

# **Social and Professional Borderlines: The Socioprofessional Dynamic and the Experiences of African-American and White Pharmacy Students**

Kenneth M. Hale  
Thomas W. Humphreys  
Randall V. Schexnayder

**ABSTRACT.** This naturalistic study focused on the experiences of African-American and white pharmacy students at a predominantly black and predominantly white institution. Data collection included individual and small group interviews, observations of classroom and student organization activities, and document analyses. Results are presented within a framework of the sources of pharmacy student environmental influence including societal, personal, university, and college effects. Student experiences are described according to a model of personal and environmental influences on pharmacy student educational experience. This includes the precursory influences of personal background, effort, interfering problems, and support. Social and professional involvements are at the center of this model. "Socioacademic" and "socioprofessional" interactions are described as being closely related to a student's professional vi-

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Kenneth M. Hale, R.Ph., Ph.D., is Assistant Dean and Clinical Associate Professor at the Ohio State University College of Pharmacy, 217 Lloyd M. Parks Hall, 500 West 12th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210-1291. Thomas W. Humphreys, R.Ph., is a practicing pharmacist in Columbus, OH. At the time of this study, he was a pharmacy student at Ohio State University. Randall V. Schexnayder, R.Ph., M.S.Ph., is Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the Xavier University of Louisiana College of Pharmacy, New Orleans, LA 70125-1098.

The authors would like to thank the students at Xavier University of Louisiana and Ohio State University who participated in this study.

Journal of Pharmacy Teaching, Vol. 9(4) 2002  
<http://www.haworthpress.com/store/product.asp?sku=J060>  
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10.1300/J060v09n04\_02

ability. The paper concludes with implications for educational practice and a narrative constructed around the experiences of an isolated African-American male student in the predominantly white setting. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Student experience, African-American students, white students, socioacademic interactions, socioprofessional interactions

Most whites in contact with Negroes, always the teachers of their brethren in black, both by precept and practice, have treated the professions as aristocratic spheres to which Negroes should not aspire.

*Carter G. Woodson (1)*

## **BACKGROUND**

One of the most pressing dilemmas facing the pharmacy profession today relates quite directly to Woodson's admonition of almost 70 years ago. The academic and social environments, as well as the paucity of people of color, within many of our colleges may continue to convey the message to students that this profession is indeed an aristocratic sphere to which African-Americans should not aspire. Our dilemma—and our moral imperative—is to remove this perception by improving access and creating institutional environments in our schools and colleges of pharmacy in which these underrepresented students will thrive.

There are at least two important reasons for educators to be concerned about the underrepresentation of African-Americans in our institutions of pharmaceutical education.<sup>1</sup> The first concerns access to medical care, which is discrepant in the American health care system. One important indicator of access to medical care for any population is the proportion of its members who are health professionals. This assumption with regard to pharmaceutical care has been confirmed by several studies which demonstrate that practitioners of color are more likely to provide pharmacy services within nonwhite communities than white pharmacists (3, 4).

A second underlying cause for concern is the need for justice and equity in the distribution of educational resources. Green articulates the general impetus for this concern quite well: "A college degree provides increased employment opportunity as well as enhanced social standing. Anything less than full access for all citizens to this important credential is clearly unjust" (5). If access to pharmaceutical education for individuals of all racial and ethnic backgrounds is to become a reality, pharmacy educators must find ways to enhance the participation of members of underrepresented groups.

What collegiate factors influence student attitudes and performance, which may have a bearing on the participation of students of color? Several models appear in the literature that incorporate personal background and college environment or experiential variables with influence on educational outcomes (6, 7). While other researchers have studied pharmacy student success vis-à-vis cognitive or noncognitive personal system or student background variables, previous work has not focused on the influence of institutional environment or student behaviors and experiences on performance and satisfaction (8, 9).

The material to follow emanates from a study of the experiences of African-American and white pharmacy students at a predominantly black institution and a predominantly white institution. It highlights the social and professional borderlines which define the educational environment for these professional students. These borderlines often constitute barriers to opportunity in the form of social, academic, and professional networks that can result in differences in academic adjustment and performance.

Other researchers have provided a scholarly foundation for this study. Jacqueline Fleming's work relating to student success in black and white institutions demonstrated that "there is social-psychological evidence that many blacks in white colleges undergo a classic identity crisis that interferes with academic functioning" (10). Ultimately, "a crisis in social adjustment awaits black students who enter white colleges," with significant ramifications for psychosocial as well as intellectual development (11).

Walter Allen conducted several salient studies focusing on black students in the U.S. higher education system. His emphasis has been on the "structural, interpersonal, and psychological correlates of success." Using data from the National Study of Black College Students,<sup>2</sup> Allen concluded that, for black students at white institutions, "[t]heir extreme social estrangement from campus life provides the only exception to a largely positive pattern" (12). Allen later wrote that:

Interpersonal relationships are crucial in determining how individual and institutional characteristics influence black student experiences in higher education. Interpersonal relationships form the bridge between individual dispositions and institutional tendencies; together these factors determine student outcomes. (13)

The lack of “sound interpersonal anchors,” as described by Fleming and Allen’s allusion to the “extreme social estrangement,” experienced by African-American students at predominantly white institutions echoes a theme that appears throughout the literature, that is, alienation is cited as being central to the black experience on white campuses (11, 14-16). Conversely, the limited amount of scholarship relating to white students on predominantly black campuses indicates that these students tend to be ambiguous about their “fit” within these institutions. This tolerance may be due to their temporary minority status on campus as well as generally positive perceptions of their academic environment (17).

Disparities in the institutional environment for minority students, particularly the social context, continue to be well documented (18-22). The social distance between groups of students and the persistence of voluntary segregation may be a reflection of “intractable forms of racial inequality and discrimination at both the institutional and individual level” (18). These discrepancies, in addition to personal background factors that frequently vary by ethnicity, could constitute real differences in opportunity.

### ***METHOD***

This inquiry was designed to enhance our understanding of the experiences of African-American and white students within the environments of two colleges of pharmacy. The conceptualization of the study emanated from three basic questions:

1. What characterizes African-American and white student experiences in pharmaceutical education?
2. How do these experiences differ within or between a predominantly white and a predominantly black institution according to student race?
3. Do student experiences differentially influence educational outcomes such as academic success and student satisfaction?

Naturalistic methods, predominantly involving interview techniques, were used, as the perceptions of program participants were the basis of investigation. Such perception is inherently context bound, individually constructed, and best examined holistically. Therefore, the use of qualitative methods is viewed as the only logical way to understand these experiences (i.e., through the voices of those immersed in the daily life of the study sites). This approach is also most consistent with the underpinnings of an Afrocentric perspective including emphases on holistic understanding, subjectivity, tacit knowledge, and the interaction of the knower and the known (23). In addition, the use of aggregated perceptual data, typically gathered via survey techniques, as a comparative measure of environmental constructs has been criticized as a weakness of college environment research (24, 25).

Cross-sectional data-gathering strategies were employed throughout the 1993-94 academic year using in-depth personal interviews with students at the study sites, participant and nonparticipant observations of classroom and student organization activities, small group follow-up interview sessions, and document analyses.

### ***Site Selection***

Ohio State University was selected as the predominantly white institution in this study because the primary investigator was employed by its College of Pharmacy. Ohio State has long been respected as a leader in pharmaceutical education and research and, therefore, is representative of institutions in the forefront among colleges of pharmacy in general and those situated within predominantly white institutions in particular. Similarly, Xavier University of Louisiana was chosen as the predominantly black institution because it has a rich history in educating African-American pharmacists. Xavier also has a national reputation for its success in math and science education. The fact that Ohio State and Xavier have established an articulation agreement aimed at increasing the number of black students matriculating into the former's graduate programs and involving faculty exchanges and undergraduate research opportunities and visitations for Xavier students at Ohio State also led to the identification of these study sites (26). The strong relationship between the two institutions contributed significantly to resolving issues relating to access and cooperation.

### ***Sampling Approach***

Eight African-American and eight white students at each site were selected for participation in this study, including four first-year and four upper-level students from each group (total  $n = 32$ ). Equal numbers of female and male students were identified where possible.<sup>3</sup> A purposeful random sampling approach was used to identify study participants (27).

Student participants were selected during the summer of 1993 and sent a letter describing the project and soliciting their involvement. Also included with this mailing were copies of the informed consent form (including permission to review admissions and academic records) and a participant questionnaire to collect demographic and background information. Approximately two weeks subsequent to these mailings, each student was contacted in person or via telephone to further discuss and answer questions about the study and to ascertain willingness to participate.

