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Understanding Satisfaction: The Effect of Black Greek-Letter Organization Membership on African American College Students at a Predominantly White Institution

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This study compares the levels of satisfaction of African American students in Black Greek letter Organizations (BGLOs) to those who are not in BGLOs at a predominantly White university. The researchers found that Black Greek membership played a positive role in students' social integration, leadership, spirituality, academic satisfaction, and overall satisfaction with the institution. The study concludes with implications as to how student affairs practitioners can help African American students adjust to campus life at predominantly White institutions.

Introduction

Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) have been part of American colleges and universities since the beginning of the 20th century. The first BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha, began as a social literary club in 1905 at Cornell University and became the first fraternity primarily for Black men in December of 1906 (McKenzie, 1990). The first sorority for African American women began shortly thereafter, in 1908, at Howard University (McKenzie, 1990). Six of the remaining seven BGLOs were established on various campuses during the next 14 years, and the final BGLO, Iota Phi Theta, was founded in 1963 on the Morgan State University campus (McKenzie, 1990). The National Pan-Hellenic Council, the coordinating body for BGLOs, lists 1.5 million members since the founding of the first BGLO (Ruffins & Roach, 1997).

The focus of this research study is to examine how BGLOs at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) affect Black students' overall satisfaction with college, including academic, spiritual, and psychosocial development. The research question the authors seek to answer is: How do Black Greek students feel their letter organizations have affected their satisfaction with the college experience? Because Black students' satisfaction is a critical determinant of their persistence, particularly at PWIs, it is critical to examine how involvement affects satisfaction (Astin, 1993; Brown, 2000). While much research has focused on the leadership development of Black Greeks (Kimbrough, 1995, 1998; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), student satisfaction is frequently overlooked (Astin, 1993). According to Brown (2000), between 1982 and 2000, only three studies have focused on African American students' satisfaction with college. More research should be

conducted to determine how BGLOs and other ethnic student organizations affect students' level of satisfaction while at higher education institutions (Guiffrida, 2003).

Literature Review

In studying the satisfaction of Black Greek students, many aspects must be examined, including how student involvement affects satisfaction in the general college student population, the unique experiences African American students encounter at a PWI, and finally, Black student membership in BGLOs.

Student Involvement

In his assessment of student involvement in higher education, Astin (1984) created a theory that defines student involvement as the "quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p. 307). His theory correlates increased student involvement with an increase in student learning and personal development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) support the notion that students' participation in college activities is key in their development. They state that higher education institutions can promote human development by creating proper educational environments. Student involvement is an important aspect in studying student satisfaction because student involvement, as measured by academics, social integration, and spiritual activity, is shown to increase retention (Tinto, 1993; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Because student satisfaction is also shown to increase retention (Astin, 1993), it logically follows that student involvement and student satisfaction may also be related.

African American Undergraduate Student Involvement on Predominantly White Campuses

In addition to understanding how student involvement relates to satisfaction and retention, one must look specifically at how the culture of a PWI affects African American students. Overall, only approximately 40% of African American students persist to graduation in six years (Padilla, Trevino, Trevino, & Gonzalez, 1997). The statistics worsen at PWIs (Brown, 2000; Guiffrida, 2003), which may be due to African American students' experience of PWIs as chilly and unwelcoming to students of color (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Aspects that will be examined include academic, social, and spiritual, all of which specifically affect African American students' satisfaction with the college experience (Beil, Reisen, Zea, & Caplan, 1999; Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Pike, 2003).

Academics

Kuh, Pace, and Vesper (1997) and Tinto (1993) found that students' academic integration through active learning and cooperative activities increases their engagement, involvement, and retention. In their study of academic and social integration, Beil et al. (1999) stated in their findings that academics served as a specific factor in retention because academic integration relates to a student's commitment to his/her education and institution. African American students in particular show gains in learning and personal development when involved in academic related activities at PWIs (MacKay & Kuh, 1994).

At PWIs, research shows that African Americans struggle to integrate academically (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984), resulting in the experience of alienation and unfair treatment in the classroom (Fleming, 1984). Compared with students at historically Black institutions, African American students at PWIs perceive greater levels of discrimination from faculty, administrators, and peers (Sedlacek, 1987). According to Allen (1992), African American students struggle academically because they have difficulty adjusting to college, particularly at PWIs.

