization is intimately involved in a marketing process with exclusively or primarily targets active members of the beneficiary organization.

This study has not directly examined the extent to which affinity card membership has affected the level of membership or intensity of involvement in the respective beneficiary organizations. Because of the lack of involvement by the individual beneficiary organizations in the marketing of the respective affinity programs examined in this study, it will be more difficult for them to leverage the relations created by the card issuers with cardholders, especially to the extent that the card issuers are able to establish relations with individuals who have not previously been active members or supporters of the beneficiary organizations which are aligned with the card programs. For these reasons, the form of virtual community likely to be established as a result of the UNITY Visa and
America's Black Colleges Visa will be defined largely on the basis of the donations provided to the beneficiary organizations and the number of cardholders obtained by the respective programs.

What does this mean for virtual Black communities in the context of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs? The limited involvement of the beneficiary organizations in the development and marketing of the respective programs means that the primary form of virtual community that can be transferred from the affinity program to the beneficiary organizations will be in terms of financial exchange. Although cardholders can obtain some information about the beneficiary organizations through the information issued by the card issuers and marketers, and can in fact contact them if so desired, the network which has been established to conduct the affinity card programs is not designed to be the primary means of communication between beneficiary organizations and cardholders, and between cardholders themselves. This is largely consistent with the normal operation of a credit card business, which does not specialize primarily in community development activities. However, beneficiary organizations would probably be able to expand their own virtual community networks if they were able to establish some level of communication with the cardholders which have been organized through the marketing efforts of the affinity credit card issuers. The development of virtual Black communities as a result of the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa programs, while likely to advance on a purely economic and informational level, will likely be limited at the interpersonal and organizational level because of the limited level of

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integration of the beneficiary organizations in the process. Alternative strategies will be necessary for any added income or exposure from the affinity credit card programs to translate into new or additional virtual relations between cardholders and beneficiary organizations.

Summary

This chapter has analyzed the UNITY Visa program and the America's Black Colleges Visa program from five perspectives: institutional, technological medium, patterns of access, content, and interpretative. The content perspective evaluated the theme of community and subthemes of race, power, education, and youth, in comparison with quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatially distanciating themes, revealing the multi-functional nature of the two affinity card programs. The community-centered nature of the two programs provided the basis for the construction and communication of virtual communities by credit card issuers and marketers; communities which are presented as linking the credit card issuer, marketers, beneficiaries, and cardholders in distinct types of relationships. The opportunities and limitations of these constructions are discussed for both the UNITY Visa program and the ABC Visa program.

The following chapter uses these empirical findings to provide conclusions which address the questions posed in the introduction of this study. The chapter further presents the limitations of the study, and the implications of the study for future research on different monetary forms and alternative community relations. Finally, the chapter discusses practical applications of the study for community development activities.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has provided a theoretical and empirical examination of multiple ways in which monetary forms can be viewed as human communication processes. A five-perspective analytical framework was developed, based largely on work by Joshua Meyrowitz, and applied to the examination of the complex relations between an illustrative monetary form and related conceptualizations of virtual community. This study has revealed that Black-oriented national affinity credit card programs possess a mix of characteristics that are capable of supporting, as well as undermining, particular aspects of community.

Specifically, this chapter applies the empirical findings from Chapter 6 to the theoretical discussion provided earlier in this study to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1. This discussion reveals where the empirical findings contradict or are consistent with the dominant theories of money and community as presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Then, the chapter addresses the limitations of the empirical findings regarding the two affinity credit card programs which were examined. The chapter also discusses the possible implications of these findings and the analytical method used for future communication-centered research on different monetary forms and alternative constructions of community. Finally, the
chapter discusses the practical implications of this study for individuals and groups interested in a range of community development issues.

**Answers to Research Questions**

The first research question asked the ways in which affinity credit card programs can be conceptualized and examined as communication processes. The work of Meyrowitz (1993, 1994), Pilotta (in press) and others provided the methodological basis for the examination of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa affinity card programs as media from five distinct, but overlapping, perspectives: institutional, technological medium, patterns of access, content of communication products, and interpretative. Each perspective allowed for an abstracted view of the affinity card programs under study. This approach shows not only that affinity credit card programs can be theorized as communication media, but also provides an example of how such communication perspectives can be integrated in an empirical analysis, as recommended by Meyrowitz (1993, 1994), to offer a more comprehensive understanding of communication phenomena.

Significantly, the findings of this study indicate that the Meyrowitz-inspired framework developed and applied in this study can be extended beyond the affinity credit card context to the examination of a wide range of monetary forms, to the extent that they are viewed broadly as communication processes. The application of a multi-perspective communication framework to the study of money promises to enhance the understanding of money's complex role as a medium, not only for the exchange of economic values, but also for the negotiation of an array of social, cultural, historical, political and psychological concepts. Such an
approach supports the claim by Simmel (1978/1907) that money can provide "a guideline that leads to the ultimate values and things of importance in all that is human" (p. 55).

The second research question asked what the relations are between the development and operation of Black-oriented affinity credit card programs and the constructions and interpretations of Black virtual communities. The empirical analysis shows that a necessary relationship exists between the creation and functioning of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa card programs and some level of community commitment and cohesion. This relationship, however, is asymmetrical, in that while the affinity card programs were dependent on the existence of some form of community, either material or psycho-cultural, the existence of community at this time was not dependent on the existence of the affinity card programs. The definitions of community that were identified were not consistent, sometimes referring to a single Black community; at other times identifying multiple Black communities defined by factors such as income and geography. However defined though, the dominance of any form of Black community in the marketing of affinity credit card programs -- contemporary monetary forms -- should not occur, according to the majority of the "community-destructive" theories described in Chapter 3.

Despite the fact that the empirical study contradicted the extreme nature of the "community-destructive" theories, the role of community in the affinity card programs examined was not absolute. The type of virtual community that appeared to be targeted in both programs is in some ways broad-based, in others restricted. The broad-based nature of the marketing
appeals was evidenced in the large number of charities which were eligible for donations in both of the programs. Rather than focusing on a single beneficiary organization, both the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa direct donations to a range of different institutions, enhancing the number of prospective cardholders that might be attracted to the programs. The use of community themes and sub-themes with broad appeal: race, education, youth, and power, is designed to appeal to the group consciousness of a wide range of prospective cardholders, even those who have not previously been supporters or members of the particular beneficiary organizations. This widely targeted appeal is also a reflection of the fact that many of the beneficiary organizations do not have tightly established, on-going relationships with individuals in their support base, in part because of the spatially distanced nature of these organizations. As a result, the card issuers and marketers took the lead in the marketing of the programs, with minimal involvement in the process by the beneficiary organizations.

Paradoxically, the large number of beneficiary organizations, while offering the opportunity for appealing to a larger number of cardholders, imposes limits on the active involvement of the beneficiaries in the marketing process, if only because of the inefficiencies that grow with increasing numbers of participants. While the beneficiary organizations do receive income from the programs, and do have information about their organization communicated to a broader audience of individuals through the affinity card programs, they currently have limited opportunities through the programs to establish direct ties with cardholders, unless
cardholders initiate contact with them based on information they receive from the card issuer. The alternative approach that was discussed was found in the canceled Church of God in Christ (COGIC) affinity card program, which was structured to incorporate the active involvement of the denomination, in conjunction with Key Bank and Trust, to promote card usage in local COGIC churches throughout the nation. This approach likely would have resulted in the construction of a more integrated form of virtual community through the COGIC affinity program.