### ***Data Collection***

Personal in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 2 hours were conducted with each participant during the autumn term of 1993. Small group follow-up interviews were conducted during the winter and spring terms of 1994 to augment previously collected data, further examine emerging themes, and provide a mechanism for member checks. During the winter term, the small group interviews were segregated by race and gender. During the spring, they were segregated only by race. All interviews were audiotaped, and group sessions were videotaped as well.

Participant and nonparticipant observations were conducted during the autumn term of 1993 relating to classroom activities and student professional association meetings. Collected data included student attendance; seating patterns; numbers of questions asked or responded to; significant actions of instructors; leadership roles within student organizations; student conduct and interactions before, during, and after formal activities; and any other event of relevance by participant race and gender. The intent of these observations was to examine behavioral characteristics of student participation as an indicator of degrees of academic and social engagement. A second objective for the primary investigator was to develop an appreciation of the research setting and its participants at the distant site and to attempt to see the home setting

from a different perspective, thereby making “the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (28).

Documents selected for analysis included student academic records and admissions materials. These were reviewed to better understand the academic and personal backgrounds of individual study participants and to reveal trends or inconsistencies between preprofessional characteristics and socioacademic integration in their pharmacy program.

### ***Data Analyses***

The reformulation of data involved defining and sorting categorical information obtained from interview transcripts, observations, and document analyses. This methodology constituted coding, categorization, interpretation, and member checking as described by Lincoln and Guba (29). Operationally, a combination of the techniques of analytic induction and negative case analysis<sup>4</sup> was employed in the reformulation of data and the ensuing presentation of results. This was accomplished through analytic coding and sorting, using major codes and subcodes. Clustered data were then reviewed to reveal major themes, trends, commonalities, and discrepancies. Such analyses were performed subsequent to intrainstitutional sorts of the data by race and gender. Throughout this process, the words of the participants were foundational to the themes that began to emerge.

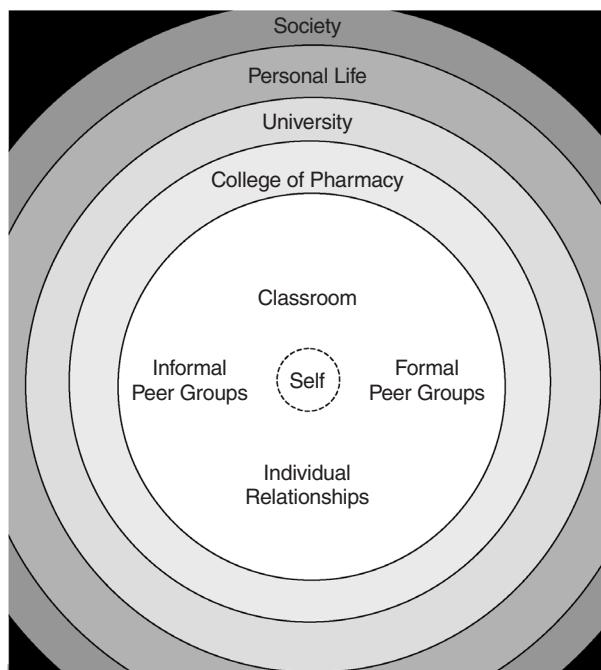
## ***RESULTS***

### ***Sources of Pharmacy Student Environmental Influence***

This work was conceptualized to facilitate an understanding of the lives of students within the two colleges of pharmacy, *per se*. Our first understanding was that this, in itself, is impossible. There are many layers of experience that affect any person and cannot be separated from the whole. At least nine such layers of environmental or experiential influence were reflected in the stories of the student participants. These range from the effects of society to the aspects of a student’s personal life to experiences in the academic environment (Figure 1).

Within the academy, students are affected by the university and college milieus. At the college level, the classroom environment or that of formal peer groups (e.g., student organizations); informal peer groups; and individual relationships with other students, faculty members, or

FIGURE 1. Sources of Pharmacy Student Environmental Influence.



administrators comes to bear. And a student's sense of self, or intrapsychic awareness, underlies all of these influences.

The aura of these various sources of influence may at times be rather ominous. For example, the repercussions of being an African-American male in U.S. society permeated all aspects of the lives of the black men in this study. For women, the safety issues inherent in attending an urban institution at times overshadowed their academic endeavors. And for any student, the looming developmental tasks of early adulthood sometimes interfere with the collegiate experience. It is within this broader context of their lives that students' academic experience is cast.

#### ***Model of Personal and Environmental Influences on Educational Experience***

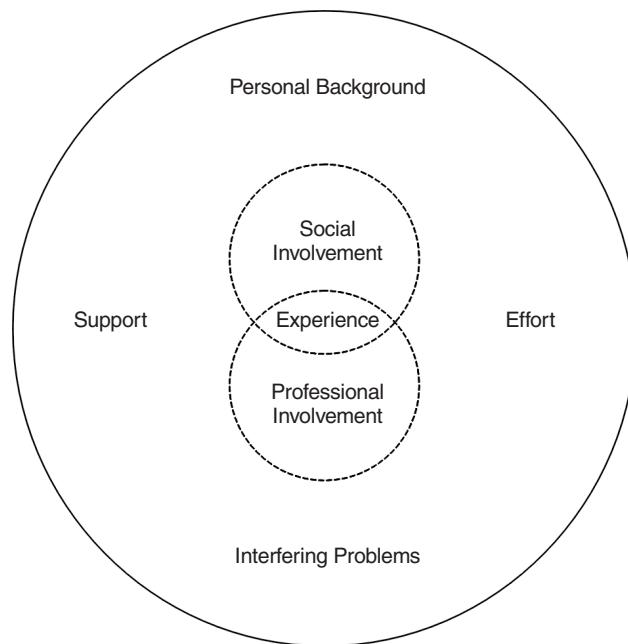
The model used to describe the experiences of these students is multifaceted and includes both personal and environmental dimensions,

with six themes or categories of influence seeming to account for a variety of significant experiential phenomena (Figure 2). The six emergent themes include social involvement, professional involvement, personal background, effort, interfering problems, and support. Social and professional involvement, which are inextricably connected in this model, are at the core of the student's experience. The remaining factors are precursory influences that provide a foundation for (or perhaps mediate) social and professional involvement. They represent characteristics that a student brings to the college experience or reflect the personal and institutional context within which involvement may, or may not, occur.

### ***Personal Background***

One of the study participants suggested that, "we all carry our little baggage with us." This simple metaphor represents the concept of the influence of personal background on the collegiate experience very

FIGURE 2. Model of Personal and Environmental Influences on Pharmacy Student Educational Experience.



well. When enrolling in college, along with the bags containing their material needs, students bring the experiential “baggage” that has been packed throughout their lives and even before they were born. This baggage includes their family background and current lifestyle. It includes the ramifications of their age, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic demographics.

Personal background factors may influence a student’s ability or inclination to become socially and professionally involved, and those from differing ethnic—and particularly socioeconomic—backgrounds often have received disparate academic preparation. Such individuals will not have, in the words of an African-American student at Xavier, “started off at the same point.” They will not have been afforded “equal opportunity.”

Such factors as socioeconomic status, prior multicultural experiences, and student expectations may also engender assumptions or cultural perceptions that are not conducive to multicultural interaction. For example, an African-American student at Ohio State described his perception of the white students and their expectations relating to diversity in this way:

I believe most of the students are from families that are pretty much middle-class, maybe upper middle-class. So, to see a, basically a guy from, not from the streets, but pretty close to it, you know, roaming up and down the hallways studying pharmacy, I don’t know how they handled that . . . I don’t think any of the students expected to see black students in pharmacy school . . . They just accepted they wouldn’t be there and that was it.

### ***Effort***

The amount of effort that students expend relating to social or professional involvement will also, obviously, influence their experience. Student effort is required to optimize academic performance, professional networking, and interpersonal relationships with faculty members and other students. With regard to interracial social connections, this may require substantial effort. As put by one student, “People have to be willing to do what they perceive is reaching out across a barrier and interact.” And the demographics of the human aggregate impose different perceptual barriers for those of minority presence, as described by a black student at Ohio State:

It's like you're always the only black person in the class, and in a way that's good because they tend to remember your name . . . . But in a way I guess you feel, not necessarily intimidated, but I guess uneasy . . . . It's like you basically have to make that extra effort to get to know some of the other students. You know, it's easy for them to get to know other people because they're all white, but because you're the only black person I guess sometimes I feel like you have to make that extra effort . . . . I feel that I have to approach them, whereas, you know, they don't really have to be bothered with me because they have all these other white students that they can talk to.