Social Interaction

DeSousa and Kuh (1996) reported that outside of the classroom experiences and interactions with peers are imperative to student learning and development amongst African American students. The social component focuses on the "daily life and personal needs" (Tinto, 1993, p. 106) of members of the higher education institution, including formal and informal social gatherings. Pike's (2003) findings stated that students who socially engaged in their college campus through predominantly White Greek organizations reported being more involved academically with the campus, felt the campus was supportive, and interacted more regularly with other students and with faculty.

Because the social environment of PWIs can be unwelcoming, African American students report marginal participation within traditional campus organizations, feeling the social climate of PWIs is "exclusive and insensitive to their social needs" (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001, p. 30). Due to the fact that their values may be dissimilar with those of the White majority, African Americans might have a more difficult time integrating (Tinto, 1993). For this reason, establishing a support group at a PWI is of utmost importance. Guiffrida (2003) commented that African American students who do not set up supportive peer groups at PWIs often express feelings of being uncomfortable, isolated, and stressed, which can cause them to leave the institution.

Students of color find support groups through the formation of enclaves, which usually evolve from membership in formal, multicultural associations (predominantly underrepresented student populations) (Guiffrida, 2003).

Spirituality and Religion

People often use *spirituality* and *religion* synonymously in literature related to the social sciences, yet they have distinct characteristics (Mattis, 2000). Spirituality is an individual's relationship with or belief in a "higher creational force or Supreme Being," (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Jagers & Smith, 1996, p. 605). In contrast, religion is defined as, "the routine and pragmatic demonstrations of spirituality" (Constantine et al., 2002, p. 605). Mattis (2000) proposed that individuals use religion to express their spirituality.

From the research conducted by Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody, and Levin (1996), African Americans involve themselves in religious activities (attending services, reading material, watching or listening to broadcasts, and finding comfort in their spirituality through religion) more than Whites. African American culture values religiosity, which can be attributed to the ways in which African Americans related to one another for survival purposes during the years of slavery (Phillips, 2000). Spirituality and religion help African American college students cope and create social support systems (Constantine et al., 2002). In regards to survival (e.g., coping and adjustment) for African Americans, their affiliation with a religious group and/or the practice of their spirituality positively impacts their adjustment to college and increases academic success (Constantine et al., 2002; Jager & Smith, 1996). Walker and Dixon (2002) believed that in terms of academics, students consider their spirituality to be correlated with their academic achievement. Students who self-reported to be more spiritual in their behaviors and beliefs earned higher grade point averages and academic honors (Walker & Dixon, 2002).

African American Undergraduate Involvement in Multicultural Organizations

Academic, social, and spiritual integration play crucial roles in African American students' satisfaction and retention at college (Allen, 1992; Constantine et al., 2002; Guiffrida, 2003). Multicultural organizations can provide the needed support for the unique experiences of African American students at PWIs (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). African American students participate in multicultural organizations because these organizations affirm their presence at PWIs and foster a sense of mattering, a sense "that others depend upon us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experi-

ence us as an ego extension which exercises a powerful influence on our actions" (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001, p. 30).

Several reports assert why and how multicultural organizations promote mattering in underrepresented groups. African American college students who participated in Person and Christensen's (1996) study on Black student culture stated that multicultural organizations provide assistance and assurance to students who feel marginalized and desolate. Multicultural organizations also provide comfort and an opportunity to serve in the African American community (Guiffrida, 2003). They supply opportunities for African American students to connect with peers similar to them, offer a forum to discuss experiences and frustrations with being a minority student, and provide a place where African Americans feel comfortable and accepted (Guiffrida, 2003).

One genre of multicultural organizations that may help students integrate is the traditionally Black Greek system. The founding BGLO members were seen as racial leaders and "were expected to assist in advancing the political, economic, and educational strivings of the Black community" (McKenzie, 1990, p. 30). Research shows that BGLOs continue to successfully provide these leadership and involvement opportunities for which they were created. Pike and Askew (1990) reported BGLO students as having higher levels of academic effort, campus involvement, and peer interaction. Specifically, BGLO students hold more leadership positions than Black students not involved in BGLOs (Kimbrough, 1995, 1998). Furthermore, Kimbrough (1998) found that BGLOs offer exceptional leadership opportunities for their members. Not only do BGLO members hold more leadership positions in multicultural organizations, but they also show more involvement in the larger campus culture and traditional campus organizations (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

Methods

This study examines satisfaction of BGLO students at a predominantly White public research institution compared to African American students not involved in BGLOs. Twenty-nine BGLO students participated in this study. Fifty non-Greek African American were used as the comparison group. BGLO members are in their sophomore, junior, and senior years of college. For this reason, upperclassmen were targeted for the comparison group.