The limited involvement of the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa beneficiary organizations in the operation of the programs, combined with the observed potential for tension between the individually-oriented and community-oriented benefits of affinity credit card programs, indicates that efforts to establish more of an "inner-directed" orientation for the respective beneficiary organizations will require additional efforts to establish stronger, more direct links between spatially dispersed members and supporters. Although increased income for beneficiaries from Black affinity cardholders could represent an increase in the inner-directness of an organization, such cardholder-derived income support is vulnerable to external factors if other measures are not taken to establish or enhance the direct affinity relationship between cardholder and beneficiary organization. As noted above, a strong level of affinity strength between cardholders and beneficiary organizations is valuable not only for the beneficiaries, but it also strengthens to commitment to the particular affinity card, benefiting the card issuer as well.
The restrictions on the form of virtual community being constructed in the UNITY Visa and America’s Black Colleges Visa programs is not only the result of the limited involvement of the beneficiary organizations in the marketing of the cards. Even if a virtual community is defined to include only the card issuers and those who actually become affinity cardholders, the inherent limitations of the credit card technological medium and the patterns of access to the respective cards limit the type of communication that can occur even within such a virtual community. Cardholder-cardholder communication is almost non-existent, since people generally do not use credit cards for personal transactions, and cardholder-card issuer communication is primarily dominated by the card issuers, unless the cardholder has a customer service issue or desires to ask a question about the donations for that particular year. However, these cardholder-card issuer communications are conducted via supplemental communication media, rather than through the credit card technological network. In fact, the marketing of the cards themselves by the card issuers is also conducted primarily via mailings, advertising, telemarketing, and other traditional media. Thus, while the affinity credit card programs can be defined as establishing alternative virtual relations between individuals and various organizations, the form of virtual community that is established is dependent on the incorporation of a wide range of communication media in addition to the credit card system (card instrument and processing network) itself.
The dominant form of on-going cardholder to card issuer communication is not intentional communication, but is the result of the use of credit card database systems which provide regular data to the card issuer about the status of card accounts. Although this communication is not intentional by cardholders, it provides very detailed insight to card issuers of the type of cardholders they have, their spending patterns, and other sophisticated information. This information can then be used by the card issuer/marketer to adjust its marketing strategy to retain existing customers, enhance their usage patterns, or to attract new cardholders. While this monitoring function, and its impact on communications by card issuers can be viewed as a form of communication exchange, it lacks the intentional, interactive, dialogical nature of other forms of community, whether proximate or virtual.

Another limitation on the type of virtual community that can be constructed is revealed through the necessary relation in the affinity card programs between the community themes and subthemes, and the quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes. Although the community themes are necessary, it was determined in the previous chapter that the "community-destructive" themes were also necessary for the existence of the affinity programs, because as credit cards serving the individual financial needs of cardholders, there is a fundamental role for these features as well. This reflects the multi-functional nature of affinity credit cards, which is consistent with Zelizer's (1994) argument that money has both quantitative/instrumental features and cultural aspects. Affinity card programs must satisfy both individual
goals and group aims. The particular impact of a specific criterion is a contingent matter, but must be seen as a limitation on the construction and stability of a particular virtual community that can be developed through the programs. This instability is another reason why the lack of active involvement by beneficiary organizations in the marketing of the programs can have significant implications. Despite the prominence of community benefits in their relationship, affinity card issuers and affinity cardholders also function in an economic relationship that can be weakened or terminated due to financial or instrumental matters. Community-based beneficiary organizations will, in turn, possibly find inconsistency in the level of their donations, unless they are able to use the relationships established through the affinity card programs as the basis to develop or enhance their own relationships with cardholders. Rather than serving as competition for card issuers, this active beneficiary involvement should solidify the loyalty of the cardholder to the particular affinity card program.

The dominance of the card issuer-cardholder relationship over the cardholder-cardholder or beneficiary-cardholder interaction in the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa program is not unique to these two programs. As Worthington and Horne (1996) note in research on university alumni affinity card programs, this phenomenon is not unprecedented. This "hub-and-spoke" form of virtual community corresponds to the tertiary associations which Putnam (1995) condemns as inferior to secondary associations which involve active social interaction in proximate space. The tendency of many of the beneficiary organizations
in the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa context to function with their own members and supporters in a "hub-and-spoke" relationship limits their ability to construct alternative relationship structures in the context of affinity credit card programs. If the beneficiary organizations lack proximate or "secondary associations" with their members and supporters, and if the virtual interactions they have with members and supporters are infrequent, then they become dependent on the regular direct contacts which the affinity credit card issuer has with cardholders via billing statements or newsletters. While the relationship between the card issuer and cardholder results in financial support for a particular beneficiary organization, it does not necessarily result in increased direct interaction between cardholders and the beneficiaries. The risk is that the beneficiary organization becomes more of a symbol to a cardholder than an active organization with which they are directly engaged, potentially limiting the intensity of virtual community which can be created.

The economic orientation of the virtual community created through the UNITY Visa and America's Black Colleges Visa is a different finding than that observed in research done by Pilotta (in press), in which the sense of community among central city Blacks in Columbus, Ohio was articulated more as an interpersonal phenomenon than one based on economic solidarity. In the current study, the economic form of virtual community that is being created can be seen as based on or enhanced by psychic or cultural forms of community. The direct interpersonal articulation of community that exists among Blacks in proximate space is not a visible part of the affinity credit card networks that were the
emphasis of this study. This is primarily because of the nature of credit card networks. Unlike cash or coins, they cannot be used universally for exchanges among people. Credit cards are only accepted by recognized merchants. The majority of individuals who would be defined as members of a particular Black community cannot exchange affinity credit cards between themselves. Although bystanders can obtain social disclosure about a cardholder's affinity relationship by viewing use of the card in transactions, this is more of an indirect form of communication than if individuals could engage in credit card transactions among themselves. Therefore, the type of community that can be created among cardholders is based in an individual's status as a cardholder, and is created, maintained, or enhanced by the images on the card itself, the information that the cardholder receives from the card issuer or marketer (or beneficiary organization when applicable), and the knowledge that usage of the card results in benefits to a particular beneficiary. While it is economic, and can be cultural, it is not a direct interpersonal community, in either a proximate or virtual sense. However, interpersonal community can be constructed through separate means, if the economic and cultural messages are effectively communicated.

The creation of a range of relationships pursuant to affinity credit card programs is important for credit card issuers, marketers, and beneficiary organizations, because it affects the level of community that can be constructed: economic, psycho-cultural, and interpersonal. Horwitz (1989) describes money as one of the four "channels" or "infrastructures" which allow for trade and discourse which bind together a community,
society or nation. These four infrastructures also include telecommunication, energy utilities, and transportation. Like most theorists of money, Horwitz emphasizes its fundamental role as "a representation of value," "the means of exchange of value," and "crucial for economic intercourse beyond the level of barter" (pp. 11-12). However, this infrastructural reference is useful in determining the potential for affinity credit card programs, and economic networks in general, to influence the development of virtual Black communities.

As stated above, the necessary relationship between affinity credit card programs and the concept of Black community is asymmetrical, with the existence of the affinity programs clearly dependent on some material or conceptual definition of Black community, with the reverse relation not clearly established as necessary. In fact, some sort of group affinity among Blacks, whether manifested or perceived, must pre-exist the establishment of an affinity program. This is of crucial importance in the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa programs. This differs from the situation in which a government can mandate the use of a single system of money and outlaw competing forms by force of law and its enforcement powers. As Zelizer notes (1994), the U.S. government embarked on an all-out effort in the middle to late 19th century to outlaw or tax out of existence any monetary instruments that were not issued or authorized by the federal government. In this situation, compliance is largely ensured by the fear of punishment by the government for violation of the law.

In the context of affinity credit card programs, competing monetary forms exist without a governmental mandate that one form be used rather
than others. Although operating over the same network and functioning as part of the same association as other Visa cards, the specific characteristics of the UNITY Visa card, the ABC Visa card, and other competing credit cards establish the need for incentives other than the force of law to be used to persuade prospective or existing cardholders to use a particular card. While the multi-functional nature of the two programs has been noted, the dominant feature or the "hook" for these two cards is their clearly defined commitment to community development. Whether expressed in terms of race, youth, education or power, the role of community is central in the promotion of the respective affinity card programs, and will remain so as long as the other functions of the respective card remains competitive.