For minority-presence students who "make that extra effort," reciprocity on the part of majority-presence students is also a prerequisite to a positive environment for interracial socialization. As related by an African-American student at Ohio State:

It's like an effort, it's like work—we already have enough work . . . . If it was an equal effort it might not be so bad, but for the most part it doesn't feel like one . . . . I think [whites] that make the effort, you would equally make the effort back. You know, if you see the effort there then you jump on it.

Effort expended to develop interpersonal skills, or what Walter Allen called "interpersonal accomplishment," constitutes a characteristic of black students who tend to succeed in predominantly white institutions. "Drawing on their learned interpersonal skills, these Black students manage to create and maintain favorable social relationships with Blacks and whites, faculty and students, on the campus" (12). A black student at Xavier reflected this notion in describing his perception of what it would take to make it at a white college:

You have to be socially capable of dealing with all types of situations that may come your way whether being racism, whether it's being simple prejudice, whether it's just not having to prove yourself. So you have to be a strong individual. Aggressive, you have to be aggressive. Articulate, productive, those are the things that you must be.

### *Interfering Problems*

The third precursory influence on student involvement, interfering problems, might also be classified more generally as "stress." College

is, indeed, stressful for many students. It is a dynamic time in their lives when they are often struggling to make ends meet and learning about themselves and their relationships with others in addition to what they learn in the classroom. As put by a student at Ohio State, "I think college, more than any time in your life, I mean there's always going to be those things that are just stressing you out and that are going to happen at the worst possible time." Stress may originate at any level of the sources of student environmental influence (Figure 1) affecting, in very direct ways, their ability or inclination to be socially and professionally engaged within their college. And minority-presence students tended to adopt more of an internal (to themselves) focus to their methods for dealing with stress, that is, black students at Ohio State and white students at Xavier more frequently cited an inward or avoidance approach to stress management as opposed to social interactions or other external techniques, which were more prevalent among majority students.

For minority-presence students, the experience of prejudice, perceptions of preferential treatment, or resentment represent powerful interfering problems. Such phenomena can "knock you for a loop," as a black student at Ohio State said. Particularly for African-Americans, the power in these actions strikes deep and resonates with their previous experiences in American society as well as those of their ancestors. This idea was affirmed in the words of a white student at Xavier who hypothesized:

I think [black] students at Ohio State are probably discriminated against a lot more just because that's the way it's always been, you know. A lot of people are still brought up that way . . . I think they're discriminated against more, I would assume.

And, perhaps, this difference creates an impetus for affirmative action because, "We owe people, we have generations where the opportunities were not there, and we owe them" (white student, Xavier).

Such interfering problems may constitute an additional stressor that is specific to minority students—having something to prove. Every student has something to prove when he or she enrolls in college. Perhaps students need to show themselves, their family, the community, their peers, or the faculty that they are up to the challenge of living on their own or successfully navigating a college curriculum. However, when individuals, because of their race, have something additional to prove in terms of their social or professional capabilities, they incur interfering problems beyond the normal stress associated with being a student. This

may dictate extra effort on their part, yet it may influence their involvement because they are reluctant to reveal academic deficiencies. Consider the words of a black student concerning the paucity of questions raised in class by African-Americans at Ohio State:

You hardly ever see a black student ask a question during class . . . . Probably because the professor might say it was something that they should've known or probably just because they don't want anybody to know they didn't know.

Having something to prove, then, may paradoxically motivate students to invest additional effort in their studies but inhibit a prerequisite access to information.<sup>5</sup>

The existence of prejudice, the perception of preferential treatment, or the feeling that an individual has something to prove because of race may induce or be perpetuated by student resentment. For African-American students at the predominantly white institution, perceptions concerning preferential treatment in admissions and the allocation of student financial aid are the crux of perceived resentment on the part of whites:

Some white students felt that we shouldn't be here or that we're not able to do the work like they are . . . . I know there's white people that feel the only reason [I'm] here at Ohio State is because of the minority recruitment . . . . Not just because, you know, I was as smart as he or she was, but because they need to meet a quota. (black student, Ohio State)

Conversely, for white students at Xavier, perceived resentment on the part of students, faculty, administrators, or staff members was grounded in the social expectations associated with being a historically black university. In terms of these feelings on the part of black students, "Some of them have expressed it . . . . Some people ask, you know, in class, 'Is this still a black institution? Then why are all of these white people here?'" (black student, Xavier).

Outcomes relating to interfering problems may result from primary effects that are somewhat easy to identify, but it is likely the secondary effects of stress that are more insidious in terms of social and professional involvement. It is the diminution of involvement through which interfering problems inflict their greatest damage. The specific consequences of prejudicial stress are echoed in the words of black students within the predominantly white institution:

Those things make me feel bad, just quote-unquote, in general, bad . . . I feel like I'm under attack in certain ways . . . It knocks me for a loop lots of times. You know, it really upsets me, and it will get me down or depress me.

It can take its toll, you know. Some days you can just come home and just be mad, like I can't believe how today went . . . But these are things you deal with even if you're not at Ohio State University . . . But that's not something that you want to deal with when you're here for an education.

### *Support*

The support rendered to students interfaces in differing ways with each of the other three major precursory influences. The level of personal support that a student might receive is influenced by background via such phenomena as family structure, as well as the amount of effort they expend toward seeking assistance or establishing relationships with others in the college community. In another sense, the support afforded these individuals will affect their ability to cope with interfering problems. And the ability to reach their scholastic potential may sometimes be dependent upon assistance relating to the dimensions of their lives across any of the sources of environmental influence (Figure 1).

Students may receive personal support from many different directions. They may sense varying degrees of institutional support from their university or college. Within the institution, they may be sustained by the efforts of students, faculty, staff, or administrators. In their personal lives, they may enjoy the support provided by their faith, family, friends, and significant others. And, importantly, they often spoke of their necessity to rely upon themselves.

But students mainly seek interpersonal support within the borderlines of their race and gender-specific group, and the demographic limitations for minority-presence students may produce a different context regarding the need for institutional support as compared to their majority-presence peers. This effect was expressed by an African-American at Ohio State who felt: "I need [support] to survive here, and I don't know if [the white students] need it to survive." The support students may draw from each other, as well as the assistance received from faculty or staff members within the institution, may influence their ability or desire to become involved.

Two particular factors were prominent in student perceptions relating to support from faculty and staff. First, these individuals must be ac-

cessible. Second, and most importantly, it is the efforts of the faculty and staff to get to know students on a personal level which lay the groundwork for support at its best. Ultimately, it is the personal efforts of individuals that seem to make the most difference. The outcome of such support may have a very direct bearing on students' ability or desire to stay engaged within their respective programs. For example, ramifications of this type of support for the retention of two particular students were apparent in these words:

My parents are trying to get me to transfer, . . . but I don't want to go because . . . I've established myself here, and I've got people here that I've come to depend on. (black student, Ohio State)

There was a time when I felt like I just wasn't connected at all, and I was pretty much ready to just go ahead and go into another direction. I might have just dropped out and worked and found another major and went ahead and done something else. But [an administrator] did some things and said some things with me that allowed me to feel a sense of connection, and that got me through. (another black student, Ohio State)

### ***Social Involvement***

Social involvement has many implications for college student experiences and constitutes perhaps the most significant dimension of the model of personal and environmental influences (Figure 2). And while interactions among all members of the academic community affect levels of student involvement, it is the connections between students, in particular, that tend to dictate feelings of community within a college:

It is the quality of interaction that you have with students that makes your day-to-day existence. Just walking out of a class and standing someplace waiting for another class to start, those interactions that go on right then and there within those five or ten minutes can be crucial to the way you feel when you get ready to walk into your next class. I mean it really can. And you don't want them to be, but lots of times they are. (black student, Ohio State)

The virtual segregation of students within racial borderlines places limitations on all students and particularly on those of minority presence. These limitations are grounded in the nature of the human aggre-

gate, which at both study sites could be defined in terms of “skewed” environments with “token” minority-presence students and “dominants” who are of majority presence (32).<sup>6</sup> Perceptual tendencies within skewed contexts include token visibility, contrast, and assimilation. Tokens receive attention that is inversely proportional to their relative numbers, create a context of “polarization and exaggeration of differences,” and evoke stereotypes of familiar generalizations with regard to their social type (“assimilation”). All of these phenomena may interfere with the academic process. They interact with the other aspects of the model of personal and environmental influences (Figure 2) and the general nature of the social environment or community to affect such things as the extent of institutional centrality felt by minority students, access to information, and professional networking.