Two quantitative surveys provided the data for this study – one for BGLO members and one for non-Greek students. Both surveys measured three areas of satisfaction: academic, social, and spiritual. Academic satisfaction included students' feelings regarding faculty interaction, academic peer interaction, their major and their classes, and other significant elements

related to the satisfaction of their academic life on campus. Social satisfaction included the frequency and nature of students' extracurricular involvement, as well as the racial/ethnic composition of the students' peer groups. Spiritual and religious satisfaction included students' perceptions of the importance of their spirituality and religion and how their spirituality and religion fit into their college life. In the BGLO survey, an overall satisfaction section probed information regarding how one's BGLO affected one's level of satisfaction. Additionally this section investigated the individual's relationship to the university and the greater community. The non-Greek survey simply asked students to reflect on their overall satisfaction with their college experience.

Each section of the survey, excluding demographics, utilized Likert-type questions. Surveys were distributed at each fraternity and sorority chapter meeting or gathering with the permission of each chapter president. During the same time period, students in attendance at two courses in the Department of Afro-American and African Diaspora Studies were given a similar survey, with approval from the professor. The data was analyzed using SPSS to determine t-values. Cohen's d determined effect sizes.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. Because this study was conducted only on one campus and yielded a small sample size, the findings do not necessarily hold constant for BGLO members at PWIs in different regions, different student bodies, or different racial/ethnic contributions. Furthermore, the sample populations were not equal. Whereas only 29 BGLO members were surveyed, 50 non-Greek students participated in the study. Additionally, all participants for the study were selected through convenience sampling.

Results

Table 1 contains significant findings regarding differences in satisfaction between BGLO members and non-members. Table 2 represents the BGLO members responses to satisfaction related to their BGLO membership. These results are represented on a scale from one to five. All results are mentioned are at the $p < .05$ significance level and have a moderate to high effect size.

Demographics

The researchers asked participants to report on various aspects of their demographic background, including but not limited to college class, grade point average (GPA), financial background, parents' educational background, and high school involvement, so that the researchers could determine if

Table 1
Greek Members versus Non-Greek
Members Results

Social	Greek Members			Non-Greek Members			t	d
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
I participate in 2 or more organizations	3.62	1.01	29	2.78	1.47	50	2.72	0.57
I have held 2 or more leadership positions in college	2.45	1.02	29	1.88	1.06	50	2.33	0.54
I am satisfied with my social life at college	4.38	0.86	29	3.64	1.16	50	2.99	0.64
I am involved in campus activities during my free time	4.21	0.82	29	3.6	1.14	50	2.74	0.53
There are planned activities that fit my interests	4.24	0.51	29	3.6	1.05	50	3.64	0.61
I have at least one close friend at my university	4.69	0.54	29	2.28	0.97	50	2.41	0.42
There are a multitude of culturally diverse activities at my university	3.66	1.26	29	2.92	1.21	50	2.5	0.61

Spirituality	Greek Members			Non-Greek Members			t	d
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
My spirituality is a component of my organizations	3.69	0.89	29	3.12	1.07	49	2.4	0.53
To what degree does your organizations share in your spirituality	3.41	0.91	29	3.13	0.98	48	3.92	0.87

Table 1
Continued

Religion	Greek Members			Non-Greek Members			t	d
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
My religion is a component of my student organizations	3.71	0.76	28	2.9	1.07	49	3.89	0.77
To what degree do your organizations share in your religion	2.17	0.6	29	1.51	0.62	49	4.63	1.07
Overall	Greek Members			Non-Greek Members			t	d
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
I am satisfied with my overall institution	4.21	0.73	29	3.46	1.05	50	3.72	0.71

Note: All values of t are noted to be at the significance level of $p < .05$.

factors besides membership or lack thereof in a BGLO affected the study's findings. With one exception, BGLO members and non-Greek students reported comparable findings to these demographic questions. Non-Greek students reported higher GPAs in both high school and college than did BGLO members.

Academics

No significant differences existed between BGLO members and non-Greek students regarding their academic satisfaction.

