OVERVIEW

Students’ socialization in their college environment has been found to highly correlate with retention, progress, and grades (Pascarella, E.T. [1985]. Student’s Affective Development within the College Environment. Journal of Higher Education, 56, 640-663.). However, those factors that predict retention, progress, and grades are not valid in predicting socialization. Researchers do not agree on the levels and causes of socialization among college students of different races and genders. One debate focuses upon whether black and white, male and female college students have similar types of socialization and whether their socialization is predicted on the same types of precollege background, institutional characteristics, and interaction in the college environment. Students are expected to experience greater socialization in their college environment if their college experiences are extensions of their precollegiate backgrounds and experiences (Feldman & Newcomb. [1969]. The Impact on College Students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass). They are also expected to be better socialized if they are a part of the predominant race of the students at the institution, attend more prestigious and selective institutions, and attend small, selective colleges and universities that allow for greater interaction, tighter knit communities, and greater social support. The amount of informal interaction with faculty outside the classroom also distinguishes students who are better integrated academically and socially. (Pascarella & Wolfle. Persistence in Higher Education: A Nine-year Test of a Theoretical Model. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago). Little attention has been given to race and sex distinctions in the effects of student background, academic performance, residential status, and contact with faculty on socialization. This study examines these agents of socialization, comparing race and sex differences.

DESIGN

A survey was given to 4,094 students attending 30 colleges and universities located in the southern and mid-Atlantic regions of the United
States. This student sample was stratified by race so that 50% of the students were black and 50% were white. Each student in the sample took the Student Opinion Survey (Nettles, Gosman, Thoeny, & Dandridge. [1985]. *The Causes and Consequences of College Student Performance: A Focus on Black and White Students’ Attrition Rates, Progression Rates and Grade Point Average*. Nashville: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.). It is designed to collect personal, academic, demographic, and attitudinal data and to distinguish racial differences and similarities of black and white college students’ backgrounds, attitudes, behaviors, and performances.

**FINDINGS**

Black men and women were similar on all three measures of socialization (peer group relations, student satisfaction, and academic integration), but white men and women differed from each other on all three measures of socialization. Black students ranked higher than white students on only one of the three socialization measures—peer relations—and lower on the other two. Correlation analyses revealed that socioeconomic status, high school preparation, and selectivity of the institution have the greatest influence upon the differences in socialization by race and sex.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The three dependent variables (peer group relations, student satisfaction, and academic integration) reflect different dimensions of college socialization. Subgroups of students ranking high on one of the measures rank in the middle or lower end of the distribution on the other two. For example, black men and women have the best peer group relations, but the least satisfaction with their institution and the poorest academic integration. The only common significant variable for all four groups is the measure of contact with faculty. Students of all four groups who have frequent contact with faculty are the best socialized. Academic integration and student satisfaction are more likely to be comparable for students of the same race than for those of the same sex; but peer group relations are more similar by sex.

On all three measures of socialization, when compared using thirteen independent variables representing precollege characteristics, those significant for white men, black women, and white women are not significant for black men. None of the precollege characteristics shows
significant determinants of socialization for black men. Other differences between the four groups emerge:

- Black women are equally well socialized in either large or small institutions.
- The satisfaction of black men is greatest if the racial composition of their high school and college are similar.
- Living on campus has a positive effect on the satisfaction of white women and the peer relations of all the groups except black men.
- Grade point average is a significant predictor of academic integration for all the groups.
- Being married or cohabitating is negatively associated with the satisfaction of white women, the peer relations of white men and women, and the academic integration of black women.
- The number of job hours is significant only in terms of the institutional satisfaction of white men.

**IMPLICATIONS**

- New approaches socializing college students need to be attempted by educators and those working with college students, and should be modified on the basis of a person’s race and gender.
- The challenges for those involved with higher education include helping white men and women socialize through peer relationships while also helping black men and women increase their level of satisfaction with their institution while providing the means for greater academic integration.
- The most clear cut predictor of socialization is student contact with faculty; therefore, institutions and other services should strive to strengthen student to faculty relationships.
- The institutional environment has a positive impact upon student socialization; this issue needs further study in order to isolate those factors that can and should be enhanced.
- The negative influence of marriage and cohabitation should be addressed with women—especially white women—considering marriage or some other type of committed relationship.

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