One ramification for those of minority presence is that they tended to have an external (to the college) focus to their social lives; those of majority presence more often exhibited an internal emphasis. To illustrate this point, the words of a white student at Ohio State strike to the commonplace, everyday occurrences that some may recall from their own collegiate experience, yet may be missing for others:

Football games and basketball games—we all go, we all get our tickets together and go to those. I mean any kind of social thing we would do on a weekend. Go out to the bar, go to the movies, I mean anything, just sit around at your apartment and talk and laugh.

In contrast, an African-American student at the same institution expresses an outcome much less indicative of any sense of social connectivity:

When I graduate I’ll probably never see a lot of these students and people again. I’ll just graduate and it’ll just be an experience that I will have gone through . . . I don’t have any overall emotion toward what’s here . . .

This “emotionally repressed” reaction (these were the words used by the student) does have an educational consequence since, in the words of the same student:

If I’d been a white student involved with a bunch of students who were really “gung-ho” about studying and really getting involved in things, I probably would have done very well I think . . . If a student really feels involved and connected to what’s going on, then that student does better.

Informal peer groups (or cliques) as well as formal peer groups (student organizations) largely influenced student social involvement. Both tended to be segregated by race, with cliques typically segregated by gender as well, and their borderlines are sometimes difficult to traverse. Factors involved in group formation are many and complex, with inter-racial relationships, again, influenced by the broader societal context. As put by Stanfield, “No matter how people of color define themselves, there are still the more powerful stereotypes embedded in public culture that define their status and identities within the cosmos of the dominant” (33). This meant that for an African-American at the predominantly white institution, “This wasn’t a place where you could just cross social boundaries of all kinds, regardless of what your color was . . . I think the students see it as reaching across a barrier.” It meant that cultural differences might preclude an institutional fit:

I don’t think that it’s possible for me to totally fit in. I don’t think that’s a possibility . . . There’s a lot of differences between all of us that could make me not fit in as well . . . If I went to a black college I probably would feel like I fit in. (black student, Ohio State)

And peer group composition strongly affected sharing or cooperation among students. This influence, at the extreme, is reflected by an indication that, “It’s almost like violating a social norm if someone outside your little study team asks you for something” (white student, Ohio State), or, “If you didn’t belong to that clique you’re not going to get any information—you’re not getting anything” (black student, Xavier). And, obviously, “If you only work within your close-knit group or clique, then that would prevent you from getting information” (black student, Ohio State).

A result of these influences on segregated peer group formation is a disparity in student relations, access to information, professional integration, competition, and cooperation. A lack of intergroup dependence, or the fact that “white students get their information and networking over here, and black students get their information and networking over here” (black student, Xavier), ultimately undermines successful inter-group relations, contributing to the ongoing extracurricular marginalization of minority-presence students (34). This point is powerfully illustrated in two stories told by different African-American students at Ohio State. The first addresses a student’s lack of comfort integrating a principle student gathering place—the student lounge. Consider the importance of this social gathering place as defined by a white student: “I

don't know how you could meet new people if you don't sit around the lounge, you know, and play cards or chew the fat or whatever . . . You could meet people outside the lounge, but it would be pretty difficult." Then, sense the feeling of isolation or alienation clearly evident in the words of an African-American:

I can remember I'd go to class and at 11:30 I'd see everybody going in [the student lounge] to eat their lunch or whatever, and I just felt so alone. And I just felt like I wasn't a part of this college. I would see everybody going in and eating lunch, and it was like I wanted to be there. But I felt that everybody would be looking at me like, "What is she doing here? She doesn't belong here," or whatever.

Finally, another black student's story captured the inertia inhibiting border crossings into dominant-student organization activities:

I mean it would be an event I think if I was to walk in somewhere and sit down in a group of maybe about 12 students that hadn't been used to me coming in. I know it would change the dynamic, and I don't want to get involved in that much drama, I guess you'd call it. Because I'd have to break in, I'd have to basically get them acclimatized to me, and that would take a lot of work . . . I don't want to put out that much time; it's not that necessary to me.

### ***Professional Involvement***

Professional involvement, including academic and professional integration, is the aspect of experiential influence most closely related to educational outcomes (particularly scholastic and professional success). Indeed, phenomena such as academic and professional (as well as social) integration could be considered outcomes in themselves, for the integration of students into the social and intellectual life of a community of scholars must be at least one goal of higher education. In addition, for professional students, being accepted and mentored by those in their chosen field is an important part of the professionalization process.

A student's degree of social involvement, as previously described, also has an important bearing on his or her professional integration. In fact, with regard to areas such as access to information, faculty relationships, and student cooperation and competition, the concepts of social and professional involvement become inextricable. Nonetheless, there

were several series of codings that were most germane to the academic and professional integration of students within the two institutions. These include access to information, faculty relationships, asking questions, and professional networking.

#### *Access to Information*

Obtaining access to information is important in terms of both an outcome and the process of education. Garnering necessary facts and skills underlies an individual's competence in his or her chosen field and ability to obtain the credentials to practice. Disparities in access to information, then, will undermine a student's performance. This effect is powerfully illustrated in the stories of two Ohio State students. Both stories emerged without prompting and relate to the same behavior—approaches to completing a difficult biochemistry homework assignment that took “five people four days to figure out.” First, a perspective from a white student:

The first day of biochem we got a homework assignment and it was due the next day, and nobody could figure it out. The next morning everyone was in the lounge together, and I think a lot of people became friends that way.

However, for an African-American student, the access looks quite different:

For example, like in biochem we all have this really hard homework to do, and I feel like everyone's in this big group like sitting there, and they're all doing their homework together. And I don't feel like I could just go sit in the group and, you know, get help with my homework . . . I don't feel comfortable going and being a part of that group.

How important is this difference in access to information? Another white student at Ohio State saw it this way:

I think that if you study strictly by yourself in pharmacy school, you're dead. You're dead because there's always something missing; there's always something you didn't hear. There's so much stuff, so much material. You're dead if you're a loner.

While the black student quoted above was not necessarily a loner, there was clearly a limitation in terms of comfort levels in connecting with the dominant resource pool. There were 7 African-Americans enrolled in that particular class of 137 students, and the fact that avenues for student support in terms of academic information tend to be intraracial placed severe restrictions on this individual in particular and black students in general. As expressed by another African-American:

It seems like the white students for some reason always manage to have old tests and stuff first . . . Sometimes I think, "How did they even get them or where did they get them from?"

Sheer demographics obviously create disparate support networks within a largely segregated social environment. The result may be differences in confidence and performance. As put by a different black student at Ohio State:

I think most of the white students here are probably more confident than some of us black students. Or maybe we, as black students, are kind of lacking in the confidence level because we always seem like, "Well gosh am I missing something? Do they have something that we don't have, or am I doing this right?" We think we're missing something . . .

#### *Faculty Relationships*

Connections with faculty have been shown to be important with regard to student satisfaction, performance, and retention (35-37). As such, these relationships are central to academic integration. As put by a white student at Ohio State when discussing a "considerable amount" of contact with faculty members or administrators outside of class, "It just makes me feel better, I don't know why. I guess I just feel like I'm involved in the class."

At a personal level, individual faculty members can have a very direct influence on a student's performance and satisfaction. The effect on academic performance can obviously result from academic assistance, but another dimension that is much harder to define is a student's attitude toward the professor. When a student feels good about a particular instructor, her or his motivation may be stronger since, "You can't really be excited about a teacher you don't respect" (white student, Ohio State). On the other hand, "If you like the instructor, I don't have any

problem getting an A" (a different white student, Ohio State). African-Americans in the predominantly white institution expressed relatively less comfort with faculty, particularly in terms of their perceptions relating to faculty expectations of them as students. Consider the following excerpts relating to student perceptions of faculty attitudes from African-American interview transcripts at Ohio State:

I think they expect me to be average . . . I don't want to be average . . . I think, too, that every time they see me they're thinking she's not that bright because maybe she's black or something. So they may help you, but sometimes I don't think they help you or give you as much information as they would if I was white.

I had an experience where [a faculty member] basically made me feel like I wasn't smart. Basically kind of told me this was the cream of the crop and like I would have to work extra hard because I wasn't the cream of the crop.

