BRIDGING THE GAPS: THE IMPACT OF BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF BLACK GRADUATE STUDENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of ROSEMARY E. PHELPS AND DERYL F. BAILEY)

ABSTRACT

The experience of obtaining a graduate degree can often be taxing on one’s psychological well-being. For Black graduate students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), this task becomes increasingly complicated by the fact that predominantly White campuses often compel these students to feel like unwelcomed visitors through the lack of services offered (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). How, then, do Black graduate students transform these environments into ones where they are able to thrive and succeed? One effort led by students at predominantly White campuses across the country has been the development of Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSAs). BGSAs have been designed with the goal of increasing the likelihood of successful matriculation for Black graduate students; and while these organizations exist on many campuses, little has been done to examine whether these organizations are having the desired impact.

The purpose of this study was to examine (a) the demographic variables that may influence participation in a BGSA and (b) the impact that level of participation has on the factors related to psychological well-being (i.e., alienation, depression, social support and black identity) for Black graduate students who participate in BGSAs. There were 63 male and female Black graduate student participants in this study, from one of four selected PWIs in the southeastern region of the U.S. The students were either master’s, doctoral, or juris doctorate students.

Results of this study suggested that participation level in a BGSA significantly predicted level of social support experienced by participants. However, participation level did not significantly predict feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, nor black identity. The importance of the social support provided by these organizations was also found in an examination of participants’ open ended responses to particular questions. Results of the study also indicated that selected demographic variables (e.g., age and type of undergraduate institution) did not significantly predict participation level. Finally, results from this study indicated that there was no significant relationship between participation level and black identity. Implications for university administrators and BGSAs are discussed, as well as recommendations for future research.
INDEX WORDS: African Americans, African American Graduate Students, Alienation, Black Graduate Students, Black Graduate Student Association, Black Identity, Depression, Higher Education, Predominantly White Institutions, Social Support
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated fully and completely to my family. Without you, there is no doubt that I would not be where I am today! To my mama, for the late night and early morning telephone calls, for your constant encouragement, for never giving up, for the timely deposits into my account and for the messages that blossomed into the young woman I am today. I love you! To my daddy, for nurturing my thirst for knowledge; who knows what might have happened if you had not made me use the dictionary to look up all those words. I love you! To my little brothers, Todd and Chad, you both are truly the light of my life, and I love you dearly. To my grandmas, who have taught me about dignity and grace and to my late grandfathers who loved me like only a grandfather could. To my aunts, you have all been such wonderful examples of womanhood and family for me. Thank you all for always being there and encouraging me, especially you Tee Ivy. To my uncles, thank you for always keeping me grounded and keeping me smiling. To my cousin, Elbert Jr., for very early on opening my eyes to the history and legacy of our people; your influence has guided much of my academic work. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and perspective. To my cousin Alesha, thank you for the help with editing and for always being there with an encouraging word. To all of my other cousins, thank you for the memories, the support, and the laughter. I love all of you! I complete this milestone in my life with each of you as my encouragement. “I am because we are. If we are not, then neither am I.”

Finally, this work is dedicated to my community of brothers and sisters. I do what I do with the hope that I can touch as many of you as possible.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The year 1954 marked the awakening of a new era in America’s educational system. It was during this year that the Supreme Court ruled in the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case and mandated that public schools no longer be segregated. During the years following this case, Black students began attending Predominantly White colleges and universities across the country. There they faced campus climates that were anything but welcoming. The footsteps of the first Black students at The University of Georgia were marked by White students cheering “two-four-six-eight! We don’t want to integrate” (The University of Georgia, 2001)! James Meredith, the first Black student to enroll at The University of Mississippi, had to be escorted and guarded by U.S. marshals during his time on campus. Additionally, he experienced White students moving off the sidewalks as he would pass by and found doors closed in his face as he would approach them (Meredith, 1966). It has been more than 50 years since *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954); and while it is less likely that a Black student would experience such overt mocking of his or her existence today, it is likely that he/she would experience similar feelings of not being welcomed.

Research examining the experiences of Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) suggests that these students often feel like unwelcome visitors on their own campus (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). While the majority of research in this area has been conducted with undergraduate students, it stands to reason that Black
graduate students at PWIs share similar experiences. In addition to feeling unwelcomed, Black students have frequently commented that PWI campuses feel like spaces that do not belong to them and that programs offered on campus are not for them (Feagin et al., 1996; Gossett & Cuyjet, 1998). Each of these experiences contributes to the likelihood that Black students may not be as successful at PWIs and that their psychological well-being could be compromised.

Embarking upon a graduate degree is a daunting and challenging task for most students. It signifies the transition from novice learning to more specialized learning and requires a great deal of dedication, reflection, and patience on the part of students. It is indeed a time that can cause great stress and many changes for an individual. In a 1980 study of first-year graduate students and stress, Goplerud found that 82% of the graduate students in the study reported high levels of anxiety, 50% reported symptoms of depression, and 32% of the students reported problems with sleep. Additionally, approximately one-third of the students complained of some type of physical problem. These findings are supported by Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) who state that graduate study can evoke many challenges to psychological well-being. These researchers also suggested that the most effective interventions to assist graduate students with these challenges are those that emphasize the mobilization of social support resources, particularly those resources that have a buffering effect on the stress students may experience. Since previous research suggests that graduate students’ psychological well-being can be preserved by the provision of resources that foster social support, one would expect that university administrators would implement such programming. However, many Black students at PWIs feel that programs offered are not for them. How, then, do
Black graduate students transform these environments into ones where they are able to thrive and succeed?

One effort led by students at Predominantly White campuses across the country has been the development of Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSAs). BGSAs are currently in existence on at least 50 campuses across the country with the goal of increasing the likelihood of successful matriculation for Black graduate students. This goal is met by providing services and programs that promote social support, professional development, service, scholarship, community, and academic excellence (Black Graduate and Professional Student Organization, 2005; Graduate and Professional Scholars, 2003; National Black Graduate Student Association, 2005). While many of these organizations have been in existence for approximately twenty years, little has been done in terms of measuring the impact of these organizations on the students who participate. Specifically, in what ways do organizations such as BGSAs promote the psychological well-being of the Black graduate students who choose to participate?

Statement of the Problem

BGSAs have been developed on many Predominantly White campuses as a means of dealing with factors that may affect the psychological well-being and potential success of Black graduate students. These factors include an unwelcoming climate, feelings of alienation and depression, a lack of social support, and less healthy racial identities (Brown, 2000; Feagin et al., 1996; Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998). However, very little research has been conducted on these organizations to determine whether they are having this desired impact. With budget cuts affecting services offered at colleges and universities across the country, now more than ever it is imperative that programs
designed to increase the retention rates of Black students be evaluated for their impact. Counseling psychologists are in the unique position to contribute to this endeavor because of their strong foundation in working with college student populations and in the areas of assessment and program evaluation. Counseling psychologists who work in college counseling centers should be particularly concerned with this issue as some of the primary concerns presented by students who seek services are symptoms of depression, feelings of alienation, and perceived lack of social support (Bressler, personal communication, 2005). Additionally, prevention has been a hallmark in the field of counseling psychology. As a result, counseling psychologists are well-positioned to take the lead in assessing the impact of programs designed to promote psychological well-being and academic success among Black graduate students.

Rationale for the Current Study

In a study conducted by D’Augelli and Hershberger (1993), 41% of African American students at a PWI reported occasionally hearing disparaging racial remarks. Forty-one percent of the African American students reported frequently hearing such remarks, and 59% reported that they had been the target of racial insults at least once or twice. Lett and Wright (2003) contend that acts of discrimination and the unwelcoming climate perceived by many Black students at PWIs can result in “a lessened self-esteem, underdeveloped personal identities, retarded cognitive and affective development, thereby shaking confidence and leading to feelings associated with a sense of isolation and alienation, depression, dissonance and even at times the discontinuance of education” (p. 190). Feelings of alienation and depression, a lack of social support, and challenges to one’s racial identity are well-documented in the research relating to both Black
undergraduate and graduate students at PWIs (Brown, 2000; Feagin et al., 1996; Griffin, 1991; Kennebrew, 2002; Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998). However, there is a lesser amount of research that examines how students cope with these challenges to psychological well-being while pursuing a graduate degree. Griffin (1991) states that Black students at PWIs typically develop their own support systems such as Black Student Unions in an effort to ward off feelings of isolation, depression, and loneliness. Black graduate students across the country have done exactly this by developing BGSAs on their respective campuses. Since this is the case, it is imperative that these systems be examined to determine the impact that they have on the students who participate in order to garner support from college administrators for the continuance of such programs and to make changes to these organizations so that they do have the desired impact. The current study will: (a) examine the demographic variables that may influence participation in a BGSA and (b) examine the impact that level of participation has on the psychological well-being (feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, level of social support, and racial identity) of Black graduate students who participate in BGSAs.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

Research Question 1.

To what degree do age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activities, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhood predict participation level in a BGSA at a PWI?
Null Hypothesis 1.

Age will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Null Hypothesis 2.

Type of undergraduate institution will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Null Hypothesis 3.

Type of undergraduate extracurricular activities will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Null Hypothesis 4.

Time elapsed between completing an undergraduate program and entering graduate school will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Null Hypothesis 5.

The racial makeup of participants’ childhood neighborhoods will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between participation level in a BGSA and black identity for Black graduate students at PWIs?
Null Hypothesis 1.

There will be no statistically significant relationship between participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) and black identity as measured by the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997).

Research Question 3

To what degree does participation level in a BGSA predict feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support for Black graduate students at PWIs?

Null Hypothesis 1.

Participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) will not significantly predict alienation of Black graduate students at a PWI as measured by the University Alienation Scale (UAS) (Burbach, 1972).

Null Hypothesis 2.

Participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) will not significantly predict depression in Black graduate students at a PWI as measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977).

Null Hypothesis 3.

Participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) will not significantly predict level of social support of Black graduate students at a PWI as measured by a modified version of the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B) (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987).
Research Question 4

What aspects of BGSAs are most beneficial to Black graduate students at a PWI?

This question will be addressed through examination of responses given on the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ). Additionally, open-ended responses to the following question, “What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful and why” will be examined for themes. This question is included on the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Definitions of Terms

Definitions of terms that are important in understanding this study are presented in this section.