Key Limitations

While the empirical analysis presented above provides valuable information for purposes of a deeper understanding of the communicative nature of affinity credit card programs and their implications for virtual Black community relations, the conclusions are limited, as noted above, by a number of factors. Of particular importance is the inchoate nature of affinity credit card programs in general, and the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa programs in particular. The UNITY Visa program was examined during its first-year, test market period, and the ABC Visa program was examined when it was less than four full years old. In addition to the fact that both programs are at an early stage in their development, they are competing for consumer attention in a fiercely competitive credit card marketplace. Thus, the findings and subsequent conclusions could be influenced by the
fact that the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa programs are at early stages of
development, are carving out a market which has been historically
unserved or underserved, and are competing with the resources of larger,
better funded credit card issuers. Acknowledgment of this factor is
important when using donation amounts as an indicator of commitment
to virtual forms of Black community or as an indirect measure of support
for the respective affinity credit card programs or particular beneficiary
organizations.

However, the fact that Black-oriented affinity credit card programs
are in their emergent stages and give rise to indeterminate results is to be
expected when engaging in the study of a new phenomenon. Even in the
physical sciences, the study of a new occurrence involves tentative
conclusions and the need for continued examination to confirm or clarify
previous findings. In the social sciences, given the unpredictable nature of
human actors, the study of new phenomena gives rise to even greater
uncertainty. As stated above in Chapter 5, this was an important
justification for the use of an intensive, qualitative research approach in
this study, since the quantitative data available at this time could lead to
unreliable conclusions about the status or potential of the two programs.

Despite the tentative nature of the findings regarding the level of
virtual community that has been constructed as a result of the UNITY Visa
and ABC Visa programs, the creation and marketing of these programs
provides insights into tendencies that may be on the rise in the
development and marketing of monetary instruments that are
increasingly digital and non-material in their essence. As digital money or
digital money becomes increasingly prevalent, the necessity for a material representation of value is diminished or eliminated. However, it is unclear whether this will abolish the differentiation which has characterized money in the past.

As noted by Zelizer (1994), standardization of currency in the 19th century, designed to eliminate local and private monies, was met by the earmarking of money uses based on its source or purpose. Similarly, this study has shown that standardization in the credit card market has been followed by the creation of affinity credit card offerings targeted to identity, race, ethnicity, and the like. Lynch and Lundquist (1996) raise the question of whether digital money could become the “cowrie shell of the Internet,” allowing the creation of monies by private issuers rather than governments or banks. They argue that

On the Internet, it could happen that money gets associated with specific places, such as Web pages (WebGuilders); or specific cybermalls, such as the one that Open Market and First Data are trying to create. . . . Or perhaps currency will come to be associated with specific products that it can buy, much like coupons are today. In other words, digital money creates the new possibility that currency will gradually become specialized and differentiated. There could be many kinds of currency. Yet at the same time a single, global currency becomes feasible. (Lynch & Lundquist, 1996, p. 120-121)

As discovered in this study of affinity credit card programs, monetary differentiation can also be based on racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. This study also provides extensive evidence to refute the notion that the specialization and differentiation of currency is a "new possibility" which emerges with the creation of digital money. The interdependency revealed
in the UNITY Visa and ABC Visa marketing materials between qualitative community themes and quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes can be used to gain insights into possibilities for the combination of aspects of differentiability and global usability in the digital money environment.

In addition, it has been argued that winning consumer trust in digital money will be facilitated by getting consumers accustomed to using credit cards for purchases on the Internet. This is because credit-card-based systems have the advantage of seeming familiar to consumers (Holland, 1995, pp. 68-69). If trust in credit card safety and security is one feature that is believed to be transferable to digital money, it is feasible that identity or community factors could also be overlaid onto fully digital monetary instruments. Therefore, although the affinity credit card programs examined in this study have not been in existence long enough to allow for clear, incontrovertible conclusions regarding the level of virtual community that has been established, even in this early stage they provide a very vivid image of how various themes can be combined to fulfill a range of functions. These findings will be of value in the study of electronic money, which is an even more recent development than most affinity credit card programs.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study raise a number of questions and issues that form the basis for future research. The estimated $469 billion spending power of Black Americans (Humphreys, 1997) in 1997, contrasted with the financial challenges of many Black institutions and communities,
indicates that the pre-existing level of community affinity or cohesion has not been maximized. One key question left unresolved in the present study is why in recent years Blacks with increasing incomes have been unable or unwilling to provide a greater proportion of financial support for Black institutions (excluding churches) (Kaufman, 1996). Similarly, in what sense are affinity credit card programs mechanisms that allow for the channeling of financial resources within Black communities in ways that were unavailable without affinity credit card programs? For example, why is it arguably more difficult for a person to write a check directly to a particular charitable organization than it is for a person to use a credit card, write a check to pay the credit card bill, and have the bank make a charitable donation at the end of the year on behalf of that cardholder? Whether the problems are with Blacks on an individual basis, with the charitable organizations and the nature of their programs, or with additional forces in society, these are factors that could reveal a great deal about the status of contemporary Black communities. The issue is as much socio-cultural and educational as it is economic or political. This study could be conducted on a survey basis, but would require an independent means of soliciting cardholders for participation, because of confidentiality and privacy constraints imposed on card issuers. One alternative might include placement of an advertisement or article in a local Black newspaper or national magazine requesting affinity cardholders to participate in a survey if they are holders of a particular affinity card, with a small benefit for participation. Such a survey could also inquire into the impact of affinity card membership on a cardholder's sense of community.
commitment, or on a cardholder's level of involvement with a particular beneficiary organization.

Another study could compare the type of community messages that are promoted by affinity cards supporting other ethnic or racial groups with those supporting Black-oriented beneficiary organizations. Such a study could use the five perspectives analyzed in this empirical examination, and could conduct research with individual cardholders if possible. This type of study would permit the comparison across race and ethnicity of the type of community appeals made to cardholders, the type of quantitative, instrumental-utilitarian, and spatial distanciation themes that exist, and the type of involvement in the marketing strategies that the beneficiary organizations possess.

Such research need not be limited to affinity credit card programs. Although the multi-functional nature of affinity credit card programs is explicit, alternative monetary forms can be examined in order to determine the extent to which they are multi-functional, the ways in which the different monetary functions are expressed, and the reasons why such approaches are used. This is probably the most intriguing area for future research on the issue of the relation between community and monetary forms. Research on the community-monetary relationship could address alternative financial vehicles targeted to African Americans, such as the Black-oriented mutual funds that have been developed to respond to that "untapped" investment market (Singletary, 1997).

Other research on currencies might review the historical development of money in various Western countries, particularly at the
onset of "modernity," to re-evaluate the theories that led to the dominant view that money destroys qualitative relations of community. Such research could examine other forces that might have led to the decline of visible forms of community relations. It might also study ways in which community relations might have been expressed, but in more subtle ways than in the creation of alternative physical monetary forms. Examples of "earmarking" (Zelizer, 1994) might be in evidence where a standardized form of money is used for different purposes and has different meanings depending on its source. Codere's (1968) example of the resistance of Africans to the "shatteringly simplifying" idea of British money was an example not only of the resistance of traditional communities to a rationalizing and modernizing transformation in their financial systems (pp. 572-73). It was also an example of resistance to cultural, economic and political colonialism. Acknowledgment of the multi-functional nature of all monetary forms, not just those that exist outside the centers of the global financial system, will enhance understanding of the nature in which people use, interpret and reject particular monetary instruments.

Such studies on the relations between currency and community can be conducted in the contemporary context regarding the current efforts of European countries to replace their national currencies with a single money, the Euro, by 1999. The abandonment of national currencies and creation of the Euro is being accompanied by ambivalence among citizens as well as some governments (R. Cohen, 1997a, 1997b). In response to concerns about "national bias" on the Euro, the bills have no national symbols on them. The Euro is described as probably the first Western
currency without any graven images of historic figures. In addition, there are no words on the bills, except "Euro," because the words would have to be in one language or another. Finally, the bills will not feature an image of anything that exists in the real world. Images of sweeping bridges, windows and stone gateways do not exist in reality. However, a small space will be reserved on one side of each bill. Individual countries, which will print Euros at the mints they now use for their own currencies, will be allowed to use this space for their own "national symbols" ("Europeans ponder question," 1996). Such debate over the currencies reveals a contemporary example, within Europe itself, of the cultural nature of monetary instruments. While this example deals with the concern about the maintenance of cultural identity as it relates to the level of a national currency, the issue is a spatially expanded version of more localized community identities. Indeed, in non-homogeneous nation-states, "national" identities have been forged largely as a result of the merging, absorption or elimination of competing local communities and identities.