I just want to be perceived as a student who's as intelligent as anybody out there . . . A lot of [the faculty] expect me to fail, and I think a lot of them get kind of ticked when I get good grades, too . . . I think some professors would consider me a threat. They consider me some kind of anomaly; they don't quite know what to do with me because I'm studying pharmacy. You know, a black student here in pharmacy? I get the impression from that that they think, well, this pharmacy school should be all white. You know, what in the world [am I] doing here, let's see if we can get [you] out of here. And this is probably just my imagination, but I feel like some of those midterms and finals in the classes I've taken have been harder because I was sitting in there.

These sentiments create a context where students may feel that they have something to prove to the faculty in terms of their ability. As one student said, "[I] have to work twice as hard . . . just to prove myself, that I'm as smart as the next person" (black student, Ohio State). White students are perceived to feel more comfortable (in terms of their ability) with the faculty, facilitating the formation of stronger relationships, as seemed to be the case for both black and white students at Xavier. For example, in describing experiences that have made him feel really good, one African-American student spoke of a faculty member who "really appreciated the quality of my work. She said that I would make a good pharmacist." This and other students at Xavier generally felt that "in most cases [the faculty] expect that everyone's going to do well"

(black student). And, "Sometimes when teachers recognize me, you know, as far as being a good student, that helps give me confidence" (white student, Xavier). Student confidence facilitates the establishment of faculty relationships and academic integration, which ultimately enhances professional viability. The perception of disparate outcomes in this regard is reflected in the words of an African-American participant at Ohio State when asked how the experience might have been different had the student been white. The response, in part, was as follows:

I probably would have gotten to know a lot of professors in detail . . . I probably would have had some people who sat me down and told me things like, . . . "Let me tell you something, there are professorships open all over the place. If you want to go ahead and get a Ph.D. in something, you can reasonably find yourself here."

#### *Asking Questions*

One barometer of student social and academic integration may be the tendency to ask or respond to questions in class. These behaviors can also be contributors to a student's integration by making others more comfortable around them and generally reinforcing the student's involvement in the academic enterprise. For any student, feelings of personal shyness or concern about looking "silly" or "stupid" in front of peers may inhibit question-asking behaviors. However, for African-American students at the predominantly white institution, this concern takes a different twist. For these students, the risk extended beyond personal considerations of self-esteem into the realm of interracial expectation and stereotyping. Having "something to prove" as a black student in a predominantly white college affects one's engagement in terms of comfort when asking questions: "You can't ask a stupid question when you're black because it's like they'll go, 'Oh yea, we knew [they] didn't know what was going on'" (black student, Ohio State). The minority presence of these students interacts with these racial considerations in terms of visibility as well:

I mean it's only like 5 of us compared to 200 of them. We feel like if we raise our hand we'll make us all look dumb. Because, you know, I'm this black [student], I'm raising my hand, and I'm noticeable. (black student, Ohio State)

For the black male at Ohio State, his extreme visibility was further complicated by racial dimensions to interpersonal dynamics with his instructors that seemed to be influenced by factors far beyond academic considerations. He frequently encountered hostile or inappropriate reactions from professors or felt that his instructors responded in strange ways to his questions, the latter experience being attributed to individuals focusing on his race as opposed to what he was saying. His experience with regard to the former is exemplified by a discussion of one particular professor's reaction to a question:

I'm the only black male in there, the only black spot in the classroom, and I asked him a question. He reacted toward me in a very direct, in a personal and hostile way . . . I had never seen a student attacked in such a personal way before, and I was shocked. There was this overt hostility in the classroom as a result of my questions.

This particular person was able to withstand such treatment, perhaps as a result of his personal strength and the fact that he was a nontraditional and, therefore, more mature and experienced student. But he quickly made note of the fact that others might have reacted quite differently:

I'm older, you know, I've been through some experiences, and I'm stronger, as a result I can deal with things like that. But a younger student, 20 years old, they would have been blown away in that environment . . . A lot of students would have been wrecked by that.

These words make a powerful statement about black students within a predominantly white college. Beyond the influence of personal system influences such as educational preparation and socioeconomic background, there may lie subtle, yet insidious, aspects of the academic environment that are hard to quantify but nonetheless have a bearing on student participation. The fact that a student might be "blown away" or "wrecked" by a professor's response to a simple question is one such example.

The same student's description of the failure of faculty to hear what he is saying when asking questions may not have the same potency with regard to student participation as the previous story, but it, too, reflects the influence of race on the interactions between faculty members and students in the classroom:

I know when I ask a question I'm liable to get any kind of a response from professors because, once again, they're dealing with me as a black person, and they will do things and say things when they're answering me that I don't see them doing with the white students . . . A lot of professors, because I'm black, when I ask a question they don't quite hear what I'm saying. I've had them say things that have nothing to do with the question I asked . . . There have been instances, and it happens pretty frequently, where I have to ask a question twice in order to get the answer I want because they don't hear me. They don't hear what I'm saying.

All of this means that this student does not enter a course with what should be standard assumptions about his professors. Instead of anticipating that his instructors will accept him as they would any other student, provide forthright answers to his questions, and expect him to perform well with the proper investment of time and effort, he operates as follows:

I try to ask a question of the professor to kind of feel them out, to see how they respond to me. It kind of tells me what they think about me in general. If I ask a question and they don't listen to it and they respond to me like I'm asking something stupid or they get kind of angry when I ask a question, then I know they consider me a problem and that they don't really expect me to probably succeed. Or maybe they're even kind of intimidated by the fact that I'm taking something in an area of knowledge that is theirs.

One final ramification for those who engage in their classes by asking or responding to questions is the potential to improve relationships with their fellow students. This effect and its importance for one African-American student at Ohio State were described as follows:

Asking a question does several things for me. It lets people know I'm here, it gets them used to hearing a black person speak, and as a result a lot of the students in the class become more comfortable with me because they hear me talking. I'm not talking to them directly, but they hear me talking. And as a result they get a sense that they know what I'm about . . . And then as a result they speak, they become a little bit more friendly, they open up a little bit more to me.

Therefore, when students actively engage in class by asking or responding to questions, they accomplish a variety of things. First, they acquire information, but beyond this primary effect they also may influence the nature of their relationships with faculty members or other students. For those who are inhibited from such engagement, a vicious cycle may evolve whereby they don't feel comfortable interacting in the classroom because they are relatively isolated from instructors and peers, yet their silence perpetuates this estrangement. The consequence for the individual is alienation and a diminution of learning. The consequence for the classroom may be lost opportunities for multicultural experiences that would enrich the environment for everyone. A black student at Ohio State acknowledged this effect: "When I ask a question in a classroom I bring my own flavor to it, and I think I kind of altered things a little bit . . . I know I bring something to this experience that's a little bit different."

### *Professional Networking*

Professional involvement, particularly as it relates to student organizations, can also clearly contribute to an individual's perception related to professional viability. Some students explicitly recognized this and pursued involvement so that they could "go out already a member of some pharmacy organization . . . [and] feel connected with pharmacists as a group." Succinctly put by the same student: "I want to have those professional and social connections" (white student, Xavier).

Differences in involvement in student organizations and the influence of disparate participation on social relationships and access to information were previously discussed. Similarly, an effect (though more difficult to identify) seems inevitable in terms of professional viability. This phenomenon may be most significant for black students at the predominantly white institution because their marginalization from the dominant organizations may result in a head start of sorts for those of majority presence. In the words of one black student at Ohio State:

I think that the white students may begin seeing their career start while they're in pharmacy school. Whereas black students, I don't think they really see their career starting so much, to a great degree . . . I don't think they really see that they can form a career and start doing some things by networking with certain organizations like that.

This observation contributes to a “cumulative disadvantage” among minorities with regard to their perceptions of the workplace (38, 39). As described by Carvajal and Hardigan:

When women and minorities receive, either directly or indirectly, fewer or less intense messages of encouragement than do non-Hispanic white males, when their family-versus-professional-life trade-offs or cultural preferences are not properly understood, or, worse, when they are actively blocked from attaining their full potential by overt acts of discrimination or harassment, cumulative disadvantage becomes reinforced. (39)

The idea of “cumulative disadvantage” provides another heuristic for understanding the effects of the social and professional borderlines within our colleges and universities. They contribute to societal impediments to opportunity for those outside the majority culture in ways that demand our “actions affirmative” to assure that our educational and, ultimately, in this case, health care resources are equitably distributed.