1. Black Graduate Students- Graduate students having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes students who indicate their race as Black, African American, Negro, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, Haitian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Additionally, this included graduate students who described their race as Jamaican or West Indian.

2. Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)- Institutions of higher education whose enrollment of minority students is less than 50 percent of the total enrollment (Higher Education Act, 1965).

3. Black Student Organizations (BSOs)- Black student-led organizations whose purpose is to facilitate cultural connections and social integration into the university. Examples of BSOs include: Black Student Unions, Black Sororities, Black Fraternities, and Black Student Choirs (Guiffrida, 2003).
4. Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSAs) – Black student-led organizations whose purpose is to increase the likelihood of successful matriculation for Black graduate students. This purpose is met by providing services that promote social support, professional development, service, scholarship, community, and academic excellence (Black Graduate and Professional Student Organization, 2005; Graduate and Professional Scholars, 2003; National Black Graduate Student Association, 2005).

5. Psychological Well-Being- For the purposes of this study, psychological well-being will include black identity, social support, alienation, and depression.

6. Extracurricular activities- Activities that students participate in outside of the classroom designed to enhance the overall college and university educational experience. Extracurricular activities include clubs, sports teams, and performing arts units (Astin, 1984).

7. Racial identity- The process of development by which individual members of various socioracial groups overcome the version of internalized racism that typifies their group in order to achieve a self-affirming and realistic racial-group or collective identity (Helms, 1990).

8. Black identity- For the purposes of this study, Black identity will be conceptualized using the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) developed by Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998). This model focuses on African Americans’ beliefs about the significance of race in (a) how they define themselves and (b) the qualitative meanings that they ascribe to membership in that racial group.
9. Alienation- The lack of perception of fit within an environment that is in some ways alien (James, 1998).

10. Depression- Mood characterized by feelings of sadness, emptiness, anxiety, pessimism, worthlessness, helplessness and a loss of interest in things/activities that were once pleasurable (Depression, 2005).

11. Social support- For the purposes of this study, social support is conceptualized according to the model developed by Barrera and Ainlay (1983). According to this model, there are six different modes of social support: a) material aid (including financial), b) behavioral assistance, c) intimate interaction, d) guidance, e) feedback, and f) positive social interaction.

Limitations

1. Each campus BGSA is unique; therefore, it may be difficult to generalize findings as a result of differences in programs offered, activity level of individual members, institutional support for the organization, leadership structure, and number of members in the BGSA.

2. Research participants are from one geographic region of the United States. Therefore, generalizations cannot be made regarding BGSAs at PWIs in other geographic locations.

3. There is no assessment of other factors (e.g., spirituality, family support) that may contribute to participants’ psychological well-being. Therefore, it may be difficult to conclude that participation in a BGSA is the factor that greatly contributes to level of psychological well-being.
4. This study does not take into account other groups (e.g., sororities, fraternities, churches) that may provide social support. These institutions may also promote psychological well-being.

5. The BGSAQ is an instrument developed by the researcher for the purposes of this study. Therefore, reliability information is limited.

6. Participants in this study must have been active with their BGSA for at least one semester. Students newly active with a BGSA may not have a clear understanding regarding the impact of the organization before participating for at least one semester.

7. This study only focuses on involvement in one particular type of student organization. Psychological well-being may be influenced by involvement in other student organizations as well.

Assumptions

1. Black graduate students need some type of support network in place at a PWI to increase their likelihood of successful matriculation.

2. Self-report questionnaires will adequately measure black identity, social support, alienation, symptoms of depression, and participation level in a BGSA.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

When examining previous research regarding Black graduate students at PWIs, four factors seemed to surface throughout much of the literature. The factors of alienation, depression, social support and racial identity have all been examined in the context of the experiences of Black students on Predominantly White campuses. Researchers have looked at these areas to determine how these factors contribute to the psychological well-being and overall successful matriculation of Black students at PWIs. This review of literature will provide a closer examination of these factors and will also give a more comprehensive picture of Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSAs) as organizations that provide programming and opportunities that take into consideration these factors in an effort to promote psychological well-being and successful matriculation. This literature review will begin by examining the experiences of Black graduate students on Predominantly White campuses. It will continue by looking at each of the factors alienation, depression, social support, and Black identity, as they relate to Black students at PWIs. The literature review will conclude by exploring Black student organizations, specifically BGSAs.

Black Graduate Student Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions

In 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics found that African Americans received only 8% of the master’s degrees conferred each year and about 6% of the PhDs awarded, with the majority of these degrees coming from PWIs. Thus, it is
important to examine the experiences that Black graduate students have at PWIs as these experiences may be contributing to the small number of Blacks receiving graduate degrees. Overwhelmingly, the literature regarding the experiences of Black graduate students at PWIs asserts that there continues to be a struggle. Fleming (1984) in her seminal work, explored the lived experiences of Black students at PWIs and today, more than 20 years later, it is still a major area of study as evidenced by recent works such as, “A Long Way to Go: Conversations about Race by African American Faculty and Graduate Students” (Cleveland, 2004) and “Journey to the Ph.D.: How to Navigate the Process as African Americans” (Green & Scott, 2003). These works and others contend that Predominantly White campuses have a tendency to be cold and unwelcoming for the Black student (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Lett & Wright, 2003; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). This cold and unwelcoming climate is created by a variety of factors including White spaces, feelings of invisibility, and unequal treatment by faculty.

The participants in Feagin et al.’s (1996) study refer to many areas of Predominantly White campuses as “White spaces.” This refers to the physical places on a campus such as student union buildings and large gatherings such as sporting events and other campus programs where Black students feel as though they do not belong. This message is often conveyed quite loudly, yet most often nonverbally. One participant in the Feagin et al. study discussed how he would notice that many times when he and a friend would enter a computer lab, White students would gradually start to disappear. Another participant spoke about her emotional reaction to thumbing through the college yearbook of her PWI and finding very few pictures of Black students doing anything, yet finding several pages of pictures of White students hanging around, standing in lines, and
doing other things that seemed to really portray the recreational life of a White college student.

Many Black students at PWIs are made to feel invisible by both students and faculty members. In a study conducted by Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, and Sanders (1997), one African American doctoral student states

I was walking across campus one day, and when I passed a White student, I spoke to him. He ignored me. I felt invisible when he totally ignored my personhood. He made no acknowledgement of my presence.

It was like I had no right to be there – like I didn’t belong. (p. 492)

Yet another African American doctoral student in this study details his ongoing struggle to be recognized by a faculty member. He states that he would repeatedly speak to the professor without any acknowledgement of his presence. One day he spoke to the professor in such a loud voice that the professor jumped, but “he looked at me that day” (p.492) he proclaims. It is as though this student feels momentarily powerful because he has finally gained this recognition, but as his recounting of the events continues it is obvious that the powerful feeling is fleeting as he speaks of the disappointment experienced as he witnesses the professor having interactions with other students in the program. He states, “I used to see him interacting with White students – they belonged, but I did not” (p. 492). In addition to this treatment from other students and faculty members, Black students are made to feel invisible by the programmatic offerings at their institutions. Students often assert that there are few social offerings or cultural activities that appeal to Black students at PWIs. This results in students feeling further invisible by
their institutions because they feel as though their social needs are not being considered (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Milner, 2004).

The third and final factor that often contributes to a cold and unwelcoming climate for Black graduate students at PWIs is unfair treatment by faculty members. This unfair treatment often comes in the form of excluding Black graduate students from writing and publishing opportunities while offering these opportunities to their White counterparts (Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997). Incoming graduate students are not often aware of many of the experiences they should participate in to make their “package,” so to speak, more attractive to employers once their graduate program is completed. Undoubtedly, one of these experiences is writing and publishing for a professional audience. Black students, in particular, frequently find themselves near the end of their programs asking the question “Where were my research opportunities” (Dewalt, 2004, p.44)? A participant in the Patterson-Stewart et al. (1997) study detailed how disillusioning it was to see her White peers being given opportunities and information that she was not privy to. She speaks about blaming herself for not being more assertive in asking for research and presenting opportunities before realizing that the White students had not been assertive, but simply connected.

Alienation

Research suggests that when African American undergraduate students feel as though they are a part of the university community, they excel at higher levels and are more likely to complete their programs of study (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Feeling as though you are not a part of the community is referred to as alienation. James (1998) defined alienation as the lack of perception of fit within an environment
that is in some ways alien. This lack of fit is often magnified for Black students at PWIs as evidenced by Steward, Jackson, and Jackson (1990). This study found that successful African American undergraduate students tended to express and want to be included to a greater extent when on a Predominantly White campus than when in a Predominantly African American campus situation. The fact that Black students have feelings of alienation is well-documented in the research literature. In a study conducted by Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999), sixteen of the twenty-two 4th year African American undergraduate students reported feeling “underrepresented,” “isolated,” “alienated,” or in the minority numerically. Students in this study further explained this feeling stating that they would, “look for another Black person” when they walk into a room. Gossett and Cuyjet (1998) found in their sample of 1180 students across four campuses that 40% of the African American students did not feel that there was any place on campus where they felt “at home.” A final illustration of this feeling in the literature comes from Taylor and Olswang (1997) who found that 56% of African American undergraduate students did not feel as though they were a part of campus life.

While it is clear that many Black students do feel a sense of alienation at PWIs, previous researchers have also described the detrimental effects that alienation has on these students. James (1998) suggests that a lack of opportunities for students to get involved in activities and organizations that suit their interests on Predominantly White campuses is a concern for all students, but particularly a concern for minority group students as this may then lead to “anxieties which can affect a student’s ability to learn and succeed” (p.230). Pounds (1987) found that socially alienated undergraduate students were less effective socially, had fewer friends, felt lonelier, and participated less
in extracurricular activities. This study also found that they were less likely to have personal contacts with others on campus or to become integrated into the social systems within their institutions.

James (1998) also found that undergraduate students who reported that they were more alienated also had higher levels of depression. Previous research also documents the positive effects that can occur when students do not feel alienated. Zea and Reisen (1997) suggests that integration into the university community influenced undergraduate students’ commitment to staying in college for both ethnic minority students and White students. This is further evidenced by Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton and Wilson (1999) who found that comfort with one’s university was one of the strongest predictors of persistence in college among African American undergraduate students.