On-line electronic commerce would be particularly appropriate as an area for future research on the relation between monetary forms and virtual communities. Will electronic monetary forms be uniformly imposed, or will on-line bankers be free to compete for "customers"? If such monetary forms are not imposed by fiat, what means will be used by companies to distinguish one monetary form from another? Will the marketing appeals be exclusively quantitative or instrumental-utilitarian, or will they incorporate concepts of community in order to provide a proximate flavor to an otherwise entirely virtual medium? How do racial
statistics on computer ownership and usage affect the type of marketing appeals that will be developed? For example, a recent study conducted by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the U.S. Census Bureau (1995) revealed that in central cities, only 10.4 percent of Black, non-Hispanic households had a computer, 29.4 percent of White, non-Hispanic households had a computer, while nearly 36 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic households had a computer. What are the implications of these types of statistics for the development and marketing of on-line financial products to Blacks, Asians, or Whites?

The potential for targeting digital money on the basis of racial or cultural identity is significant given the diverse entities who are free to create such monetary instruments, the ability to customize such on-line monies, and the technological means to target certain types of digital money to particular markets. Although targeting of digital money based on race or culture is not yet an emphasis in the literature on this subject, conflict over which images will be used to represent particular electronic monetary instruments have already been identified as a crucial competitive issue. In what has been referred to as the "battle of the logos," an issue has been raised regarding the impact of having both banks and nonbanks providing digital money to consumers. To the extent that digital money providers such as DigiCash join forces with companies like AT&T or Microsoft that have control over the computer-communication networks over which digital money is accessed and used, systems could be developed that make the AT&T or Microsoft logo the first thing people see, even if banks have competing digital money services that are accessible
over the same network. An officer for one major bank has warned that banks could become "buttons on a network operated by other entities" (Holland, 1995, p. 70).

Another early example of a product that shows the potential for targeted monetary forms is Millicent, a system under development by Digital Equipment Corporation which bypasses banks and national mints. In a concept reminiscent of early forms of private currency and coinage which were commonly issued in the United States prior to the Civil War (Zelizer, 1994, pp. 12-14), on-line merchants are encouraged to print their own, vendor-specific electronic money (scrip or coupons), and brokers buy of group lots of the scrip at a discount to face value, selling it to consumers at retail. This scrip is only valid for Millicent transactions, and consists of a digital signature, a serial number, and a stated value (typically a cent or less) (Freeman, 1996, p. 60; Flohr, 1996, p. 82; Castelluccio, 1996, p. 45). While this system is still in its infancy, and the targeted nature of the system relates to vendor-specific qualities, the potential for creating digital monies which are customized based on identity characteristics is a likely development in the future, possibly offering some similarities to the development of affinity credit card programs as a variation on credit cards distinguished primarily based on interest rates, instrumental-utilitarian characteristics, and qualities of a particular bank or bank association.

The embryonic nature of digital money systems makes it difficult to make many strong assumptions about the parallels between affinity credit card programs and digital money offerings. However, to the extent that digital money systems develop an identity "layer" for marketing purposes,
there are likely to be excellent opportunities to examine the similarities and differences between the systems. For example, how does the interpretation of a cultural logo on a physical credit card compare to the interpretation of the same cultural logo, but visible only on a computer screen? To what extent are qualitative characteristics of customized monies retained or transformed in the digital environment of digital money? These and other questions will become increasingly significant as digital money becomes more prevalent in the social life.

Practical Applications

The possible studies discussed above, while relevant from the standpoint of examining multi-functional theories of monetary forms, have integrated within them practical applications as well. The centrality of monetary instruments and institutions to all of the functions of contemporary society, as well as the persistence of various definitions of community, guarantees that the scholarly examination of these relations will intersect with pragmatic, real-world matters. These can arise in the context of the decisions whether to develop community-based targeted marketing strategies for various products and services. In addition, the results of this sort of research can inform efforts by community development organizations to increase their sources of revenue or to enhance relationships with spatially dispersed members or prospective supporters. The efforts to promote acceptance of the Euro could benefit from research indicating the effects of emphasizing its quantitative and instrumental-utilitarian features, in contrast to or in combination with the creation of a continent-wide "community" appeal to a new form of
community. As a governmentally mandated form of money, citizens have limited choice in the matter, but they can engage in various measures to undermine or earmark the money if they are resistant to the strategies which are used to promote its use.

Another practical application of this study could be to help inform banking law and regulation as it relates to changing concepts of community. For example, the Community Reinvestment Act, which relies on a geographically-based definition of community, is becoming increasingly inapplicable for monetary instruments that are accessible from sources that are independent of a particular branch location. With the growth of financial services such as credit cards and digital money that have spatially dispersed markets, legislation such as the Community Reinvestment Act will have to be modified to respond to the increasingly virtual nature of both communities and financial services.

The examination of monetary forms as communication processes expands the opportunities for a more complete understanding of one of the most central phenomena in the contemporary world. To this researcher, one who is particularly interested in the internal development of Black communities to allow more meaningful individual and collective participation in local, national and global affairs, this issue raises significant possibilities, as well as concerns. With community goals and individualistic desires so intimately bound in monetary forms, establishing and maintaining a balance will be a continuing challenge. However, the establishment of programs such as the UNITY Visa program and the America's Black Colleges Visa program indicate that despite the
constraints that exist for the development of Black communities, opportunities are also present, and may be increasing. These opportunities may not always be the result of benevolence, moral inclinations, or uninterested philanthropy. In the final analysis, the motivations for opportunities are less important than the fact that such opportunities arise. The key requirement is evaluation of such opportunities with circumspection, using the results to establish plans of action that provide maximum benefits for individuals as well as communities, however defined. While such evaluations and action plans are not unproblematic or uncontroversial, it is imperative that they be conducted. This study is one effort in that direction.
APPENDIX A

CONDITIONS IMPOSED BY OSU HUMANS SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Research involving Human Subjects

ACTION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research protocol:

96BO064 MONEY AND CREDIT SYSTEMS AS COMMUNICATION MEDIA: AFFINITY CREDIT CARD PROGRAMS AND THE NEGOTIATED RECONSTRUCTION OF VIRTUAL BLACK COMMUNITIES, Rekha Surnajiva, Patrick D. Hadley, Communication/Journalism

THE BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES HUMAN SUBJECTS IRB HAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

- APPROVED
- DISAPPROVED
- APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS∗
- WAIVER OF WRITTEN CONSENT GRANTED

∗ Conditions stated by the IRB have been met by the investigator and, therefore, the protocol is APPROVED.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least three (3) years beyond the termination of the subject’s participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Human Subjects IRB for the required retention period. This application has been approved for the period of one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the IRB, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

DATE: November 15, 1996

Signature: Patricia M. Johnson

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RESEARCH PROTOCOL:

96B0364 MONEY AND CREDIT SYSTEMS AS COMMUNICATION MEDIA: AFFINITY CREDIT CARD PROGRAMS AND THE NEGOTIATED RECONSTRUCTION OF VIRTUAL BLACK COMMUNITIES, Rohan Samarakkiva, Patrick D. Hadley, Communication/Journalism

was presented for review by the Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB to ensure proper protection of the rights and welfare of the individuals involved with consideration of the methods used to obtain informed consent and the justification of risks in terms of potential benefits to be gained, the IRB action was:

__ APPROVED  __ DEFERRED*

X APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS*  __ DISAPPROVED

__ NO REVIEW NECESSARY

*CONDITIONS/COMMENTS:

Subjects were deemed NOT AT RISK and the protocol was unanimously APPROVED WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

1. Revise answer on Summary Sheets as follows and forward a copy to the IRB:
   
   #1 Clarify what is meant by the statement: . . . to determine how they use affinity credit card programs to construct and interpret various meaning of community.
   