Social Interaction

Social interaction encompassed campus organizational involvement, social life, and friendships. More BGLO than non-Greek students reported having at least one close friend at their university ($t = 2.409$) ($d = 0.4224$). BGLO members reported being a part of more student organizations than non-Greek students ($t = 2.716$) ($d = 0.5700$). Additionally, they held more leadership positions than their non-Greek counterparts ($t = 2.325$) ($d = 0.5350$). BGLO members involved themselves more in campus activities during their free time ($t = 2.735$) ($d = 0.5310$) and felt more strongly that the campus offered planned activities that fit their interests ($t = 3.640$) ($d = 0.6110$). Furthermore, students involved in BGLOs agreed more so than non-Greek students that the campus offered a multitude of culturally diverse

activities ($t = 2.564$) ($d = 0.6078$). Lastly, when asked to respond to the statement, "I am satisfied with my social life at college," BGLO students reported greater levels of satisfaction ($t = 2.991$) ($d = 0.6393$).

Spirituality/Religion

Significant differences existed between BGLO and non-Greek students regarding the role spirituality and religion play in their respective campus organizations. BGLO students felt that spirituality ($t = 2.398$) ($d = 0.5286$) and religion ($t = 3.562$) ($d = 0.7662$) were components of their BGLOs, whereas non-Greek students did not agree that spirituality and religion were components of their campus organizations. Similarly, BGLO members felt that the degree their BGLO shared their spirituality ($t = 3.921$) ($d = 0.8656$) and religion ($t = 4.625$) ($d = 1.074$) was higher than the degree non-Greek students felt their campus organizations shared their spirituality and religion.

Overall Satisfaction

The researchers noted significant differences between BGLO members and non-Greek members when responding to the statement "I am satisfied with my institution overall." BGLO members were more satisfied with their overall experience at the university than non-Greek members ($t = 3.717$) ($d = .7087$). BGLO members were asked a series of questions concerning the relationship between their BGLO involvement and their satisfaction in academics, social interaction, spirituality, religion, and overall satisfaction with the university. In all areas, BGLO membership increased

Table 2
Overall Satisfaction of BGLO Members

My Greek Letter Organization has increased my satisfaction...	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
...with my academics	79.30%	13.80%	6.90%
...with my social life	96.50%	0%	3.40%
...with my spirituality	62%	24.10%	13.70%
...with my religious beliefs	55.10%	34.50%	10.30%
My Greek Letter Organization has promoted my overall satisfaction at IU	93.10%	3.40%	3.40%
I am satisfied with my Greek Letter Organization	93.10%	0%	6.90%
I am satisfied with my institution overall	89.70%	6.90%	3.40%

students' satisfaction. 79.3% of BGLO students felt that their BGLO had increased their satisfaction with their academics; 96.5% felt the BGLO increased their social satisfaction; 62% said their BGLO increased their spiritual satisfaction; and 62.1% agreed or strongly agreed that their BGLO increased their religious satisfaction. Finally, 93.1% of the sampled BGLO members said that their BGLO increased their overall satisfaction with the university.

Discussion

The researchers' intent of this study was to understand how membership in a BGLO at a PWI affects the overall satisfaction of African American students. The results of the research provided insight as to how these organizations contribute to African American students' academic, social, spiritual and religious satisfaction.

Academics

Interestingly, no significant differences existed between BGLO members and non-Greek students regarding academics. Both BGLO members and non-Greek students reported being moderately satisfied with their academic life at college. Both groups reported the most negative results when responding to the statements, "I find my classes difficult," "I am bored in my classes," and "How often do you interact with faculty outside of class?" Because of the difficulties African American students have in the classroom, in regards to integrating with other students and interactions with peers and faculty members (Fleming, 1984), these are important aspects in examining their academic satisfaction.

BGLOs were founded with values of academics and service (McKenzie, 1990). Because African American students struggle academically at PWIs, the founders of BGLOs believed the organizations could support African Americans academically (Fleming, 1984). Although BGLO members reported their organization as increasing their academic satisfaction, the results show no difference between the satisfaction level of students who are or are not involved in BGLOs. Furthermore, BGLO members report a lower average GPA than their non-Greek counterparts, which may be attributed to more focus on social and service activities among BGLO members, rather than on academics.

Social

BGLOs do a good job of socially integrating African American students into the African American subculture and the larger university community. Socially, BGLOs serve as an avenue for leadership, organizational involve-

ment, and awareness of other campus activities, which may help with adjustment to college and satisfaction with campus life. Noteworthy, BGLOs provided their members with the majority of their social activities. Both BGLO members and non-Greek students feel that having friends with whom they identify and having a racially diverse group of friends increases their social satisfaction.