A primary way in which students attempt to deal with these feelings of alienation is by getting involved in some way with the campus community. Lane and Daugherty (1999) found that undergraduate students involved in Greek organizations were significantly less alienated than students who were not involved in Greek organizations. Furthermore, Moran, Yengo, and Algier (1994) found that undergraduate college students were more socially adjusted if they were involved in a college student organization. These ideas are also supported by Mallinckrodt and Sedlacek (1987). These researchers found that African American undergraduate students who were more involved with their campus felt less alienated because they had a stronger identification with their institution. These students also had higher retention rates. On the campuses of many PWIs, White students can feel less alienated by joining any of the already established student organizations; however, Black students are often forced to develop their own social and
cultural networks within the college community in an effort to deal with their feelings of alienation (Allen, 1992; D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

**Depression**

Symptoms of depression including feelings of sadness, emptiness, and loss of interest in things which were once pleasurable (National Institute of Mental Health, 2005) have been found to be connected to several different experiences among African Americans. Perhaps the most well studied is the relationship between symptoms of depression and perceived racial discrimination. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) found that self-reported experiences with discrimination in a sample of African Americans were related to symptoms of depression, anxiety, obsession-compulsion, and somatization. Additionally, a study conducted by Sellers and Shelton (2003), with a sample of African American undergraduates at 3 different PWIs, found a significant relationship between the students’ self-reported experiences with racial discrimination and levels of psychological distress, which included symptoms of depression and anxiety. Finally, Kimbrough, Molock, and Walton (1996) found that symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation appeared to be buffered by support from family and friends in a sample of African American undergraduate students at a PWI.

**Social Support**

Social support is among the most widely researched constructs in psychology and related fields (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987). There are several different models of social support, each focusing on slightly different areas. For this reason, it is imperative at this juncture to explicate its meaning in this study. For the purposes of this study, social support is being conceptualized using the model developed by Barrera and Ainlay
This model was developed by Barrera and Ainlay (1983) after ten research articles discussing social support were examined for commonalities among concepts. From this examination, six different modes of social support emerged: a) material aid – providing tangible materials in the form of money and other physical objects; b) behavioral assistance – sharing of tasks through physical labor; c) intimate interaction – traditional nondirective counseling behaviors such as listening and expressing esteem, caring, and understanding; d) guidance – offering advice, information, or instruction; e) feedback – providing individuals with feedback about their behavior, thoughts, or feelings, and f) positive social interaction – engaging in social interactions for fun and relaxation.

At this juncture it is also important to discuss the two leading hypotheses regarding the impact of social support on psychological well-being, the direct effects hypothesis and the buffering hypothesis. The direct effects hypothesis maintains that social support has beneficial effects regardless of the level of other stressors. Furthermore, the perception of too little support may in itself be a source of stress. Cohen and Wills (1985) provide support for this hypothesis by suggesting that social support may have a generalized benefit because “large social networks provide persons with regular positive experiences and a set of stable, socially rewarded roles in the community” (p. 311). Cohen and Wills (1985) also suggest that integration into a social network may defend against negative stressors that may otherwise result in psychological or physical disorders. The alternative to the direct effects hypothesis, the buffering hypothesis, suggests that social support is related to well-being only for persons who experience stress and is not particularly useful to individuals who are not currently
experiencing elevated levels of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Support for this hypothesis from Cohen and Wills (1985) asserts that having the perception that others will be there to provide support in the event of a negative stressor may redefine a situation for an individual, thereby preventing the situation from being perceived as highly stressful.

In his seminal work examining social support and stress among first year graduate students, Goplerud (1980) found that students who had pre-existing social networks before entering graduate school or who quickly developed these networks once beginning graduate school, fared much better than their less well-connected peers. This study found that students who were single, recent arrivals to the city, and less socially active reported on average twice as much cumulative stress and 60% more intense life changes and health or emotional disturbances than their peers who felt more socially supported. Goplerud (1980) did not report on the racial or ethnic backgrounds of its’ participants. These findings were supported by Hodgson and Simoni’s (1995) study which found that graduate students with less social support reported greater psychological distress. Seventy-four percent of the participants in this study were White, while 8.8% of the participants were classified as minority students. However, neither the race nor the ethnicity of these students was provided. This study further asserts that graduate “students will not function as well academically or psychologically if they do not perceive themselves as receiving support from faculty and their institution” (Hodgson & Simoni, 1995, p. 253).

When specifically looking at the social support experiences of Black graduate students, Williams (2000) reported that African American graduate students held more negative perceptions of the social environment at a PWI than did Hispanic or Asian
American students. Additionally, DeFour and Hirsch (1990) found that students who considered themselves more socially integrated had lower scores on a measure of psychological well-being, were less likely to have considered dropping out of school, and had better academic performance. These students were also better adjusted and perceived themselves to be making good progress in their graduate programs.

Many researchers agree that social support is a crucial factor in the successful matriculation of students. Brown (2000) states “social support is arguably the most important determinant of college success and satisfaction, particularly for African American students attending Predominantly White Institutions” (p. 480). Additionally, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) assert that the challenges that graduate school imposes on a student’s psychological well-being may be best combated by interventions that “emphasize mobilization of social support resources, especially resources that may have a significant buffering effect on stress” (p. 717). Given this information, it stands to reason that any organization on a Predominantly White campus that attempts to ensure the psychological well-being of its African American students would have as one of its central foci, social support.

**Racial Identity**

Racial identity is arguably the most widely discussed and researched psychological construct as it relates to the experiences of African Americans (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). According to Helms (1990), the development of a positive racial identity is the process by which a member of a socioracial group overcomes the version of internalized racism that typifies his/her group in order to achieve a self-affirming and realistic racial group or collective identity. By far,
the leading researchers in this area have been Cross (1971, 1991), Helms (1984), and Parham & Helms (1981, 1985). Cross’ (1971) theory of Nigrescence detailed five stages that an African American person would experience en route to developing a healthy racial identity. The first stage, pre-encounter, is characterized by the placement of little value on race in a person’s life. In the second stage, encounter, African Americans are faced with a collection of experiences that force them to examine the role race plays in their lives. The third stage is immersion/emersion. This stage is characterized by intense pro-Black/anti-White attitudes. The fourth stage, internalization, is characterized by more realistic thoughts and attitudes about what it means to be Black. Individuals in this stage have an inner security about their “Blackness.” The fifth and final stage, internalization-commitment, is indicative of those people who have taken their internalized attitudes about what it means to be Black and put them into action. Building upon the foundation of Cross (1971), the work of Helms (1984) and Parham and Helms (1981) resulted in the development of the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS). The RIAS was developed to operationalize the five stages proposed by Cross (1971). The RIAS has gone through several different revisions and in its current form is a 50-item scale in which respondents are asked to respond to items using a Likert-type scale to indicate the extent to which each item is representative of his/her attitudes (Helms & Parham, 1990).

The newest wave of researchers in the area of racial identity have carefully examined what has been laid out by previous researchers and attempted to develop new models of racial identity that will provide a more unified and consistent theory of racial identity as it relates to African Americans. One such theory is the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) developed by a team of researchers headed by Robert
Sellers of the University of Michigan. The MMRI (Sellers et al., 1998) defines racial identity as “the significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to being Black in their conceptualizations of self.” This model focuses on African Americans’ beliefs about the significance of race in (a) how they define themselves and (b) the qualitative meanings that they ascribe to membership in that racial group. In order to ascertain this information, this model is composed of four dimensions: salience, centrality, regard, and ideology. Salience refers to the extent to which a person defines her/him self with regard to race. Centrality refers to whether race is a core part of a person’s self-concept. Regard refers to the extent to which a person feels positively or negatively towards African Americans and their membership in that group. This dimension consists of both private regard and public regard. Private regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively toward African Americans and their membership in that group. Public regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively. The fourth and final dimension of the MMRI model is ideology. Ideology refers to a person’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with regard to the way he/she feels that the members of the race should act. The MMBI asserts that there are four ideologies: nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist. The nationalist ideology stresses the uniqueness of being Black. The nationalist person views the African American experience as being different from that of any other group. The oppressed minority ideology emphasizes the similarities between the oppression that African Americans face and that of other groups. The assimilationist ideology is characterized by an emphasis on the similarities between African Americans and the rest of American society. A person with an assimilationist
ideology acknowledges his/her status as an American and attempts to enter, as much as possible, into the mainstream. The humanist ideology emphasizes the similarities among all humans. Persons with a humanist viewpoint do not think in terms of race, gender, class or other distinguishing characteristics. They are likely to view everyone as belonging to the human race. (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

A great variety of research has been conducted examining the connection between racial identity and psychological well-being in African Americans. Research has found that pre-encounter attitudes have been positively related to higher levels of depression (Munford, 1994) and negatively related to general well-being and self-esteem in African Americans (Carter, 1991; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). On the other hand, internalization attitudes have been linked to healthy psychological functioning such as positive self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms (Munford, 1994; Pyant & Yanico, 1991) as well as more psychological adjustment (Pierre & Mahalik, 2005).

In addition to studies that have examined the connection between racial identity and psychological well-being among the general population of African Americans in the U.S., there have also been studies that examined the specific connection between racial identity and the psychological well-being and overall experiences of Black students at PWIs. Pillay (2005) found that African American female students in pre-encounter and encounter statuses had lower levels of psychological health. Pierre and Mahalik (2005) found that pre-encounter and immersion racial identity attitudes were associated with greater psychological distress and less self-esteem among young adult Black men and that internalization attitudes were associated with greater self-esteem. In a study conducted by Neville and Lilly (2000), African American students who more strongly
endorsed an internalization racial identity reported lower levels of general psychological distress and psychological symptomology than did students who did not endorse an internalization racial identity as strongly. Related to the overall experiences of Black students at PWIs, Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) found that greater involvement in campus activities among Black male students resulted in higher stages of racial identity development. Furthermore, results from Mitchell and Dell’s (1992) study suggest a positive correlation between encounter, immersion, and internalization attitudes and participation in cultural activities, and a negative relationship between pre-encounter attitudes and participation in cultural activities.