   #14 Omit notation in final report that a certain company declined to participate.
   
   #17 Specify what archival will be used.

2. Clarify the recruitment process.

3. Revise the solicitation letter as follows and forward a copy to the IRB:
   
   a. Identify the principal by name, title, and OSU affiliation in the first paragraph of the letter.
   
   b. Include signature block for principal investigator, including: original signature, title, and OSU affiliation.

4. Revise "Summary for informed interview consent" to be used as a script and use HS-027 standard consent form.

5. Revise the HS-027 consent form as follows and forward a copy to the IRB:
   
   Provide signature of the principal investigator.
6. Provide the IRB with a copy of the letter of support from the participating Banks and organizations, printed on company letterhead and signed by the appropriate administrator.

COMMENT: The IRB suggests that the casual recruitment procedure may be an unrealistic approach to use with the groups targeted for participation in the study, i.e. management personnel.

If you agree to the above conditions, PLEASE SIGN THIS FORM IN THE SPACE PROVIDED BELOW AND RETURN WITH ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED TO THE HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW DESK, 300 RESEARCH FOUNDATION, 1960 KENNY ROAD, CAMPUS, within one week. Upon such compliance, the approval form will be mailed to you. (In case of a deferred protocol, please submit the requested information at your earliest convenience. The next meeting of the IRB will be two weeks from the meeting date indicated above.)

Date: Dec 5, 1996

[Signature]

Signature of principal and co-investigator

HS-025A
Rev. 2/92
(Conditions/Comments)
APPENDIX B
PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Brief overview of your organization (history, goals, nature of membership).

2. What factors (internal, external) influenced your organization's entry into the Unity Visa card program? Initiator?

3. Who developed marketing strategy? What are major themes or emphases in marketing efforts?

4. Was marketing focus on mass advertising, direct mail, or combination? If direct mail, to whom are marketing efforts directed, and what databases are used to identify prospects?

5. How was logo on Unity Visa card developed? By whom?

6. How does the bank communicate to the beneficiary organization the status of the Unity Visa card program?

7. What data can you share about the response in the targeted market to the Unity Visa card program? In general, how has your organization interpreted the response of the market to this affinity card?

8. Any sense of which factors have had an influence on the level of response to the Unity Visa card program at this time?

9. Impact of Unity Visa card program on other initiatives in your organization?
APPENDIX C
UNITY VISA BROCHURE

Introducing the
UNITY Visa Card

A Credit Card With A Mission

Lamar Arnold
Charles J. Reed
Rev. John M. Bonner, M
Francisca C. Borges
Senator Edward W. Brooke
Wayne A. Bold
Rev. Calvin Butts
John W. Car
Dr. Richard D. Car
Dale Mason Coxman
Johnnie L. Cowper
Darwin N. Davis, Sr.
David N. Denmark
Judge Lewis L. Douglass
Dr. Kemper E. Davis
June W. Dring
Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Ronald Gour
Kenneth J. Guscott
André Harrell
La-Var Hawkins
Carolyn Golden Hessagana
Denise Jackson
Maynard Jackson

Samuel Jackson
Warren G. Jackson
John E. Jacobs
Sharon Pratt Kelly
Melvin H. King
Hendel J. Knox
Bennett M. Lee, Sr.
Elma Lewis
George R. Lewis
Tracy V. Maddox
Ralph Martin
Charles J. Ogletree, Jr.
Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint
Dr. W. Franklin Richardson
Sydney Ranier
George A. Russell, Jr.
Russell Simmons
John T. Sims
Dr. Deborah Prinsep-Storr
Rev. Charles Stitt
Ltc. Walker
Senator Hoyt H. Willey
Fletcher H. "Flash" Willey
Senator Deeble Wilkerson
The power to improve our community is in your hands... with the new UNITY Visa card.

Introducing the UNITY Visa card: the credit card that contributes directly to your choice of African-American charities. As a UNITY Visa cardholder, you will join a powerful network of people committed to turning the massive spending power of African Americans — over $200 billion a year — into a force for positive change in the African-American community. The UNITY Visa is offered exclusively by the Boston Bank of Commerce, one of the most well-established African-American owned banks in the country.

Everything You’d Expect From Visa... With No Annual Fee.

The UNITY Visa card not only contributes automatically to the African-American community but it also offers you all the advantages you’d expect from Visa, including:

- Worldwide Acceptance - over 12 million establishments around the world.
- $100,000 Worldwide Automatic Travel Accident Insurance at no additional charge.
- Lost Luggage Coverage: at no additional charge.
- ATM Access around the world.

*Details of coverage provided with application

Make A Difference When You Make A Purchase... With Unity Visa.

Every time you use the Unity Visa card, we will automatically donate 1% of your purchase amount to your choice of the following charities:

- Children’s Defense Fund
- Jackie Robinson Foundation
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- National Urban League & Local Affiliates
- Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund
- United Negro College Fund

Or, if you prefer, you may choose to have your donation sent to the UNITY Foundation*, which contributes to local grassroots organizations.

Call For A UNITY Visa Card Application Today!

Simply call us at 1 800 59-UNITV and we’ll send you a UNITY Visa application by mail. Become a force for positive change while enjoying all the benefits of UNITY Visa.

UNITY starts with you.
Introducing Visa -- 
A world of positive change.

As a force for good, Visa is offered by the Boston-based Visa Inc. to communities all over the world. Visa is committed to making financial inclusion a reality.

Every day, Visa empowers people to live, work and play in a world without limits.

Today, Visa.

You.

Visa.

Everything you do.

For a better world.

Introducing a world of positive change.
**APPENDIX D**

**UNITY VISA APPLICATION**

Yes! I wish to apply for a UNITY Visa card.

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<th>Last Name</th>
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<th>Street Address</th>
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<tr>
<th>City</th>
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**Charity Selection**

Please choose ONE of the following options:

- Children's Defense Fund
- Jackie Robinson Foundation
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- National Urban League & Local Affiliate
- Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund
- United Negro College Fund
- UNITY Foundation

If a charity is not designated, remain blank and go to the UNITY Foundation.

**Free Additional Cards**

Print the full name of authorized household or family members who should receive an additional card at no additional cost.

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<th>First Name</th>
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<th>Last Name</th>
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<tr>
<th>Home Telephone Number</th>
<th>Business Telephone Number</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employer Address</th>
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**Social Security Number | Date of Birth**

**Bank Name | Bank Account Number**

**Source of Other Income | Annual Amount**

**Own Home | Rent | Monthly Rent/Mortgage Payment**

**Name of Landlord or Mortgage Co. | Phone Number**

**Mother/Father Name | last name only**

**Co-Applicant Information**

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</table>

**Social Security Number | Date of Birth**

**Source of Other Income | Annual Amount**

**NOTICE: Amounts should support one minimum income need not be revealed if you do not wish to disclose it as income.**

**Signatures**

**Applicant Signature | Date | Co-Applicant Signature | Date**

**Applicant's name:** I certify that I am at least 18 years of age and that everything stated in this application is true and correct. I understand that the use of any card issued in connection with this application will be subject to the terms and conditions of the UNITY Visa Card Agreement that will be sent with the card. I also understand that if I accept the offer, both of us have the right to use the account and will be jointly and severally liable for the entire account balance.
A promotional rate of 0.95% will be applied to transferred balances, new purchases and cash advances for the first 6 months of membership. Current as of 30%, the non-discounted Annual Percentage Rate is 13.95%.

The annual percentage rate effective after the promotional period may vary month to month. This rate will be calculated by adding 7% to the highest Prime Rate as published in The Wall Street Journal on the 22nd day of the preceding month, not to go below 13.95%.

Variable Rate Information

Credit Period 25 days from the date of your statement, on average.