### ***DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION***

This work was replete with experiential phenomena that reveal important differences depending upon a student’s race. These range from the influence of personal background to disparities in professional opportunity. The borderlines between students, or between students and other members of the academic community (i.e., faculty, staff, and administrators), are created by many complex, interacting factors. And while these borderlines exist, they may not stand as a barrier to all students, largely due to variations in interpersonal accomplishment. Even so, Behar reminds us that “we cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us” (40). The borderlines have their foundation in the discriminatory societal context within which we were conceived and reared. This has a significant bearing on the experience of all students but particularly those of minority presence. It means that minority-presence students may feel the added pressure of having something to prove with regard to their professional or social capabilities. And it presents overt or, more typically, subtle prejudicial intrusions on one’s day-to-day experience. The words of the African-American male student at Ohio State summarize the personal impact of this effect quite well: “Because I’m black, people look at me and they make certain as-

sumptions . . . Most frequently I feel that people assume I'm hostile, they consider me suspect and probably a potential source of trouble."

We will conclude this article by summarizing our observations relating to the three research questions, discussing implications for educational practice, and presenting a narrative based on the experiences of an African-American pharmacy student in a predominantly white institution.

### ***What Characterizes African-American and White Student Experiences in Pharmaceutical Education?***

If there were one word that best describes the pharmacy student experience, that word would probably be *stress*. This stress is defined in terms of the pressures students endure with regard to personal circumstances, financial needs, professional task competence, and especially academics. One of the between-group differences addressed in the next section concerns the coping mechanism individuals employ to deal with these pressures. These differences are grounded in disparate social and professional integration.

Another distinctive attribute of student experience centers on the influence of peer groups. Informal peer groups, or cliques, exert a powerful influence on student's social and professional involvement. They are largely divided by race and gender and dictate many of the ways in which students interact. Nacoste has alluded to the intent of affirmative action initiatives for diversifying "the informal social networks through which power and influence flow in our country" (41). We did not see such diversification coming to fruition, at least in these settings.

Formal peer groups or student organizations also constitute a forum for social and professional integration. Their influence on such phenomena as student networking (especially between cohorts at different class levels), access to information, leadership opportunities, and integration into the pharmacy profession was important at both colleges. Student organizations tended to be quite segregated at these institutions, with minority-presence students tending to participate in one particular association. Taken together, the segregation of students within formal and informal peer groups is a critical factor in observed disparities in experience.

Students at both colleges also tended toward extracurricular dissociation, which was relatively stronger for minority-presence students than for their majority-presence peers. This tendency for whites at Xavier seemed to be a matter of choice resulting from disinterest or lifestyle

constraints. For blacks at Ohio State, extracurricular dissociation appeared to occur more by chance due to feelings of alienation emanating from personal discomfort or academic difficulties. This was indicative of marginalization, which engendered a disproportionately external focus to their social lives.

Within-group social networks separated by an “invisible barrier” between black and white students were most typical of interracial relationships. Influenced to some extent by cultural differences between students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds that were more often recognized by African-Americans, the ramifications of these differences were alluded to more often by whites. For minority-presence students this sometimes translated to alienation.

***How Do These Experiences Differ Within or Between  
a Predominantly White and a Predominantly Black  
Institution According to Student Race?***

There were many similarities in experiences at the two study sites. Students were generally under significant stress; students operated in a social environment characterized by self-segregation, largely within race- and gender-specific cliques; student competition (especially between peer groups) was a common denominator; and within-group cooperation was the norm. However there were differences in student experience, largely based on sociodemographics. A key consequence of observed disparities in experience involved access to information, extending from simple availability of material that may be helpful in a particular course to the experience of “seeing their career start while they’re in pharmacy school” via connections made in professional organizations.

African-Americans at Ohio State and whites at Xavier shared a number of experiential phenomena. One example is the visibility associated with their minority-presence status. However, this visibility seemed to affect the two groups quite differently. White students at Xavier often expressed positive effects related to becoming known in the college community. On the other hand, black participants at Ohio State spoke of their visibility in ways that more closely resembled prejudicial scrutiny, including the perception of purposeful segregation felt by their majority-presence peers.

Another variation in experience related to intergroup dependence. Allport described this phenomenon as one prerequisite to successful interracial interactions, and we found this dimension to be largely missing

at both colleges (34). At Xavier, parallel support structures with strong within-group networking on the part of whites seemed to preclude such intergroup dependence. At Ohio State, African-Americans depended on whites to some degree, but the reverse seemed to be a rare occurrence—"I mean it's just not something that's looked at" (black student, Ohio State).

The socio-demographic character of the human aggregate, in a very general sense, also established a framework for student feelings with regard to person-environment "fit." The extent to which an individual feels a "fit" between himself or herself and the collegiate environment may be reflected in his or her feelings about the various aspects of social and professional involvement within that environment. For example, white students at Xavier referred to the "culture shock" they experienced when matriculating into a setting where they were of minority presence, perhaps for the first time in their lives. An important consideration for these students is that their college experience constituted a temporary minority presence, whereas blacks at Ohio State existed in minority-presence contexts both within and beyond the academic environment. This distinction may make whites more tolerant of what may be perceived as less than optimal social conditions (17).

The degree of "fit" which a student feels within her or his college also had a bearing on two additional phenomena, one of which tended to have a more individualized effect and the other more of an influence on the institutional environment. Those of minority presence tended to exhibit a primarily internal (to themselves) focus for coping with stress and a primarily external (to the college) focus with regard to their social life. Whereas majority-presence students were more likely to refer to socialized mechanisms for stress management, involving interactions with other members of the college community, minority-presence students more frequently spoke of inward or avoidance techniques. Whites at Xavier and blacks at Ohio State also seemed more likely to establish their personal social networks outside the institution. These observations diminish the amount of personal support that minority-presence students are able to garner within the college, minimize their role in shaping the college's social environment, and influence professional involvement as well. This connection to professional integration is noted in recognition of Nacoste's reference to "socioacademic interactions," which he considers critical for satisfactory adjustment in the academic setting (42). It recognizes the informal, social avenues within a college's hallways or other gathering places through which a significant amount of academic and professional information flows.

***Do Student Experiences Differentially Influence Educational Outcomes Such as Academic Success and Student Satisfaction?***

Having reviewed the general character of student experience and differences within and between the study sites, our final summary observation pertains to related outcomes. Certainly, one might expect that differences in such constructs as access to information and student-faculty relationships would affect a student's academic performance and this, combined with disparities in social involvement, would logically alter degrees of satisfaction. We do hasten to reiterate that we have not pursued a positivistic search for prediction in this research, and one must obviously be cautious with regard to implications of cause and effect. As suggested by Astin, causal inferences must be construed in terms of three initial components: student inputs, college environment, and student outputs (43). Similarly, James and Sells, via their reciprocal causation model, remind us of the interplay between student outcomes and collegiate environment: "Individuals engender much of their environment through their behaviors" (44). Nonetheless, we did perceive differences in outcomes that may be related to discrepancies in experience. These include levels of student comfort, perceptions of the college environment, reflections on experience and professional viability, academic success, and student satisfaction.

In terms of student comfort, we saw dimensions to this phenomenon that were very general as well as ones that were specific. For African-Americans at Ohio State, the college was "not the most comfortable place I've been" (black student, Ohio State). Were they white instead of black, "It would be more comfortable for sure . . . [White students are] more comfortable with whom they talk to . . . It would just be comfortable, it would be easy, you know" (another black student, Ohio State). Or, conversely, had they attended a predominantly black institution, "maybe I would have felt more comfortable and, then, I mean maybe I would've even done better in school" (black student, Ohio State). Indeed, for African-American students at Xavier, "I think this was a more relaxing environment . . . [Whereas] at a white school I probably would have had a harder time adjusting" (black student, Xavier). Even white students there seemed to feel welcomed and comfortable "on a whole."

The ways in which students come to view the environment of their respective colleges and their experiences within them were also discrepant, with outcomes for minority-presence students in the predominantly white setting being most problematic. These individuals may perceive an attitude that they "don't particularly care for, so I don't as-

sociate in that environment" (black student, Ohio State). Or they may more generally infer that "[t]he school is not an easy place to be . . . It's just not as easy to get along on a day-to-day basis in a predominantly white setting if you're not white . . . It's just not made easy for you" (a different black student, Ohio State).