**Black Student Organizations**

The establishment of Black Student Organizations (BSOs) on the campuses of PWIs has occurred as a response to the need for these students to build a community of people who understand them and their journey through what at times has been described as a hostile and unwelcoming environment (Feagin et al., 1996). Even though there are dozens of campus organizations offered at many PWIs, students, both Black and White, feel as though “minority students will feel intimidated, unwelcome, and unwanted in predominantly White organizations and activities” (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995, p. 123-124). Twelve percent of the African American students in the Fisher and Hartmann (1995) study spoke of the importance of predominantly Black groups. One student commented, “A lot of the activities on this campus are geared toward White students. We need things that are for Black students [to] help them know who they are” (p.124). In addition to developing these organizations as a way to help affirm who they are as people, Black students also develop them to maintain psychological well-being. Griffin
(1991) asserts that Black students at PWIs often develop support systems such as Black Student Unions, sororities, and fraternities in an effort to ward off feelings of isolation, depression, and loneliness.

Much research has been conducted on the importance of these organizations and counterspaces for Black students at PWIs. Guiffrida (2003) found that members highly valued their membership in BSOs for four main reasons: a) membership assisted them in developing out-of-class relationships with faculty, b) membership provided them with the opportunity to give back to the Black community, c) membership gave them a feeling of comfort because they were able to surround themselves with others like them, and d) membership exposed and connected Black students from predominantly White home communities to African American culture. Some of the students in the Guiffrida (2003) study who had grown up in a predominantly White environment commented that being involved with other Black students who “seemed so strong and confident of themselves and their Blackness” (p.314) invoked a need within them to connect with the Black community as well.

Perhaps the importance of these organizations is best captured in the following quote taken from Howard-Hamilton (2003) as a summary of Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000):

Students of color establish academic and social counterspaces on campus by finding people who look like themselves and establishing a space that is comfortable and hospitable for them. These counterspaces may be in a physical structure such as a cultural center, or may be simply the presence of participants in an organization that espouses Africentric
values such as a Black fraternity or sorority, or a study group. The primary emphasis of the counterspace is on finding shelter from the daily torrent of micro aggressions and to be in a place that is validating and supportive. (p.23)

Black Graduate Student Associations

The mission statement for the BGSA at The University of Georgia states as its purpose “to provide academic and social support for minority graduate and professional students while working to increase their matriculation” (Graduate and Professional Scholars, 2003). The BGSA at Virginia Commonwealth University states as its purpose “to promote fellowship, scholarship, and professional development for African American graduate students” (African American Graduate Student Association, 2005), and the BGSA at The University of Wisconsin- Madison lists among its purposes “to provide a support system for Black students enrolled in graduate and professional programs, to serve as a networking organization for Black students and alumni, to bridge the gap between campus and the community through volunteer and community service projects, and to assist the university in recruiting qualified Black students into graduate and professional programs” (Black Graduate and Professional Student Organization, 2005). In order to meet these specified purposes, these organizations sponsor a variety of programs and services including monthly general body meetings, monthly social mixers, grant-writing workshops, job-search workshops, stress management workshops, community service projects, Black History Month programming, roundtable discussions, and lectures which focus on current issues of interest to the African American community.
(African American Graduate Student Association, 2005; Black Graduate and Professional Student Organization, 2005; Graduate and Professional Scholars, 2003).
Chapter 3

Methodology

This study was designed to investigate selected demographic variables that may influence a student’s participation in a BGSA and to examine the impact that participation in a BGSA has on a student’s psychological well-being (i.e., feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, level of social support, and racial identity). This chapter provides information on the sample, instrumentation, research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis used in this study.

Description of the Sample

Profiles of the universities.

The universities selected for participation in this study were chosen by their classification as a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University- Extensive, their status as a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) located in the southeastern region of the U.S., and their inclusion on the 2003-2004 Black Issues in Higher Education list of schools for “African American Doctorates Conferred” (Borden & Brown, 2004). Additionally, one of the universities, while meeting the other selection criteria, was also the researcher’s home institution.

Auburn University.

Auburn University was chartered in 1856 and opened its doors to students in 1859. This university had a Fall 2005 total enrollment of 23,333 students, of which 1,834 were Black students. Two hundred sixty-nine of these students were Black graduate
students. The first Black student enrolled at this university in 1964 as an undergraduate student (Auburn University, 2006). The BGSA was founded on this campus in 1994 (Black Graduate and Professional Student Association-Auburn, 2006). This university was ranked 97th in Black Issues in Higher Education’s 2003-2004 “African American Doctorates Conferred” (Borden & Brown, 2004) ranking of colleges and universities.

The University of Tennessee.

The University of Tennessee became a land grant institution in 1879. This university had a Fall 2005 total enrollment of 26,100 students, including 2,388 Black students. Six hundred thirty-eight of these students were Black graduate or professional students. The first Black student enrolled at this university in 1952 as a graduate student (The University of Tennessee, 2006). The BGSA was founded on this campus in 1998 (Black Graduate and Professional Student Association-Tennessee, 2006). This university was ranked 52nd in Black Issues in Higher Education’s 2003-2004 “African American Doctorates Conferred” (Borden & Brown, 2004) ranking of colleges and universities.

Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University was founded in 1838. This university had a Fall 2005 total enrollment of 29,349 students, including 5,184 Black students. Six hundred of these students were Black graduate students. The first Black students enrolled at this university were a group of 5 students who enrolled as graduate students (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006). The BGSA on this campus was founded in 2002 (African American Graduate Student Association, 2005). This university was ranked 44th in Black Issues in Higher Education’s 2003-2004 “African American Doctorates Conferred” (Borden & Brown, 2004) ranking of colleges and universities.
The University of Georgia.

The University of Georgia was founded in 1785. This university had a Fall 2005 total enrollment of 32,421 students, with 2,106 Black students enrolled. Six hundred thirty-five of these students were Black graduate students. The first Black students to enroll at this university were two undergraduates in 1961 (The University of Georgia, 2006). The BGSA on this campus was founded in 1984 (Graduate and Professional Scholars, 2003). This university was ranked 11th in Black Issues in Higher Education’s 2003-2004 “African American Doctorates Conferred” (Borden & Brown, 2004) ranking of colleges and universities.

Demographics of the Participants

Participants in this study were 63 Black graduate students who attended one of the four universities selected for this study. Eleven students were from Auburn University, ten students were from The University of Tennessee, three students were from Virginia Commonwealth University, and thirty-nine students were from The University of Georgia. Fifty-seven (90.5%) of the participants identified their race/ethnicity as African American/Black, four (6.3%) of the participants identified as Biracial, and two (3.2%) identified as Other. Thirteen (20.6%) of the participants were male and fifty (79.4%) of the participants were female. Thirty-two (50.8%) of the students were master’s students, thirty (47.6%) were doctoral students, and one (1.6%) was a juris doctorate student. Participants ranged in age from 22-39.
Instrumentation

University Alienation Scale (UAS)

The UAS (Burbach, 1972) is a 24-item survey that asks students to respond to statements using a Likert-type scale where 1 = strong disagreement with the statement and 5 = strong agreement with the statement. The UAS was developed to measure a college student’s sense of connection or disconnection from his/her university. The scale is based on three different dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement. Powerlessness refers to a student’s feeling of having a lack of control over his/her environment. A sample item for this scale is “The administration has too much control over my life at this university.” Meaninglessness refers to a student’s inability to make sense of his/her existence at the university. A sample item from this scale is “Things have become so complicated at this university that I really don’t understand just what is going on.” Finally, social estrangement refers to a student’s feeling of isolation within the university. A sample item from this scale is “This university is just too big and impersonal to provide for the individual student.”

The split-half reliability of the UAS as reported by Burbach (1972) is .92. Each individual scale, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement, yielded a split-half reliability of .79, .89, and .72 respectively. Additionally, a factor analysis was completed in order to determine whether the groupings of the items were cohesive enough to warrant the three specified dimensions. The correlations among the clusters (Factors I and II, r = .69; Factors II and III, r = .46; and Factors I and III, r = .68) provide practical evidence for the existence of the generalized factor of alienation.
In a study conducted by James (1998) on the effects of social alienation on Black college students at a PWI, an adaptation of the UAS was used. This instrument called the PRIDE scale was developed by James as an expansion of the UAS by examining self-worth and self-esteem in addition to the existing UAS constructs of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement. The PRIDE scale is based on the principles of: Pride, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Enthusiasm. James (1998) utilized these principles as a broader generalization of the principles of the Nguzo Saba outlined by Dr. Maulana Karenga (1988). In this study, James (1998) found that students who had higher scores on the UAS indicated lower levels of self-esteem as indicated by their scores on the PRIDE scale.

*Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D)*

The CES-D (Radloff, 1977) is a 20-item self report questionnaire developed to assess depressive symptoms in individuals. Respondents are asked to indicate how often during the course of the past week they have been affected by the listed symptoms. Responses range from *rarely or none of the time (<1 day)* to *most or all of the time (5-7 days)*. A total score is obtained by summing all of the items. Any score higher than 15 indicates the presence of at least mild or moderate levels of depression. As the score increases, so does the severity of the depression.

A high level of internal consistency is reported by Radloff (1977) for the CES-D. A Spearman-Brown, split halves method yielded a .85 result. This suggests that the items on the CES-D consistently measure depressive symptoms. All test-retest reliability coefficients, with the exception of one, as reported by Radloff (1977) over a variety of time intervals were in the moderate range (*r = .48 – r = .67*). Additionally, the CES-D has
a strong level of discrimination between patient populations and the general population. In the sample used in Radloff’s (1977) study, 70% of the patient population scored 16 or above suggesting the presence of a mild to moderate level of depressive symptoms, while only 20% of the general population scored at or above 16.

The reliability and validity of the instrument have been demonstrated across a variety of populations including African Americans and college students (Beals, Manson, Keane, & Dick, 1991; Bromberger, Harlow, Avis, Kravitz & Cordal, 2004). A study conducted by DeFour and Hirsch (1990) that examined the relationship between social networks of Black graduate students at a PWI and their adaptation to graduate school, which included psychological well-being, used the CES-D to assess the existence of depressive symptoms in this population. These researchers found that 69% of their sample had scores of 16 or higher. This indicated at least a mild level of depression for a majority of their sample.

Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B)

The SS-B (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987) is a 45-item survey designed to assess respondents’ perceived level of social support across five areas, which also correspond to the five scales of the instrument: emotional support, socializing, practical assistance, financial assistance, and advice/guidance. It asks respondents to indicate, based on previous experience, how likely it would be for a friend or family member to respond in the ways provided. The SS-B uses a Likert-type scale with (1) indicating no one would do this and (5) indicating most family members/friends would certainly do this. Sample items from the SS-B include “Would joke around or suggest doing something to cheer me up” and “Would buy me a drink if I was short of money.” For the purposes of this study, all
references to family members or friends were changed to “members of your Black Graduate Student Association.”

Content validity for the SS-B was established by asking a panel of judges to identify the scale to which each item belonged. The mean percentage of judges correctly classifying items was as follows: emotional support (92%), socializing (89%), practical assistance (91%), and advice/guidance (90%) (Vaux et al., 1987). Internal consistency for each scale of the SS-B was computed using a sample of Black students and a sample of White students (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987). For the sample of Black students, the mean alpha with regard to family was .90 and with regard to friends was .89. In the sample of White students, the mean alpha with regard to family was .86 and with regard to friends was .83. Confirmatory factor analyses performed on the items of the SS-B provided strong evidence that the items loaded on each scale measured those concepts they were designed to measure. With the exception of one item, all items loaded significantly on their respective scales, with most loading >.70. Additionally, none of the items loaded highly on another factor with most loading <.40.

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)

The MIBI (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) is a 56-item measure of the three stable dimensions of racial identity: centrality, ideology, and regard. Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the items by using a Likert-type scale with (1) indicating strong disagreement and (7) indicating strong agreement. The Centrality scale is designed to measure the extent to which being African American is central to the respondent’s definition of self. The Regard scale, which consists of one subscale, is designed to measure the extent to which a respondent
feels positively or negatively towards African Americans and his/her membership in that group. The Private Regard subscale measures the extent to which respondents have positive feelings toward African Americans. The Ideology scale consists of the following four subscales: Assimilation, Humanist, Minority, and Nationalist. It is designed to measure a respondent’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about how African Americans should live and interact with other people in society. The Assimilation subscale measures the extent to which respondents place an emphasis on the similarities between African Americans and mainstream America. The Humanist subscale measures the extent to which respondents emphasize the similarities among individuals of all races. The Minority subscale measures the extent to which respondents place an emphasis on the similarities between African Americans and other minority groups, and finally, the Nationalist subscale measures the extent to which respondents emphasize the uniqueness of being African American.

A factor analysis of the items on the MIBI yielded values of .86, .83, and .61 for the Ideology, Centrality, and Regard scales respectively. These values suggest that the MIBI scales measure three interrelated constructs (Sellers et al., 1997). Internal consistency for the MIBI was reported by Sellers et al. (1997) with Cronbach alphas for each of the subscales. The results are as follows: Centrality (.77), Private Regard (.60), Assimilation (.73), Humanist (.70), Minority (.76), and Nationalist (.79)

Sellers et al. (1997) found evidence to support the use of the MIBI with Black students at PWIs as shown in the following Cronbach’s alphas: Centrality (.78), Private Regard (.55), Assimilation (.66), Humanist (.68), Minority (.75), and Nationalist (.78).
Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) (Appendix A)

The BGSAQ is a 33-item measure developed by the researcher to examine a respondent’s participation level in a BGSA, and to identify those programs or activities that are most beneficial to BGSA members. The BGSAQ is based on the Harden (2004) study that examined programs and activities offered by BGSAs to determine which were most beneficial. The first 24 items of the BGSAQ were designed to cover one of the three domains that are central to the work of BGSAs: social support, personal development, and professional development. Responses to these items also indicate the level of participation a respondent has had in a BGSA, as higher endorsements of the items suggest more participation. Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the statements by using a Likert-type scale with (1) indicating strong disagreement and (5) indicating strong agreement. Sample items include “I have been able to meet another/other graduate student(s) and present with them at a professional conference” and “I have met people whom I consider my family away from home.” A preliminary reliability analysis for the first 24 items of the BGSAQ was conducted to determine whether these items consistently measured the same concept. This analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha value of .95, indicating that these items did measure the same concept.

The remaining 9 items of the BGSAQ were designed to measure how active a respondent has been in his/her BGSA. Items on this scale are either forced choice or open-ended. Sample items from this portion of the BGSAQ include “Approximately how many programs/events sponsored by BGSA do you attend” and “If you are not as active
with your BGSA as you would like to be, what are the primary reasons why you are not as active as you would like to be?”

Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B)

The demographic questionnaire asked respondents to provide personal information (name of institution, student classification, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, age, year of undergraduate graduation, type of extracurricular undergraduate involvement, sorority/fraternity affiliation, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhood) and information about undergraduate and graduate institutions (type of undergraduate institution and number of Black students and faculty in graduate department).

Research Design

A passive research design was utilized in this study. Passive designs are used when examining the relationship between two or more variables (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1991). In a passive design, participant groups are not actively formed through random or nonrandom assignment, and there is no manipulation of an independent variable (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Heppner et al. (1991) suggests that a strength of the passive research design is that researchers can easily identify possible relationships among a set of variables. If a relationship is found to exist between variables, an experimental design can then be developed as a follow-up study. One of the main weaknesses of the passive research design is that causal relationships cannot be identified. An additional weakness is that convenience samples are typically used in a passive research design, which may compromise the generalizability of the results (Heppner et al., 1991). Since only four Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSAs)
have been chosen for this study, it may be more difficult to generalize the results to BGSAs at other Predominantly White Institutions.

Procedures

Recruitment of Participants

Participants for this study were recruited by word of mouth. The researcher identified contact people at each institution who were responsible for soliciting participants for the study. The contact people were either personal contacts of the researcher or the presidents of their respective organizations. Contact people were asked to share the contents of a letter, written by the researcher, containing a description of the study with members of their respective BGSAs (Appendix C). As an incentive for participating, students were allowed to enter their names into a raffle for a $25 gift card for use at Barnes and Noble Bookstores.

Data Collection

Data were collected during the Spring 2006 semester, specifically March-April 2006. Contact people at each institution were mailed a package of materials including survey packets, a letter detailing the duties of the contact person (Appendix D), a list of frequently asked questions for the contact person that may assist them in answering any questions participants have (Appendix E), and a letter to share with the members of the respective BGSAs containing a description of the study (Appendix C). Contact people were then responsible for administering and collecting completed survey packets and mailing them back to the researcher. The researcher covered the postage for all mailings. Some of the packets were administered in group settings at BGSA meetings or BGSA
functions, while other packets were completed individually and then returned to the contact person.

After contact people began administering the research packets, the researcher was contacted by one of the contact people who stated that participants were requesting an online version of the research packet to complete. Responding to this request, the researcher received Institutional Review Board approval for the desired changes and developed an electronic version of the research packet. A message including the link to the survey (Appendix F) was sent to the contact people at each school so that they could distribute it to their respective BGSA members.

The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. The contents of the paper survey packet included: Participant Consent Document (Appendix E), Demographic Questionnaire, UAS, SS-B, MIBI, BGSAQ, and CES-D. The electronic version of the survey packet included: a revised Participant Consent Document (Appendix G), Demographic Questionnaire, UAS, SS-B, MIBI, BGSAQ, and CES-D. If participants were interested in participating in the raffle, they were then asked to send an email to the researcher with their name and contact email so that they could be notified if they were chosen as the winner.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1

To what degree do age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activities, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhoods predict participation level in a BGSA at a PWI?
To investigate the effect of multiple predictor variables on a criterion variable, multiple regression analysis was used. The predictor variables for this analysis were age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activity, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhood. The criterion variable was participation level in a BGSA.

**Research Question 2**

What is the relationship between participation level in a BGSA and black identity for Black graduate students at PWIs?

A Pearson Product-Moment correlation was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between participation level in a BGSA and black identity.

**Research Question 3**

To what degree does participation level in a BGSA predict feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support for Black graduate students at PWIs?

To investigate the effect of a predictor variable on multiple criterion variables, multiple regression analysis was used. The predictor variable for this analysis was participation level in a BGSA. The criterion variables were feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support.

**Research Question 4**

What aspects of BGSAs are most beneficial to Black graduate students at a PWI?

Means for each domain assessed by the BGSAQ, social support, personal development, and professional development, were obtained to determine which aspects of BGSAs were most beneficial. Additionally, themes were developed as a result of
qualitatively examining the responses given to the following question: “What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful and why?”
Chapter 4

Results

This study examined (a) the demographic variables that may influence participation in a BGSA and (b) the impact that level of participation has on the psychological well-being (feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, level of social support, and black identity) of Black graduate students who participate in BGSAs. This chapter will provide information about the results of the analyses conducted for this study. Given the small sample size used in the study, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Demographic Data

Data were collected from 97 Black graduate students who were members of their BGSA at one of the four Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the southeastern region selected for this study. However, 34 of the research packets were excluded due to them being incomplete. If more than half of the questions, on more than one of the instruments were unanswered, then a packet was excluded. Additionally, if participants did not complete the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ), the packet was excluded since this instrument was central to several of the analyses conducted in the study. The final sample for the study included 63 graduate student participants. Eleven students were from Auburn University, ten students were from The University of Tennessee, three students were from Virginia Commonwealth University, and thirty-nine students were from The University of Georgia. Fifty-seven (90.5%) of the
participants identified their race/ethnicity as African-American/Black, four (6.3%) of the participants identified as Biracial, and two (3.2%) identified as Other. Thirteen (20.6%) of the participants were male and fifty (79.4%) of the participants were female. Thirty-two (50.8%) of the students were master’s students, thirty (47.6%) were doctoral students, and one (1.6%) was a juris doctorate student. Participants ranged in age from 22-39. More detailed demographic information about the sample can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

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# of Black Faculty in Current Department

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Preliminary Statistical Analyses

Descriptive Statistics

Black Identity.

Black identity was measured using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Participants received a score on one of each of the seven subscales of the MIBI. Mean scores for the subscales were as follows: Centrality (1.72), Private Regard (4.20), Assimilationist
Ideology (4.95), Oppressed Minority Ideology (4.95), Nationalist Ideology (4.36), and Humanist Ideology (5.17). Table 4.2 provides information about the black identity scores for this sample.

Table 4.2

*Descriptive Statistics for the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centrality</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Regard</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilationist</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppressed Minority</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>3.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>4.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>3.22</td>
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</table>

*Note.* N = 63.