BGLOs help African American students find friends at PWIs with whom they identify, specifically providing them an environment that is predominantly African American. Since BGLO members are more satisfied with their social life than non-Greeks and they largely attribute their social satisfaction to their BGLO, these organizations seem to be providing social support and campus involvement components of student development which Guiffrida (2003) and Kimbrough (1998) note as important to adjustment at PWIs.

Spirituality/Religion

High numbers of both BGLO members and non-Greek students considered themselves to be spiritual and religious. The majority of BGLO members stated that their spirituality and religion increased while at college, whereas the majority of non-Greek students reported that their spirituality and religion has not changed while at the college. Because of the large role spirituality and religion play in the African American community (Constantine et al., 2002), this can be an important aspect to African American student adjustment at PWIs. BGLOs integrate spirituality and religion into their organizations more so than other campus organizations in which African American students are involved. Because most students indicated that they do not attend religious services while at college, through ritual prayers and spiritual activities, BGLOs can serve as a substitute to a traditional religious service, helping students have a place to express their spiritual and religious beliefs.

Implications

Implications for Black Greek-Letter Organizations

BGLOs need to return to their academic roots to improve upon their current academic performance. Each member needs to understand the mission and goals of her/his organization when he/she joins the chapter. A stronger commitment to scholastic achievement by the BGLOs may increase the satisfaction and success in the members' academic lives. Having a graduate advisor who is an active member of the organization can assist the members of the BGLO to maintain the academic standards outlined by the

founding members and of the institution. Through increasing their academic commitment and satisfaction, BGLO members can serve as academic leaders for the African American community.

Socially, BGLOs should continue to cultivate the social, leadership, and campus integration opportunities they promote. As the majority of all surveyed students agreed that it was important to have friends with whom they identified, BGLOs provide a context where students can find friends with whom they identify racially. The majority of both groups also reported that having a racially diverse group of friends increased their satisfaction. BGLO members should proactively involve themselves socially in campus wide organizations, becoming leaders amongst the entire campus population. The researchers, however, did not examine the social aspect of service, yet recommend that BGLO members integrate themselves in order to increase their satisfaction with their, as they reported.

Because of the importance of spirituality and religion in regards to BGLO membership, BGLO members feel these aspects serve an important role in their organizations. They indicated that their spirituality and religion increased while at college, unlike non-Greek students. Because spirituality and religion are important elements of BGLOs, the organizations may want to examine their missions to ensure that these aspects are clearly defined in the mission statement. Furthermore, the organization members need to be aware of how affiliation with a particular religion may limit who pledges their organization. Although affiliation with a particular religion is acceptable, this affiliation should be apparent to students when recruitment begins.

Implications for Higher Education and Student Affairs Practitioners

Practitioners in higher education institutions should realize the importance BGLOs have for African American students. These organizations should be promoted in a way by which students can become more integrated in the African American community and the overall campus. By doing so, students will be more aware of campus events which include cultural and diverse activities and educational opportunities. Additionally, practitioners may consider how BGLOs promote an individual student's spiritual and religious identity development.

Future Research

Because academic satisfaction between BGLO members and non-Greek students did not differ and because academic satisfaction was not strong amongst either group, future research should look at the aspects affecting academic satisfaction at PWIs amongst the entire African American population. Furthermore, research should examine how BGLOs are

attributing to academic satisfaction amongst their members. The relationship between academic integration and academic satisfaction should be studied to help individuals better understand what aspects contribute to academic satisfaction.

Since a founding purpose of BGLOs was service (McKenzie, 1990), future researchers may want to focus on how BGLOs cultivate service and social engagement amongst African Americans and how these aspects contribute to social satisfaction. Researchers may want to study whether active involvement in other multicultural organizations fosters the same increases in satisfaction. Comparisons can be made to indicate if these types of organizations affect academic satisfaction more significantly than BGLOs.

Future research should look at how BGLO involvement affects students' development as it relates to spirituality and religion. Another interesting line of research might be to examine if spiritual/religious involvement affects overall satisfaction with the college experience.

In conclusion, BGLOs serve as an avenue for increasing satisfaction for African Americans at PWIs. Members of BGLOs conveyed greater satisfaction with the institution as a whole than non-Greeks and attributed increases in satisfaction in academics, social involvement, and spirituality/religion at least partially to their BGLO. Organizations such as BGLOs are needed on the campuses of PWIs to continue to assist African American students with their overall college experience.

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