Late Fee None

Minimum Finance Charge $5.00 in any month that a finance charge is payable.

Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases Average Daily Balance Method including new purchases.

Transactions Fee on Cash Advances 2% of the amount of the advance, but not less than $2.00 or more than $20.00. Late Payment Fee the lower of 5% or 10% of the balance outstanding, if minimum payment is not paid in full after 35 days of payment due date. Overlimit Fee $25. Returned Payment Charge $10. Documentation Fee $5 per item.

Authorization: I agree that you may obtain and use consumer credit reports in connection with this offer and any update, renewal or extension of credit to me. You or your agent may exchange credit information about me with others in connection with my application, account or any credit you extend to me.

New York Residents may contact the New York State Banking Department at 1-800-518-4860 to obtain a comparative listing of credit card rates, fees and grace periods.

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APPENDIX E

AMERICA'S BLACK COLLEGES VISA APPLICATION/BROCHURE

(SECURED CARD)
A Letter To The Supporters
And Alumni Of Black Colleges And Universities
From Shirley Chisholm.

Dear Supporters:

We are pleased to announce a new opportunity for students attending Black Colleges. Increasingly, colleges are recognizing the unique and important contributions that alumni and supporters make to their institutions and to our community. One way in which we can support these institutions is through card programs.

The America's Black College Secured Visa Card program is designed to benefit both the colleges and the alumni and supporters. By applying for the card, you will be assisting America's Black Colleges in meeting their financial obligations and in supporting their achievements.

This program can be very beneficial. It allows you to maintain a balance on your card and to pay any amount you owe when you wish. Furthermore, you will receive various benefits associated with your card.

Here are the qualifications:

- Minimum income: $8,500 (or $165 per week)
- No length requirements for living at current address
- No length requirements for current job
- No current account overdraw
- All court proceedings involving credit must be finalized

Besides supporting students attending America's Black Colleges, you get all these other benefits:

- No annual fee for the first year
- Credit limit: double your initial deposit
- Access to nationwide Automatic Teller Machines
- $100,000 Travel Insurance
- FREE Alamo Rent A Car membership

We invite you to join us in supporting America's Black Colleges. Your involvement will make a significant difference.

Sincerely,
Shirley Chisholm
About The Secured America's Black Colleges VISA® Card.

Key Federal Savings Bank Presents The Secured America's Black Colleges VISA® Card.

Questions And Answers About The Secured America's Black Colleges VISA® Card.

Students Attending These Institutions Of Higher Education Will Benefit From The America's Black Colleges VISA® Card.

1-800-425-8880
APPENDIX F

AMERICA'S BLACK COLLEGES VISA APPLICATION/BROCHURE

(UNSECURED CARD)
A Letter To The Supporters
And Alumni Of Black
Colleges And Universities
From Shirley Chisholm.

In recent years, I have had the opportunity to speak with many people about the need for federal support for our nation's historically black colleges and universities. This is an important issue, and I am proud to be a strong advocate for the rights of black people.

America's Black Colleges VISA Card Qualifications:
- Minimum gross income of $17,500
- Must have a credit history of at least two years
- Cannot be a P.O. Box or General Delivery
- Must have two years of credit history
- Credit history must be excellent

Besides Supporting Students Attending America's Black Colleges, You Get All These Other Benefits:
- No annual fee for the first year
- Low annual percentage rate of 16.9%
- 25-31 day grace period on new purchases
- Credit limit at $1,000
- Access to worldwide automatic
- Free $100,000 travel insurance
- Free alumni rent-a-car membership

I encourage all of you to support America's Black Colleges and universities. By doing so, we can help ensure that these institutions continue to provide the quality education that is essential for the success of our black community.

Sincerely,
Shirley Chisholm
APPENDIX G

AMERICA'S BLACK COLLEGES VISA AD

(AMERICA'S BLACK COLLEGES DIRECTORY)

It's the America's Black Colleges VISA* card from Key Federal Savings Bank. Each time you use this very special card, a contribution is made to benefit students attending America's Black Colleges. And to make this card available to the widest number of people, Key Federal is proud to be the only bank in America offering two options:

One is for those who've already established good credit. The other is a secured card, backed by a savings account with Key Federal, for those wishing to establish or reestablish good credit histories. Both feature no annual fees for the first year and both give you the power to help our young people get the higher education — and the future — they deserve.

Call for your America's Black Colleges VISA* application 24 hours a day, toll-free.

1-800-228-1303

of Maryland
APPENDIX H

AMERICA'S BLACK COLLEGES VISA AD #1

Thanks to the America’s Black Colleges VISA* card, exclusively from Key Federal Savings Bank. The only card in America that makes a contribution to help the students of America’s Black Colleges every time you use it. And to make it even more available for those wishing to help our young people get the education they deserve, Key Federal offers it in two ways:

* A traditional VISA* card for those who’ve already established good credit.
* A secured VISA* card backed by your interest-bearing savings account for those wishing to establish or reestablish good credit.

Why Wait? Call for Your VISA Application 24 Hours A Day!

1-800-228-5122

KEY FEDERAL SAVINGS BANK
of Maryland

IDC
Here's the One Credit

He Needs to Graduate.

It's the America's Black Colleges Visa card, exclusively from Key Federal Savings Bank.

The only card in America that makes a contribution to help the students of America's Black Colleges every time you use it. And to make it even more available for those wishing to help our young people get the education they deserve, Key Federal offers it in two ways:

* A traditional card, for those who've already established good credit.

* A secured card backed by your interest-bearing savings account, for those wishing to establish or re-establish good credit.

Why Wait? Call For Your FREE Application 24 Hours A Day!

1-800-228-5110

KEY FEDERAL SAVINGS BANK
of Maryland
PRESENTING THE VISA® CARD THAT HELPS DREAMS COME TRUE.

Apply for the secured America's Black Colleges VISA® Card from Key Federal Savings Bank.
It's a real learning experience.

Get and use the secured America's Black Colleges VISA® Card from Key Federal Savings Bank. It's backed by money you deposit to an insured, interest-bearing savings account. So getting approved is easy. The bank donates $7.00 to Key Federal's America's Black Colleges Scholarship Fund every time a card is issued. Then, every time a card is used, we donate a percentage of the purchase amount.

Apply for the secured America's Black Colleges VISA® Card from Key Federal Savings Bank, today.

CALL TO APPLY:
1-800-4-01-8880
Apply for the America's Black Colleges VISA® Card from Key Federal Savings Bank. It's a real learning experience.

Now you can get the credit you deserve, and help our children get the education they deserve.

Get and use the America's Black Colleges VISA® Card from Key Federal Savings Bank.

The bank donates $7.00 to Key Federal's America's Black Colleges Fund every time a card is issued. Then, every time a card is used, we donate a percentage of the purchase amount. This program provides thousands of dollars to students at over 115 Black colleges and universities.

Get the VISA® Card that's a real learning experience. Apply for the America's Black Colleges VISA® Card from Key Federal Savings Bank, today.

CALL TAPPLY
1-800-000-
APPENDIX I
UNITY VISA SOLICITATION LETTER

Get the new credit card that contributes to the African-American community—the UNITY Visa card.

Dear Friend:

We urge you to join a powerful network of people across the country committed to the future of the African-American community. Join Dr. Alvin Poussaint, Julian B. Erving, Russell Simmons, Sharon Pratt Kelly and many others by obtaining a UNITY Visa card—the first credit card that allows you to partner our spending power and channel it back into the African-American community. The new UNITY™ Visa card is the first and only national credit card to be offered by an African-American owned bank. It is also the first and only credit card that directly contributes to your choice of African-American charities.

Serving Your Needs. With No Annual Fee

The UNITY Visa card offers you everything you look for in a credit card. There's no annual fee. The introductory annual percentage rate (APR) is only 9.95%. And the UNITY Visa card is accepted at over 12 million establishments including stores, hotels and restaurants around the world. It provides all the benefits that come with Visa membership. Most important, UNITY Visa is offered by a federally insured bank owned by African Americans and dedicated to the financial needs of the African-American community.