*Alienation.*

Alienation was measured using the University Alienation Scale (UAS) (Burbach, 1972). This scale yielded three separate subscale scores and a total score. Mean scores for each subscale were as follows: Meaninglessness (19.21), Powerlessness (24.16), Social Estrangement (19.52), and total score (62.95). Table 4.3 provides information about the alienation scores for this sample.
Table 4.3

*Descriptive Statistics for the University Alienation Scale (UAS)*

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<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td>19.21</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>20.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>24.16</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Estrangement</td>
<td>19.52</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>13.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62.95</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>51.00</td>
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</table>

*Note.* N = 63.

*Depression.*

The Center for Epidemiologic Studies – Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977) was used to measure the presence of depressive symptoms in this study. A total score is obtained by summing all of the items on this measure. The mean score for depression in this sample was 19.63. Tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 provide more detailed information about the depression scores for this sample.

Table 4.4

*Descriptive Statistics for the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)*

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<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>5.44</td>
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*Note.* N = 63.
Table 4.5

Additional Descriptive Statistics for the CES-D

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<td>15-21 (Mild-Moderate Depression)</td>
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<td>22 or higher (Major Depression)</td>
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<td>31.8</td>
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<td>Missing</td>
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<td>9.4</td>
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*Note. N = 63.*

Table 4.6

CES-D Scores By Gender

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*Note. N = 63.*

Social Support.

An adaptation of the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B) (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987) was used to measure the level of social support that BGSA participants experienced. A subscale score is yielded for each of the five domains assessed by the instrument as well as an overall social support score. Means for each domain were as
follows: Emotional Support (31.32), Socializing (25.54), Practical Assistance (25.90), Financial Assistance (21.06), and Advice/Guidance (43.13). The overall mean social support score was 146.46. Table 4.7 provides more information about the sample’s scores on the SS-B.

Table 4.7

*Descriptive Statistics for the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B)*

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<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
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<td>9.16</td>
<td>36.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing</td>
<td>25.54</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>28.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical Assistance</td>
<td>25.90</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>32.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Assistance</td>
<td>21.06</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>31.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice/Guidance</td>
<td>43.13</td>
<td>12.32</td>
<td>48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>146.46</td>
<td>40.87</td>
<td>174.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N= 63.

*Participation Level.*

The Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) was used to measure participation in a Black Graduate Student Association for this study. The BGSAQ yields only a total score for participation. The mean for BGSAQ total score in this study was 81.11. Table 4.8 provides more information about the participation scores for this sample. Table 4.9 provides a summary of additional descriptive information gathered from the BGSAQ.
Table 4.8

*Descriptive Statistics for the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81.11</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>84.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $N=63$.

Table 4.9

*Additional Descriptive Statistics for the BGSAQ*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offices Held</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-President</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentarian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Chair</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of Meetings Attended Per Academic Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 80-99%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 50-79%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 20-49%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.9 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentage of Programs/Events Attended Per Academic Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 80-99%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 50-79%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 20-49%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activities Most Likely Attended**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural events</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General body meetings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social activism events</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Board Meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attended the National Black Graduate Student Association Conference**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**# of Times in Attendance at National Black Graduate Student Association Conference**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# of Positions Held in National Black Graduate Student Association

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Positions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who have considered leaving their current institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who believe their graduate school experience would have been less enjoyable without participation in their BGSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who felt like being in their BGSA made them feel a part of the university community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basic Assumptions Regarding Multiple Regression

Pedhazur (1997) suggests that there are five basic assumptions related to multiple regression models: a) The relationship between the dependent variables and the independent variables is linear; b) errors are distributed with equal variance; c) errors are independent of one another; d) errors are normally distributed; and e) predictor variables are not correlated. This final assumption refers to multicollinearity. If multicollinearity occurs, particularly in studies with small sample sizes, it becomes more likely that a Type I error will occur. To determine whether multicollinearity exists between the independent variables of a regression model, a common practice is to examine the correlations between the variables for coefficients greater than or equal to .80.

To investigate the presence of multicollinearity in the presence of the regression models of this study that employed more than one independent variable, Pearson Product Moment Correlations were calculated and examined for scores equal to or greater than .80. None of the correlation values of the variables exceeded .80 indicating that the assumption of multicollinearity had not been violated in this study. Table 4.10 illustrates the correlation matrices for the independent variables of age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activity, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhood, which are used to address Research Question 1 of this study.
Table 4.10

*Pearson Product Moment Correlations for Independent Variables Used in Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Undergrad</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Neigh.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.324</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>.724</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>-.324</td>
<td></td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>-.309</td>
<td>-.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td></td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>-.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>.724</td>
<td>-.309</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td></td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>-.160</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Question 1*

To what degree do age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activities, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhoods predict participation level in a BGSA at a PWI?

To examine the degree to which age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activities, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhoods predicted participation level in a BGSA at a PWI each of these variables were entered into a multiple regression model as predictor variables. Participation level was the criterion variable in this model.

*Null Hypothesis 1.*

Age will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).
*Null Hypothesis 2.*

Type of undergraduate institution will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

*Null Hypothesis 3.*

Type of undergraduate extracurricular activities will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

*Null Hypothesis 4.*

Time elapsed between completing an undergraduate program and entering graduate school will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

*Null Hypothesis 5.*

The racial makeup of participants’ childhood neighborhoods will not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

The regression model using these predictor variables did not yield significant results, $F(16,62) = 1.06, p=.417$ indicating that the predictor variables in this model do not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA. Without a significant $F$ value, null hypotheses 1-4 cannot be tested.

*Research Question 2*

What is the relationship between participation level in a BGSA and black identity for Black graduate students at PWIs?
A Pearson Product Moment correlation was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between participation level in a BGSA and black identity.

Null Hypothesis 1.

There will be no statistically significant relationship between participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) and black identity as measured by the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997).

Pearson Product Moment correlations indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between participation level and black identity. None of the correlations yielded values lower than the .05 level of significance. Table 4.11 provides a summary of this analysis. Based on these results, it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis for this research question.

Table 4.11

Pearson Product Moment Correlations for Participation Level and Black Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Significance Value($p$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centrality</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private regard</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public regard</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilationist</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppressed Minority</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3

To what degree does participation level in a BGSA predict feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support for Black graduate students at PWIs?

To examine the degree to which participation level predicts feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support, a multiple regression analysis was used. The predictor variable for this analysis was participation level in a BGSA. The criterion variables were feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support. Three separate analyses were conducted to address this research question.

Null Hypothesis 1.

Participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) will not significantly predict alienation of Black graduate students at a PWI as measured by the University Alienation Scale (UAS) (Burbach, 1972).

Participation level did not significantly predict feelings of alienation. Each of the subscales for the UAS were entered into a regression model with participation level and none resulted in significant results. The results were as follows: Meaninglessness, $F(1,62) = .389, p = .54$; Powerlessness, $F(1,62) = 3.06, p = .09$; and Social estrangement, $F(1,62) = .99, p = .32$. Table 4.12 provides a summary of these analyses. Given these results it is not possible to reject null hypothesis 1 for research question 3.

Null Hypothesis 2.

Participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) will not significantly predict depression in Black
graduate students at a PWI as measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977).

Participation level did not significantly predict depression scores, $F (1,62) = .145$, $p = .71$. Additional information about this multiple regression analysis can be found in Table 4.13. Based on the results of this analysis, it is not possible to reject Null Hypothesis 2 for Research Question 3.

**Null Hypothesis 3.**

Participation level in a BGSA as measured by the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) will not significantly predict level of social support of Black graduate students at a PWI a measured by a modified version of the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B) (Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart, 1987).

Participation level did significantly predict level of social support. The multiple regression analyses used for this hypothesis suggested that participation level was significant in predicting levels of social support on each subscale of the SS-B: Emotional Support, $F (1,62) = 51.29$, $p = .00$; Socializing, $F (1,62) = 47.06$, $p = .00$; Practical Assistance, $F (1,62) = 54.64$, $p = .00$; Financial Assistance, $F (1,62) = 56.63$, $p = .00$, and Advice/Guidance, $F (1,62) = 44.90$, $p = .00$. These results suggest that participation level in a BGSA explained 45% of the variance in emotional support, 43% of the variance in socializing, 46% of the variance in practical assistance, 47% of the variance in financial assistance, and 42% of the variance in advice/guidance. Table 4.14 provides detailed information about this analysis. Based on the results of this multiple regression analysis, it is possible to reject Null Hypothesis 3 for Research Question 3.
Table 4.12

Multiple Regression Analysis of Participation Level and Alienation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$F$ (1,62)</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>.535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social estrangement</td>
<td>-.127</td>
<td>-.997</td>
<td>.994</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.936</td>
<td>.875</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 63.

Table 4.13

Multiple Regression Analysis of Participation Level and Depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$F$ (1,62)</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>-.381</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 63.

Table 4.14

Multiple Regression Analysis for Participation Level and Social Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$F$ (1,62)</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>.676</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>51.29</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing</td>
<td>.660</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>47.06</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>.687</td>
<td>7.39</td>
<td>54.64</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>.694</td>
<td>7.53</td>
<td>56.63</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice/Guidance</td>
<td>.651</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>44.90</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.707</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>60.88</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 63.
Research Question 4

What aspects of BGSAs are most beneficial to Black graduate students at a PWI?

This question was addressed through examination of responses given on the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ). Additionally, open-ended responses to the following question, “What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful and why” were examined for themes. This question is included on the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ).

Means for each domain assessed by the BGSAQ, social support, personal development, and professional development, were obtained to determine which aspects of BGSAs were most beneficial. Examining the means for these domains suggested that the professional development activities were the most beneficial aspects of participation. The mean score for the professional development domain was 30.45, personal development was 28.49, and social support was 22.17. Table 4.15 provides more information about the sample’s scores on the BGSAQ.

Table 4.15

Descriptive Statistics for the Subscales of the BGSAQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>30.45</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>34.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>28.49</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>31.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>22.17</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 63.
Summary of Open-Ended Responses

Themes were developed after examining the participants’ responses to the following question, “What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful and why?” The researcher was able to place responses to this question into one of two themes that developed: social support and professional development. It is important to note that these themes are consistent with two of the domains from the BGSAQ.