This may engender some degree of indifference toward their experience, as expressed by the same participant: "I don't have any overall emotion toward what's here. It's a college of pharmacy in . . . North America. You know, predominantly white, that's the kind of environment it is." Ultimately, differences in these outcomes may encourage a white student to suggest that, "I would tell somebody to go here in a heartbeat, my experience here has been excellent" (white student, Ohio State) and a black student to conclude that, "With what I know now, I think I would have gone to [a historically black university]" (black student, Ohio State). Indeed, for African-Americans at the predominantly black college, sentiments tended to indicate that: "Xavier's a great school, I have no complaints with it; I would recommend it to anyone" (black student, Xavier).

The inextricable connections between social and professional integration and differences in such integration in general and connections to student organizations in particular seem to have implications for several outcomes related to professional viability. First, weaker student-faculty relationships for blacks at Ohio State, grounded in impressions of differing faculty expectations, had effects that may have been as simple as perceived difficulties in identifying individuals to write letters of recommendation for employment or graduate programs, or may have extended more deeply vis-à-vis professional networking. For example, one student conjectured that:

[If I were a white student] I think I would have penetrated a lot of the networks that are in the college. I probably would have gotten to know a lot of the professors in detail . . . I think I would have gotten more involved with, I guess you could call it the infrastructure of the school . . . I think I would have gotten a chance to just talk head-to-head with people about some things that are just going on in the profession that allow you just to go places and do things. (black student, Ohio State)

Another outcome for minority-presence students at both sites relates to a diminution in social involvement, especially within formal peer groups. Several participants at Xavier reminded us that, "Pharmacy is

kind of a group thing, because you're always working with other pharmacists . . . There's a lot of interaction between pharmacists" (white student, Xavier). Therefore, it behooves every student to "get on the bandwagon and . . . meet people . . . I know that this young man or young lady will be a pharmacist. I know that this may be a connection for me in a day, you know, in the future" (black student, Xavier). The fact that these networks are typically confined within racial and, sometimes, gender borderlines constitutes a handicap for minority-presence students (particularly in the predominantly white setting) within the informal social networks through which power and influence flow in the profession. Involvement in formal peer groups, or student organizations, may help individuals "feel connected to pharmacists as a group" and provide both "professional and social connections" (white student, Xavier).

An important barometer for educational experience is academic performance. Our research indicates that it is "socioacademic" or "socio-professional" interactions that may differentiate such outcomes based on the degree of student "fit." Access to information, faculty relationships, question-asking behaviors, professional integration, and the character of student competition and cooperation all exhibit differences based on race with implications for academic performance. One of the principle understandings that we have taken from this research involves the connection between social and professional integration. The opportunity or inclination for students to become involved has ramifications for outcome. In many ways "involvement" translates into access to resources, and "you need resources to get good grades" (white student, Ohio State). Nacoste's conceptualization of the socioacademic dynamic is reflected in the influence of social integration on performance and the association of performance with subsequent interpersonal involvement (42). This dynamic is exemplified in the words of a black student at Ohio State who hypothesized that, "If I had been connected with a lot of people, if I had really good relationships with lots of people like a group of classmates or several professors that I could talk to on a regular basis, . . . after a while you'd get involved in just doing lots of work and working well." On the other hand, students may feel a need to do well academically to fit into their respective college environments. Several minority-presence students at Ohio State spoke of this effect:

I know for myself, . . . when I did really bad I tended to withdraw from people, from the college, just because I had bad grades and,

you know, I felt stupid and stuff, and I thought I would say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. So to avoid appearing stupid to people I just withdrew, . . . and I would just go to class or whatever and struggle on my own. (black student, Ohio State)

This phenomenon especially influences interracial relationships, as suggested by the remarks of the same student about the outcome that paralleled improvements in performance: "as my grades got better, then I talked to the white people because I felt that I was no longer less than them."

The incumbent differences in student-student as well as student-faculty relationships may have far-reaching significance in terms of student networking within the profession. This constitutes a "socioprofessional" dimension to students' experience that is analogous to Nacoste's reference to the "socioacademic interactions" that are critical for student adjustment and success (42). In cases where students do not engage, yet another handicap may be realized, and a black student in a predominantly white setting may come to feel that, "I'm not really welcome in the profession" (black student, Ohio State).

A final outcome that may account for a broader assessment of a student's overall experience is satisfaction. Academic success as well as other aspects of a student's experience affect this indicator. As we analyzed the student's words related to "satisfaction" or "happiness" from the interview transcripts, it became difficult, if not impossible, to discern clear differences between the groups in this study. There were satisfactions as well as indifferences or dissatisfactions evident throughout.

The differences in satisfaction that we were able to discern across racial (and gender) borderlines included the effect of perceived preferential treatment, feelings with regard to relative importance within the college community, and personal safety on campus. Whites at Ohio State often expressed dissatisfaction associated with perceptions of preferential treatment toward African-Americans in admissions and the award of financial aid. Blacks at Xavier voiced resentment relating to perceptions of preferential treatment extended to whites by the faculty. White students at Xavier expressed dissatisfaction with regard to limitations in professional opportunity and perceptions of leniency toward blacks with regard to academic policy. White males at both institutions were less likely to consider themselves an important part of the college as compared to other groups. And women at both sites expressed concern with regard to their personal safety on campus and in the surround-

ing areas. Variations in student satisfaction, even within racial and gender groupings, are a reminder of the complexities of experiential influence and the individual's response to it.

### ***Implications for Practice***

The results of this research suggest a number of ways to enhance student experience. First, educators must be cognizant of the myriad factors within their societal, personal, and academic existences that may affect student performance. The provision of, or assistance in procuring, support when needed across these sources of environmental influence may be essential for student retention as well as the students' ability to reach their great potential.

An understanding of the sources of environmental influence may also illustrate the continuing need for affirmative action with regard to student admissions and the allocation of institutional resources (e.g., financial aid). Differing opportunities within society with discrepant ramifications for their personal background mean that, as suggested by Thurgood Marshall, African-Americans may not have had an "equal start" and, therefore, are not afforded "equal opportunity." This study also highlights another disparity in opportunity for African-Americans in a predominantly white institution relating to their experiences within the academic setting. These differences combined with the varying effects of personal background surely affect student participation and success. This cumulative disadvantage is reminiscent of the factors leading to gaps in student performance outlined by Bowen and Bok (45).<sup>7</sup>

Efforts to make students aware of the socioacademic and socioprofessional ramifications for their training will also enhance their performance and satisfaction. In particular, encouraging participation in student organizations will benefit these individuals in terms of access to academic and professional information. More importantly, the social connections engendered within these formal peer groups may have far-reaching implications via professional networking.

Faculty members can nurture a sense of professional viability in their students by such simple behavior as treating them as professionals. And a professor's expectations of his or her students and discernible perceptions of their abilities are powerful contributors to students' level of confidence and sense of achievement, which influence academic performance as well as students' vision of their future professional life.

This work also underscores the importance of individual effort toward the establishment of a multicultural collegiate community. This is an area in which one person can have a profound effect on institutional change. Anderson speaks passionately to the interpersonal effects of such individual effort on the part of educators when he asks, “What would we do if we really loved the students?”:

I have been able to promote students’ achievement, persistence, and development most effectively when I have taken an active interest in them, sought to know and understand them as persons, cared for them by developing personally relevant services, respected their individuality and uniqueness, and felt responsibility for their success and development. Whether through elaborate and systematic programs, or through fledgling, half-baked efforts, when students sense that they are being loved, it makes a difference! So, then, if our aim is to promote student’s academic achievement, persistence, and development, it would seem entirely reasonable to ask ourselves, What would we do if we really loved the students? And, to ask ourselves, How can I demonstrate the love I feel toward students in practical and personally meaningful ways?

(46)

“I almost see like two separate entities, that’s almost what it was like” (white student, Ohio State), and it is the efforts of individuals that engender an environment conducive to minority-presence student involvement. It is the actions of individuals that will soften the borderlines between us. For, in the words of an African-American student at Ohio State, “There is a barrier there . . . And it’s not something that couldn’t be broken.”

### ***Student Narrative***

The participants in this study were asked how they thought their experiences might have been different if they were of the other race or attended an institution with differing student demographics. Their responses were varied. Those of majority presence usually conceded that, were they in the minority, their social life within the college would have changed, and minority-presence students spoke of the consequences (usually social) of a hypothetical attendance at a university where they were among the majority-presence population. However, in many cases their responses were nebulous as exemplified by that of a white student at Ohio

State when asked, during a small group follow-up session, how the student's experiences might have differed if the student had been an African-American: "I think it would be different . . . I can't explain how it would be different, but I've got a feeling it would be different." Hopefully, what has been presented throughout this article will help the reader understand how race contributes to shaping one's collegiate experience. However, we would like to conclude this work with a brief narrative constructed around the experiences of the lone African-American male at Ohio State to help define just "how it would be different."