UNITY Visa—An Instrument For Change

Every time you use the UNITY Visa card, we automatically donate 1% of your spending to your choice of the following charities that support the African-American community:

- Children's Defense Fund
- Jackie Robinson Foundation
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- National Urban League and Local Affiliate
- Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund
- United Negro College Fund

Or you can support more local charities by selecting the UNITY Foundation™—a non-profit organization established to identify and contribute to grassroots organizations supporting the African-American community.

In addition, as a UNITY Visa cardholder, you will receive the quarterly UNITY newsletter that details the latest information on important issues concerning African Americans.
UNITY VISA SOLICITATION LETTER

The combined annual spending of African Americans is over $200 billion a year. As you can see, African Americans are a very powerful economic force in this country and around the world. With the UNITY Visa card, we can channel this spending power back into the community. As a UNITY Visa cardholder, your contributions, together with the entire network of cardholders, will make a powerful difference in assisting community service organizations to fulfill their mission.

Serving Our Community Nationwide

The UNITY Visa card is issued by the Boston Bank of Commerce, one of the largest and most well-established African-American owned banks in the country. Since our incorporation over 10 years ago, we have provided a full range of financial services to our customers, including home mortgages, business loans and checking and savings accounts. Our deposits are insured by the FDIC.

The Boston Bank of Commerce has never been just another bank. We have always been committed to serving the needs of the African-American community for affordable housing, small business development and community services.

And now, we are expanding our services to address the national African-American community by bringing our financial expertise to UNITY Visa, the card that allows African Americans to support our community institutions.

Don’t Pass Up This Opportunity...Return Your Application Today

To begin building a brighter future for the African-American community...at absolutely no cost to you...please review the enclosed materials and return your application today.

Sincerely,

Kevin Cohee
Chairman
Boston Bank of Commerce

* See Summary of Terms and Credit Disclosures on back of the Application, including information regarding the variable rate in effect after the introductory period.


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Dear Friend:

Key Federal Savings Bank has joined with Affinity Card Marketing to help support students attending more than 115 historically black colleges and universities and present you with an investment that makes financial and social sense. Key Federal’s America’s Black Colleges VISA® Program is designed to provide you with a VISA® card and support students attending America’s Black Colleges with much-needed financial support.

Upon your approval for our VISA® card, a contribution will be made to The Key Federal America’s Black Colleges Scholarship Fund. Then, each time you use your card, a portion of each purchase will also be contributed to the scholarship fund.

The America’s Black Colleges Program has something for everyone. Key Federal is the only bank in the county to offer two options which both benefit students attending America’s Black Colleges: one, a VISA® card for people who have established excellent credit histories and the other, a secured VISA® card, backed by a savings account with Key Federal, for those who need to establish or re-establish good credit histories. Please read through the application accompanying this letter and decide which option best suits you.

We recognize the importance of supporting students attending America’s Black Colleges. And, we know you do as well. Your participation in the America’s Black Colleges VISA® Program, and that of your family, friends and colleagues, supports black higher education every time the card is used.

Please let others in the community, your relatives and friends who share our commitment know about this exciting VISA® card program. They can call Key Federal for an application, toll free: 1-800-328-2200.

Thank you for your support.

Yours truly,

Alvin Lee
Executive Director

P.S. In addition to the America’s Black Colleges VISA® Program, we provide several other programs which also benefit students attending America’s Black Colleges. Materials from these programs are enclosed.

P.O. Box 19776 • Baltimore, MD 21225

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APPENDIX K

UNITY VISA PRESS RELEASE

BOSTON BANK OF COMMERCE

Contact: Michael Kammer, Shelley Bates
Michael Kammer Public Relations
212/627-8098 or mkpr@aol.com

For Immediate Release
News Alert!

BLACK-OWNED BOSTON BANK OF COMMERCE MAKES HISTORY
WITH PIONEERING CREDIT CARD ENCOURAGING SELF-EMPOWERMENT

$300 Million Credit Offering Is Largest Ever by and for African Americans

New York City, February 20 — Looking to help African Americans channel their formidable spending power back into their communities, New England’s only black-owned bank will issue a historic credit card that will carry a message of self-reliance at a critical time in black history.

With nearly $300 million in pre-approved credit, the new UNITY Visa card launch will represent the largest credit offering ever by and for African Americans, according to Kevin Cohee, chairman of the black-owned Boston Bank of Commerce, which is issuing the card. The Boston Bank of Commerce is one of the most well-established African-American-owned banks in the country.

Created to channel the estimated $200 billion spending power of African Americans into a force for positive change in their communities, the card will direct 1% of every dollar charged to the cardholder’s choice of African-American charities. Consumers can call 1-800-59-UNITY to apply for the card.

The UNITY Visa’s debut at the outset of Black History Month is significant and symbolic, according to Boston Bank of Commerce senior vice president/marketing Terri Williams, who developed the card with Cohee.

“As the nation salutes the accomplishments of African Americans, it’s important that we focus on our future,” said Williams. “We hope this card will send a positive message about the power and potential black consumers can harness for their own benefit.”

More than just a credit card, the UNITY Visa card will create a powerful economic, social, and political network that African Americans can contribute to as part of their everyday lives.

Williams estimated that if just 15% of African Americans currently holding credit cards become regular users of the UNITY Visa card, the contribution program could generate an estimated $15 million a year in donations to African-American charities. The United Negro College Fund, Children’s Defense Fund, Jackie Robinson Foundation, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, and National Urban League and local affiliates are among organizations that will benefit from UNITY Visa transactions. The Boston Bank of Commerce has also established the UNITY Foundation, which contributes to local African-American grassroots organizations nationwide.

(more)
UNITY VISA PRESS RELEASE

UNITY Visa card?

The UNITY Visa card carries no annual fee, has an introductory interest rate of 9.95%, and assures cardholders the premium benefits of Visa membership, including acceptance at over 12 million establishments worldwide, ATM access and travel insurance programs. Cardholders also receive the quarterly UNITY Visa Newsletter with information on political and economic issues that affect African Americans.

Although the card has been in development for more than eight years, the timing of its launch carries special resonance after the historic Million Man March, and with the much-debated dismantling of affirmative action programs. "The events of this year make it clear that African Americans must look to ourselves, not outside, for true economic empowerment. We named the card for that goal, which is to unify the many black communities in the U.S.," Williams said. "One thing we all share is our commitment to supporting African-American economic development."

"Black people have always sought ways to channel our spending power back into the community," said Boston Bank of Commerce president and CEO Ron Homer. "We believe the UNITY Visa has the potential to be one of the largest donors to charities and a symbol of African-American empowerment worldwide."

Until now, African Americans have been less likely than other consumers to own a credit card. The UNITY Visa card is the first national credit card to target the African-American consumer and is expected to attract over 1 million cardholders.

**Card's Mission Attracts a Prominent Roster of Charter Members**

Impressed by the card's mission, a diverse and prominent group of African Americans has already signed on as charter members, including former New York City Mayor David N. Dinkins, Harvard Medical School professor Dr. Alvin Poussaint, basketball great Julius Erving, and music superstar Queen Latifah. The UNITY Visa card will make it easy for African Americans to channel the money they spend back into the black community without having to change their current spending habits.

"The current mood of the African-American community augurs well for the success of the card. It's a practical, personal way for people to realize the goals of the Million Man March just by doing what they already do," says Cohee. He and Mrs. Williams hint that "the UNITY Visa is the first of the many new products that we have planned at the Boston Bank of Commerce. It is the foundation of things to come."

Cohee and Williams are married and have a long and successful record of groundbreaking achievement in the business world. In 1988, the couple purchased Military Professional Services, Inc., a marketer of Visa and MasterCard to military officers, and led the company that earned a citation in the Congressional Record for outstanding service.

After successfully selling a major portion of the MPS credit card portfolio to First Chicago National Bank in 1991, Cohee and Williams invested $1 million of the proceeds into the Boston Bank of Commerce.