Social Support

Many participants commented that participating in their BGSA allowed them to have connections with other Black graduate students that they might not have otherwise had. Participants also found comfort in knowing that there were other students who “looked like them” that were facing similar struggles. Additionally, the BGSA presented some participants with the opportunity to participate in activities that provided them with a way to relax and unwind from their academic obligations. The following are examples of the responses that participants gave to the question that referred to the social support they received through their BGSA.

“Social events (like dinners and parties) because we are able to talk and discuss issues facing each other and offer solutions and suggestions.”

“Being able to meet other graduate minority students on campus was very beneficial. I pretty much work in [the] lab from 8:30-5pm, and do not venture to other parts of the campus often. By participating in the BGSA I was able to meet other minority students.”

“The forum that it provided to meet other minorities in order to find support for the stresses of both graduate school AND a predominantly white environment. This forum allowed me to meet two people who will be my friends for life.”
“Social outlets. I wouldn’t have much of a social life without them and the people I’ve met there.”

“Just knowing other Black students were here helped me feel better.”

“Fellowship/support network- allows me to share frustrations and express concerns about grad school with someone who can relate with the issues of being a grad student.”

“The fact that it exists gives me comfort in knowing that if I need help with a racial issue or need to meet people it’s there. Also the fact that people are working on behalf of black people to me is helpful.”

“The social events. They have been a nice break in the semester for me.”

*Professional Development*

Participants commented that participation in their BGSA allowed them to participate in activities that taught them about preparing for a job, finding funding for graduate school, as well as assisted them in developing skills they thought would be helpful in the future. The following are examples of the responses that participants gave to the question that referred to the professional development they received through their BGSA.

“Networking events, which is a good way to build business contacts for the future.”

“Opportunity to network not only with fellow students and faculty but professionals in the local community as well.”

“The professional development programs because they prepare me for the workforce.”

“The ability to serve as an outlet for those students who may be isolated in their departments. I have also enjoyed serving as a voice to the graduate administration about the needs of minority graduate students.”
“I have received financial support through my BGSA and have also been able to develop networking and communication skills by communicating with administrators.”

“The networking opportunities have proven to be an invaluable resource in my quest to obtain a masters degree at a predominantly white university.”

“Networking with other graduate students and campus administration, and working with the administration to improve the quality of life for minority students.”

“I gained experience planning and sponsoring events.”

The results provided in this chapter detailed the demographic variables that influenced participation in a BGSA, and also provided information about the impact that level of participation has on the psychological well-being of Black graduate students who participate in BGSAs. These results will be further examined and discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that participation in a Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) had on the psychological well-being of Black graduate students. More specifically, the study examined (a) the demographic variables that may influence participation in a BGSA and (b) the impact that level of participation has on feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, level of social support, and black identity of Black graduate students who participate in BGSAs. The completion of a graduate degree can be a daunting task for anyone. The mere nature of graduate school often times causes a student to question his/her competence. The graduate school experience can also be a very isolating experience. For Black graduate students at PWIs, this undertaking becomes even more complicated by the fact that Predominantly White campuses often make these students feel like unwelcomed visitors through the lack of services offered. Previous researchers have suggested that one way in which Black students attempt to buffer themselves against this isolation is through the creation of organizations such as BGSAs. It was the intent of this study to add to the body of literature in this area by providing information about the impact of participating in such an organization on Black graduate students.

The research questions that were proposed in this study were: a) To what degree do age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activities,
time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood
eighborhoods predict participation level in a BGSA at a PWI?; b) What is the
relationship between participation level in a BGSA and Black Identity for Black graduate
students at PWIs?; c) To what degree does participation level in a BGSA predict feelings
of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support for Black graduate
students at PWIs?; and d) What aspects of BGSAs are most beneficial to Black graduate
students at a PWI?

The final sample for the study consisted of 63 Black graduate students who were
members of their BGSA at one of four PWIs in the southeastern region selected for this
study. Eleven students were from Auburn University, ten students were from The
University of Tennessee, three students were from Virginia Commonwealth University,
and thirty-nine students were from The University of Georgia. Fifty-seven of the
participants identified their race/ethnicity as African-American/Black, four of the
participants identified as Biracial, and two identified as Other. Thirteen of the participants
were male and fifty of the participants were female. Thirty-two of the students were
master’s students, thirty were doctoral students, and one was a juris doctorate student.
Participants ranged in age from 22-39.

To address Research Question 1, a multiple regression analysis was conducted
using age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular
activity, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of
childhood neighborhood as predictor variables and using participation level as the
criterion variable. The analysis for this regression model did not yield a significant result
suggesting that these predictor variables would not be effective in predicting participation
level. These findings made it unnecessary to test the null hypotheses associated with this research question.

To address Research Question 2, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between participation level in a BGSA and black identity. None of the correlations in this analysis yielded significance values lower than the .05 level suggesting that there was no statistically significant relationship between black identity and participation level in a BGSA.

Research Question 3 was addressed through the use of three separate multiple regression analyses to determine the degree to which participation level in a BGSA predicted feelings of alienation, symptoms of depression, and level of social support. Results of the alienation multiple regression analysis indicated that participation level did not significantly predict feelings of alienation. Likewise, the results of the depression multiple regression analysis suggested that participation level also did not significantly predict symptoms of depression. However, the results of the social support multiple regression analysis indicated that participation level did significantly predict the level of social support experienced by participants in each of the areas measured by the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B). The correlation coefficients for the areas of emotional support, socializing, financial assistance, practical assistance, and advice/guidance were all below the .05 level of significance.

To address Research Question 4, means of each of the domains of the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) were examined to determine which aspects of their BGSAs participants found most beneficial. The results of this
examination suggested that participants found the professional development activities most beneficial. Additionally, this question was addressed by summarizing open-ended responses to the question, “What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful and why” into themes. This examination found that participants’ responses corresponded to one of two areas: social support and professional development.

Conclusions and Discussion

Findings Regarding Participation Level and Age, Type of Undergraduate Institution, Type of Undergraduate Extracurricular Activity, Time Elapsed Between Undergraduate and Graduate School, and Racial Makeup of Childhood Neighborhood (Research Question 1).

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that as a group, the predictor variables of age, type of undergraduate institution, type of undergraduate extracurricular activity, time elapsed between undergraduate and graduate school, and racial makeup of childhood neighborhood did not significantly predict participation level in a BGSA. These variables were selected for inclusion in this model based on findings from a study conducted by Harden (2004) in which participants commented that BGSAs appeared to be catering to students who were younger and new graduates from their undergraduate institutions. Additionally, the researcher hypothesized that Black students from HBCUs, Black students who had been involved in similar types of organizations while undergraduates, and Black students who grew up in predominantly Black neighborhoods would all be more likely to participate in a BGSA. However, these hypotheses were disproved. One possible reason why the results of this analysis may not have been significant is that the sample size for the study may not have been large
enough to detect an effect for these variables. It is, however, interesting to note that more of the participants in the sample were involved in community service organizations as undergraduates than in any other type of organization. This result is consistent with findings from Guiffrida (2003). This study found that one of the four reasons that Black students valued their membership in Black Student Organizations is that it gave them the opportunity to give back to the Black community.

Additionally, after examining the responses to the question “If you are not as active with your BGSA as you would like to be, what are the primary reasons why you are not as active as you would like to be?” it seems that a far greater predictor of participation level may be availability of time and/or class schedule. Twenty-six participants commented in some way that they simply did not have the time or flexibility in their schedule to be as active with their BGSA as they would like. More information about responses to this question as well as other supplemental findings are provided in Appendix H.

Findings Regarding Black Identity and Participation Level (Research Question 2).

A Pearson Product Moment correlation indicated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between black identity and participation level in a BGSA. One reason that a statistically significant relationship may not have been found between these variables is that the items of the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ), which is the instrument that was used to measure participation level in this study, did not necessarily tap into the reasons why a student would be drawn to participation in a BGSA. The reasons why a student is drawn to participate in such an
organization may have a more significant relationship with black identity than the benefits a student receives from participating in such an organization. Support for this explanation was found in participants’ responses to the question “Which aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful, and why?” Several participants responded to this question referencing the importance of having other “Black” students to confide in and connect with, suggesting the centrality of a black identity to these participants. These qualitative responses also corroborated the findings of Guiffrida (2003) who found that one of the primary reasons students valued their membership in Black Student Organizations is that the membership gave them a feeling of comfort because they were able to surround themselves with others like them.

*Findings Regarding Participation Level and Alienation (Research Question 3).*

The results of the multiple regression analyses with meaninglessness, powerlessness, and social estrangement, all subscales of the University Alienation Scale (UAS) as the criterion variables and participation level as the predictor variable indicated that participation level did not significantly predict alienation. One reason why participation level may not have been a significant predictor of feelings of alienation in this study may be that the UAS asks questions that refer to a student’s relationship to the university as a whole. Graduate students tend to be less involved with the university as a whole and more involved with their respective programs and departments. Hence, there may not have been the expectation that there would be a feeling of connection to the entire university thereby resulting in lower scores on the UAS.

However, it is important to note that in examining the open-ended responses to the question, “What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful, and why,”
the researcher found many responses that discussed how participation had allowed them to feel a part of the Black community and university community. One participant in this study commented that the aspect he/she found most beneficial about participation was that ability to develop a community of other Black students because “coming from an HBCU [to a PWI], I felt somewhat estranged from Black people.” This finding is consistent with findings from Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) who discovered that the African American undergraduate students in their sample often felt alienated and isolated from other Black students on their predominantly White campuses, and would often look for another Black person when they walked into a room.

Findings Regarding Participation Level and Depression (Research Question 3).

The results of the multiple regression analysis with depression as the criterion variable and participation level as the predictor variable indicated that participation level did not significantly predict symptoms of depression. However, the researcher did find that 67% of the participants in this study had scores consistent with at least a mild level of depression. These scores echo what was found in DeFour and Hirsch (1990). This study examined Black graduate students’ adaptation to the graduate school environment at a PWI and found that 69% of the sample had scores consistent with at least a mild level of depression using the CES-D.

One possibility for the elevation in scores on the CES-D may have been the time frame in which students completed the research packet. Students completed the instruments used for this study in March-April, 2006. The elevation in depressive symptoms found in the study may have been more a reflection of the typical stressors that come with the end of a semester and less a reflection of participants’ overall mood.
Additionally, there is no information about students’ experiences with depressive symptoms prior to this administration of the CES-D. It is possible that there were students in this sample who had a history of clinical levels of depression which may have also contributed to the elevation in scores.