The following story is our attempt at selecting and incorporating salient materials from this individual's interview transcripts. We have tried to present experiences from this man's life as a pharmacy student which will help us appreciate the day-to-day ramifications of being a black student, in particular an isolated African-American male, in a predominantly white setting. The student from whose life this story has been created has reviewed, edited, and approved these words, but he is to be commended for having the courage to tell this story at all.

One of the phrases that this individual used multiple times throughout our conversations referred to the fact that his visibility as the only African-American male in his class made his peers curious at times about . . .

#### **"THAT BLACK GUY"**

I grew up in the ghettos of Cleveland, and it has been a long journey to get where I am today. In many ways, my background has defined my experience in the College of Pharmacy. Most of the students here are young, white, middle-class, politically conservative individuals, and I'm basically an older black guy who has earned a bachelor's degree in another discipline, spent time in the Army, and am returning to academe from the work force.

Being an African-American male permeates every aspect of what I do inside and outside this place. Most of the day I spend dealing with small, subtle things that happen to me because of my color. Some days I get negative feedback from other black students, white students, the faculty, you name it. The result can be one negative experience after another until you're left with a day in which its ending is welcomed to say the least.

Good experiences for me here were not the norm. When a faculty member or peer spoke to me as he or she might speak to any other stu-

dent, when no one was “messing” with me and I could just feel relaxed, that was a good day.

As a black student in this college in general and as a black male in particular, I have found myself to be isolated to a great degree. That meant that I almost always studied by myself, and I generally just go into class, sit down, don’t speak to others, take notes, and leave. I really missed having interaction on just a human level. For example, I missed not being able to go out in the halls after an exam and debrief with my peers.

The positive experiences I have had here have centered on my ability to connect one-on-one with someone and perhaps talk about problems I may have been having. I have been able to do so with a few faculty members, administrators, or students. When this happened, I was able to feel, and do, better. There are people here to help you if you reach out. In fact, at one point I don’t think I would have made it through this program if I had not been able to connect with an individual, get involved in some things, and start to feel a little more connected to the school.

Generally speaking, it’s the students who are the determining aspect of your experience in any school. The interactions that you have (or don’t have) with your peers set the tone for the quality of your collegiate life. It’s the interactions that occur in hallways between classes that determine how you feel going into that next class. My social connections with other students in this program have not been good. I don’t feel comfortable with a lot of my peers. When I graduate, I’m sure I’ll probably never see a lot of these people again. Many students were actually hostile toward me. They would do things to me in class, like repeatedly kicking the back of my chair, that I didn’t see them doing to other students.

I haven’t really tried to cultivate friendships in this college, have no social expectations here, and don’t expect to receive support from my peers. I feel that trying to establish relationships would have been shaky for me. It would have taken a lot of effort for me to establish relationships with other students, black or white, in this college. In fact, my advice to another black male coming into this program would be to ignore the interpersonal interplay between students. If a black student comes to a predominantly white school with a need to interact and be a part of a group, you’ll probably get your feelings hurt.

Neither the white nor the black students in this college ever really reached out to me. In terms of my relationships with the former, I don’t think that black students are generally seen as favorable people to associate with if you are white. In many cases, whites will look at me and

make certain assumptions about me, that I'm hostile. Even if a person has had prior experience in a multicultural setting, it doesn't help unless people are willing to open up. They have to be willing to reach out across what they perceive to be a barrier and interact, and this wasn't a place where you could easily cross such social boundaries.

Sometimes I think that the way students treat me here is due to a perception that I have received preferential treatment. I believe that whites feel that somehow I have had an unfair advantage. I'm sure that on graduation day some will still feel that I don't deserve to be there or that maybe I didn't work as hard for my degree.

Student peer groups have also influenced my ability to relate to those around me. It is common for students who will speak to me in certain situations to snub me in others, especially when they are in their group. And I really believe that there is peer-group pressure among whites not to speak to black students.

My isolation was especially painful because, not only did the white students largely alienate me, but my black female peers also snubbed me quite a bit. I would describe our interactions as nonreceptive to outright hostile in some cases. I never felt like we were playing on the same team or that there was any degree of camaraderie between us. The African-American women in the college, with one or two exceptions, were reticent to share their notes or old tests with me.

I have never had an African-American professor at Ohio State. I think some of the faculty members in this college consider me a threat—they consider me some kind of anomaly. Maybe they're kind of intimidated by the fact that I'm taking something in an area of knowledge that is theirs. I get the impression that they think this school should be all white.

I've had instructors harass me by standing directly over me during lectures. I've gone through many a test with TA's standing over my shoulder, just looking at me. I would have liked to be able to just go in and talk to some of the professors on a one-on-one basis, but this was difficult for me. I've walked into some of the professor's offices in this college and everything that was going on would stop, and they were like, "Can I help you?!" Because of my color people don't know how to deal with me.

When I ask questions in class I accomplish a variety of things. I get information, but I also get others used to hearing my voice. This causes them to become a little more comfortable with me, and they tend to be more friendly. Just last week I was asking some questions in one of my courses, and a lot of the students were talking to me about different

things right after class. Conversely, if I keep quiet in the classroom, people's preconceived notions take over in terms of the ways they react to me. But asking questions is a monumental step which most black students are not willing to make. You see, if you're black you can't ask a stupid question or you confirm the stereotypical expectations that others may have of you, but I act differently in that regard. I make it a point to ask questions once or twice a week in class just to let people know I'm there, and I've had all kinds of reactions to this behavior. I've experienced hostility from students and professors alike, just from me asking questions. I'm liable to get any kind of a response from faculty when I pose a question in class. I sense that they are often processing the fact that I am black and, therefore, don't hear what I'm saying. They will often make a remedial response, and I frequently have to ask my questions twice to get the answer I'm looking for. But when I ask questions I bring my own flavor to the classroom; I alter the dynamic to be sure. I mean I'm the only black guy in there. I help make up what constitutes the experience in the College of Pharmacy at the Ohio State University.

Well, my experiences as a pharmacy student have not been very positive, but I will be happy to have earned this degree. I will be glad to have those credentials even though I have other interests that I may pursue. When I reflect on my interactions with the people in this place, one simple thought comes to mind: Isn't it silly that we can't talk because I'm a different color? Isn't it unfortunate that we all limit our educational experiences because of the borderlines that stand between us?

RECEIVED: 09/10/01  
REVIEWED: 01/14/02  
REVISED AND ACCEPTED: 02/27/02

#### NOTES

1. African-Americans accounted for 9% of fall 2000 enrollment in first professional pharmacy degree programs in the U.S. (2).
2. The National Study of Black College Students was a 1981 cross-sectional mailed survey of 1,050 black undergraduate, graduate, and professional students attending 6 predominantly white, 4-year public institutions from different regions of the country. The questionnaire included items relating to family background, attitudes, college experiences, aspirations, academic performance, and perceptions of institutional context.
3. Only one African-American male was enrolled in the entry-level professional program at Ohio State at the time of data collection for this study. Therefore, special

procedures were followed in this case. This individual participated in a series of personal interviews, and he read and approved all portions of the written results that were attributed to his experiences.

4. Goetz and LeCompte used the terminology "analytic induction" to describe the process of categorizing data, determining intercategorical relationships, developing working hypotheses, and refining these hypotheses based on subsequent cases. In their description of analytic induction, Goetz and LeCompte note that, "Negative instances, or phenomena that do not fit the initial function are consciously sought to expand, adapt, or restrict the original construct." Such negative case analyses are aimed at the reduction of error variance (30).

5. This phenomenon is reminiscent of Claude Steele's theory of "stereotype threat," in which stereotypic expectations of low performance induce anxiety and disidentification with the academic domain (31).

6. Kanter has defined, in qualitative and quantitative terms, distinct characteristics of groups that can be identified within a nonhomogenous or nonuniform organization. She described "skewed" environments as those in which a large preponderance of one group exists and in which "dominants" and "tokens" can be identified (32). Sociodemographics at the two study sites constituted "skewed" environments representative of the existence of "token" populations of African-American students at Ohio State and whites at Xavier.

7. Bowen and Bok describe precollege influences and experiences in college that lead to gaps in performance between black and white students. These differences include educational and family background, stereotype threat, student comfort, and minority group visibility (45).

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