(more)

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UNITY VISA PRESS RELEASE

UNITY Visa card/3

An alumnus of Harvard Law School and the University of Wisconsin, Cohoe had worked in corporate finance at Salomon Brothers and was an associate at the Chicago law firm of Kirkland and Ellis. Williams received a BA with distinction in economics from Brown University and an MBA with honors from Harvard Graduate School of Business. She made her mark at American Express as one of the youngest vice presidents and has received numerous achievement awards including Brown's Alumni Service Award.

“Our success is largely due to the support we received from the African-American community and the generation that preceded us,” says Williams. “We want to give back to the community by investing our financial resources and time in a way that will have a long-term impact. Now more than ever, all of us need to find ways to move our own community towards economic self-determination.”

# # #

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The Chairman's Perspective

Black History Month is an important time to look back at the long history of our struggles and successes, and review what we've contributed to this history over the past year.

The recent past has been marked by tremendous triumphs and sorrows, from the immense solidarity of the 1995 Million Man March to the tragic burning of many Black churches in 1996. In this issue, we review some additions to Black History in 1996. As you'll see, we made gains in politics and publishing, but lost heroes such as Ron Brown and treasures such as Ella Fitzgerald. Also, while we're making history right now, many of us are still working to know our past. To help, we offer a list of some of the newest and best African-American history books.

You'll also find a description of another of our charities — the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund. By supporting students attending the same historically black institutions that have educated so many Black leaders, this charity is playing a much needed role in the continuity of our history.

Our final section, Did You Know?, highlights one of many African-American firsts. Of course, you're part of another first — the UNITY Visa card is the first credit card issued for and by African Americans. And in December, we made the first UNITY donations to charity: $35,000 in total. Inside you'll find the details. This is just the beginning. I look forward to this year's additions to our rich history.

Kevin Cohee, Chairman

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Rosa Parks receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
SAMPLE UNITY VISA NEWSLETTER (FEBRUARY 1999)

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Some highlights of 1996 contributions to Black History.

January 8 Former California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, Jr. is sworn in as the first Black mayor of San Francisco.

January 25 Philadelphia Eagles Head Coach Ray Rhodes is named NFL Coach of the Year.

March 25 Jesse Jackson, Sr. leads protestors outside the Academy Awards ceremony, charging the motion picture industry with excluding Blacks.

May 13 For the first time in nearly 100 years, Publishers Weekly fiction and non-fiction best-seller lists were both topped by African-American writers. (Terry McMillan for How Stella Got Her Groove Back; Dennis Rodman for Bad As I Wanna Be)

June 23 During the Olympic Track and Field Trials, sprinter Michael Johnson breaks a 17-year record in the 200-meter event.

July 3 President Clinton signs the "Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996." The law increases the maximum sentence for these crimes and authorizes $10 million for church rebuilding.


November 5 As a result of the elections, a record 12 Black women will sit in the U.S. Congress this year.

Losse (a few of many):

January 17 Barbara Jordan, 39, former U.S. Representative (D-Texas).

April 3 Ron Brown, 54, first Black U.S. Secretary of Commerce and former chairman of the National Democratic Committee.

June 15 Ella Fitzgerald, 78, jazz legend.

September 18 Tupac Shakur, 25, rapper and actor.

Reading Up On Black History We count on knowledge of our past to inspire us as a community. Here are just a few of many new or recently-released history books.

• 1001 Things Everyone Should Know About African American History (James C. Stewart; 1996)
• A Pictorial History of African Americans (Langston Hughes, Milton Meltzer, C. Eric Lincoln, Jon M. Spencer; 1995)
• African American Firsts (Jane Potter, Constance Taylor; 1994)
• Black Profiles of Courage (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar; 1996)
• Glory Days. 365 Inspired Moments in African-American History (Janus Adams; 1995)
• 1,999 Facts About Blacks. A Sourcebook of African-American Achievement (Raymond M. Carter; 1997)
• The African-American Book of Days (Julia Stewart; 1996)
In December, the UNITY Visa Program gave the first donations to our participating charities. Simply through your spending on the card, we generated $35,000 for these charities in the seven months since our introduction. This, of course, is just the beginning. As we expand our network across the country, we expect to be one of the largest contributors to African-American charities in the nation, making Black empowerment and self-determination a reality.

**1996 UNITY Visa Donations**

- Children's Defense Fund: $5,000
- Jackie Robinson Foundation: $1,000
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund: $3,000
- National Urban League: $1,500
- The College Fund/UNCF: $12,500
- Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund: $2,000
- UNITY Foundation*: $10,000

*The $10,000 donated to the UNITY Foundation has been distributed in grants of $1,250 to eight grassroots organizations. The first six of these organizations provide job training to economically and educationally disadvantaged African Americans. The final two applied for and were awarded UNITY Foundation grants based on their exceptional programs.

**UNITY Foundation Grant Recipients**

- East Harlem Employment Service (New York) (STRIVE "For Women Only, Program")
- Metropolitan Career Center (Pennsylvania)
- New Community Corporation (New Jersey)
- Women Entrepreneurs of Baltimore, Inc. (Maryland)
- Roxbury Youthworks (Massachusetts)
- Capital Commitment, Inc. (Washington, D.C.)
- James R. Clark Memorial Sickle Cell Foundation (South Carolina)
- Multicultural AIDS Coalition (Massachusetts)

For more information on these organizations, please write to us at the UNITY Newsletter.
UNITY Visa Donation Program

Seven charities make up the UNITY Visa Donation Program. In this issue we feature the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund.

Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund

The Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund is a merit scholarship program that provides four-year scholarships to students who attend historically black public colleges and universities. Since its founding in 1987, the Fund has awarded scholarships totaling more than $1 million.

The 38 historically black public colleges and universities that participate in this program are pivotal educators of African Americans. These institutions enroll more than 190,000 students in studies spanning 400 fields. Students at these institutions represent 70% of all students enrolled in historically black colleges and universities, and each year these colleges and universities educate more than 54% of the African Americans who go on to graduate and professional schools.

For more information about the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, call: (202) 646-2222.

Did you know?

In 1854, the first college expressly intended for the education of African Americans, Ashmun Institute (later Lincoln University), was established in Chester County, PA. Among its graduates are Thurgood Marshall, Langston Hughes, and Kwame Nkrumah.

Source: AFRICAN AMERICANS FORUM by Jane Potter with Consistence Taylor.

For responsive Customer Service call 1 800 94-UNITY.
APPENDIX M

SAMPLE LETTER FROM KEY FEDERAL ANNOUNCING
AMERICA'S BLACK COLLEGES DONATIONS

DEAR America's Black Colleges VISA® Cardmember,

Congratulations! You and hundreds of other America's Black Colleges VISA® Cardmembers have made it possible to award the first three Key Federal-America's Black Colleges scholarships. Students from Delaware State University, Hampton University in Virginia and North Carolina A&T State University have each been awarded $2,000 scholarships.

The nationwide scholarship program began less than a year ago, and Key Federal contributes up to $7 to the scholarship fund for every America's Black Colleges VISA® card we issue (including yours). Then, Key Federal makes additional contributions every time you and other cardmembers make purchases with the cards. The money raised by the program funds scholarships for students at more than 115 Black colleges and universities across the country.

The students named as recipients of the scholarships exemplify the commitment to academic excellence, and awarding this scholarship money is one way we can support their efforts.

Enclosed is a reprint of a newspaper article which describes the program and tells you about two of the students awarded scholarships. Please take a few minutes to read the article. And please take pride in knowing that you are helping to make this program a success.

If you know others who are interested in supporting this program, have them call 1-800-228-2200 for an America's Black Colleges VISA® application.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Bouza
President, Key Operations Center, Inc.
LIST OF REFERENCES


America's Black Colleges Directory. Baltimore, MD: America's Black Colleges Program.


America's Black Colleges Visa solicitation letter. Baltimore, MD: America's Black Colleges Program.


A scholarship fund was announced by the National Basketball Association and Miller Lite beer. (1987, January 30). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 2C.


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