In examining possible explanations for why participation level may not have been a good predictor of depressive symptoms in this sample, one explanation may be that even though 67% of the participants in the study had scores consistent with at least a mild level of depression, they continued to actively participate in their BGSAs. This hypothesis is consistent with the approach that many African Americans take toward mental illness of working through the pain (Head, 2004; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). As a result of the stigma associated with depression and other mental health concerns in the Black community, many choose not to seek help for these concerns but attempt to deal with these issues by working harder or praying harder (Head, 2004). According to Head (2004), many African American men feel that if they simply work harder or pray harder, the depressive symptoms will be lifted. Additionally, many African American women have been socialized to believe that they must always appear happy go-lucky and that succumbing to depressive symptoms is a sign of weakness (Mitchell & Herring, 1998). Mitchell and Herring (1998) also assert that African American women exist within a culture that has long promoted the idea of working hard and taking care of others, despite any feelings of being tired or depressed. This is particularly relevant to the current study as 79% of the sample was female.
Findings Regarding Participation Level and Social Support (Research Question 3).

The results of the multiple regression analyses with emotional support, socializing, practical assistance, financial assistance, and advice/guidance, all subscales of the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B), as criterion variables and participation level as the predictor variable indicated that participation level was indeed a significant predictor in each of these areas of social support. These findings are consistent with previous research that has found that social support is one of the leading determinants to success for Black students at PWIs (Brown, 2000). These findings are also consistent with the findings of Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) who stated that the challenges that graduate school imposes on a student’s psychological well-being may be best combated by interventions that “emphasize mobilization of social support resources, especially resources that may have a significant buffering effect on stress” (p. 717). The results of this quantitative analysis were given further grounding by participants’ responses to the question “Which aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful, and why?” Many of the participants commented that the aspects that were most helpful were the opportunities to socialize and connect with fellow Black graduate students in a less stressful environment.

Findings Regarding Beneficial Aspects of BGSA (Research Question 4).

Examining the means for participants’ scores on each domain of the BGSAQ indicated that professional development activities were the most beneficial aspects of participation in a BGSA. This finding was further reinforced by participants’ qualitative responses to the questions “Which aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most
helpful, and why?” and “What services/programs not sponsored/offered by your BGSA do you think would be helpful to you and other Black graduate students?” Many of the participants responded to the first question by stating that networking opportunities and skills they developed through participating in the organization were most beneficial. Concurrently, many participants also commented that the services/programs they wanted more of were professional development activities such as workshops about presenting at conferences and writing grants. This need for the students in this sample are consistent with the sentiments shared in Dewalt (2004) and Patterson-Stewart et al. (1997), in which students expressed their frustration about having fewer research opportunities and experiencing more difficulty navigating academia. More information about participants’ responses to the question “What services/programs not sponsored/offered by your BGSA do you think would be helpful to you and other Black graduate students?” can be found in Appendix H.

Implications

Implications for University Administrators.

Overwhelmingly, participants in this study found the presence of and participation in a Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) to be beneficial. Given that these organizations are primarily student run and that most do not charge membership dues, the variety and extent of programming offered by these organizations is dependent upon the budget allotted from student fees and the financial support of the university administration. It is also important to note that because these organizations are primarily run by graduate students, the extent of the programming that can be offered is also dependent upon the time and schedule flexibility of these student leaders. For one of the
schools sampled in this study, a greater variety of programming is able to be offered by the BGSA because a graduate assistantship has been awarded to the organization that allows one person to devote 16 hrs/week to completing tasks necessary to carry out the mission of the organization. Support such as this from the university administration shows dedication to the overall well-being and successful matriculation of this population of graduate students and makes it more likely that the types of services and programs that are beneficial to Black graduate students can be offered.

Implications for Black Graduate Student Associations.

While participants in this study felt confident that their BGSAs were providing some services and programs that were beneficial to them as graduate students, there was also the belief that more could be done to address Black graduate students’ needs, particularly their professional development needs. Students requested workshops on topics such as: presenting at national conferences, writing grants, and publishing in research journals. Additionally, students requested activities that would improve their overall well-being such as mental health screenings and group wellness activities. Students also requested programs that would prepare them for life after graduate school, such as workshops on buying a home and investing. In many cases, the kinds of activities that students feel would be beneficial to them would best be accomplished by collaborating with other units on campus such as the graduate school, the university counseling center, the university health center, and the School of Business. Given the busy schedules of the student leaders of BGSAs it appears as though it will be imperative to tap into the variety of resources already offered by many universities, to provide programs specifically suited to the Black graduate student population. More information
about the types of programs and services members of BGSAs would like can be found in Appendix H. Though it is important to note how these organizations could be improved, it is also paramount to highlight the fact that a significant amount of students are pleased with the efforts made by their BGSAs to provide them with opportunities for social support. BGSAs are encouraged to continue to provide these kinds of programs that appear to be important in the success and psychological well-being of Black graduate students. Additionally, BGSAs are encouraged to conduct program evaluations at the end of each year to assess the activities and services that members have found most beneficial and to receive suggestions regarding the programming that students would like to see in the future.

Limitations

1. The small sample size used in this study may have increased the risk of Type I and Type II errors. A larger sample size would allow for more generalizations to be made regarding the results.

2. Some of the instruments used in this study were very lengthy, which appeared to be a deterrent to some students in completing them. Either fewer instruments or shorter instruments may increase the likelihood that students would participate and complete the research packet.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that future research in this area expand upon the items offered in the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) to examine other ways that participation in a BGSA may have been beneficial. Other areas that should be examined include: items discussing how participation decreased
symptoms of depression or anxiety, items discussing how participation affected Black identity, and items discussing how participation made students feel more a part of the university community.

2. It is recommended that future researchers in this area administer research instruments at a time in the semester that may be less stressful than post midterm, spring semester, as the stress associated with this time may unduly influence responses to questions about psychological well-being.

3. It is recommended that future research in this area look at other demographic factors that may influence participation in a BGSA such as proximity of home to campus, class schedule, and work commitments.

4. It is recommended that future research consider personality type as a factor that may influence participation in a BGSA.

5. It is recommended that future research with this population utilize a measure of alienation that assesses alienation from one’s department or program versus alienation from one’s university.

6. It is recommended that future research with this population assess for pre-existing experiences with mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety in an effort to rule this out as a factor that may influence data interpretation.

7. It is recommended that future research in this area employ more qualitative methods of data collection as it appears that some of the benefits obtained through participation in a BGSA may not be captured by quantitative methods.

8. It is recommended that future research in this area compare the psychological well-being of Black graduate students at PWIs that have BGSAs with that of
Black graduate students at PWIs that do not have BGSAs as this may provide more information about the benefits of such organizations.

9. It is recommended that future research in this area include PWIs from other regions of the country to determine whether results differ by region.

10. It is recommended that future research in this area include the perspective of university administrators regarding the benefit of having a BGSA at their institution.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to examine the demographic variables that may influence participation in a BGSA and to examine the impact that participation level in a BGSA has on the psychological well-being factors of alienation, depression, and social support. The findings of this study provided previously unknown information about how participation in a BGSA impacted Black graduate students and also provided multiple areas for further research.
References


Harden, J.K. (2004). *The role of Black graduate student associations in the lives of Black graduate students.* Unpublished manuscript, The University of Georgia.


Appendix A
Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements using the following scale:

(1) Strongly Disagree  
(2) Disagree  
(3) Neither Disagree nor Agree  
(4) Agree  
(5) Strongly Agree

Through my participation in my school’s Black Graduate Student Association,

___1. I have been able to meet other graduate students with similar research interests. 
___2. I have been able to participate in programs that overall made my graduate school experience more enjoyable. 
___3. I have met people whom I consider a part of my primary support system. 
___4. I have learned valuable skills about developing a conference presentation. 
___5. I have been able to participate in meaningful cultural events. 
___6. I have heard about opportunities for graduate assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, etc. 
___7. I have been able to get involved in the community outside of my college campus. 
___8. I have learned valuable information about developing my curriculum vitae or resume. 
___9. I have had an outlet to express frustrations with my department. 
___10. I have been able to network with school officials and administrators. 
___11. I have developed useful leadership skills by serving as an executive officer or committee chairperson. 
___12. I have learned valuable information about navigating academia and other professional venues. 
___13. I have met people who were able to tutor me in an academic area I was having trouble with. 
___14. I have been able to meet another/other graduate student(s) and present with them at a professional conference. 
___15. I have met people with whom I will probably maintain lifelong friendships. 
___16. I have been offered a buffer from some of the racial stresses of being a minority student on a predominantly white campus. 
___17. I have been able to get involved in social justice and advocacy issues that are of importance to me. 
___18. I have learned valuable information about how to conduct myself during a business dinner. 
___19. I have met people whom I consider my family away from home. 
___20. I have been able to be a part of a group that re-affirmed me as a member of a minority group. 
___21. I have met other people who have similar leisure time interests. 
___22. I have developed useful event planning skills. 
___23. I have been able to participate in community service activities. 
___24. I have been able to attend parties and other social events.
Please respond to the following questions accordingly.

1. Have you held any of the following leadership positions in your BGSA? (Circle all that apply.)
   a. President
   b. Vice-President
   c. Treasurer
   d. Secretary
   e. Historian
   f. Parliamentarian
   g. Committee Chairperson
   h. Other ______________________________________________________

2. Approximately how many BGSA meetings do you attend per academic year?
   a. 100%
   b. Between 80-99%
   c. Between 50-79%
   d. Between 20-49%
   e. Less than 10%

3. Approximately how many programs/events sponsored by BGSA do you attend?
   a. 100%
   b. Between 80-99%
   c. Between 50-79%
   d. Between 20-49%
   e. Less than 10%

4. Which activities sponsored by your BGSA are you most likely to attend? (Choose only one.)
   a. Social events (parties, movie nights, etc.)
   b. Cultural events (lectures, plays, etc.)
   c. Professional Development events (resume workshops, career planning events, etc.)
   d. General Body Meetings
   e. Social Activism events (rallies, marches, etc.)
   f. Executive Board Meetings
   g. Other ______________________________________________________

5. Have you ever attended the National Black Graduate Student Association Conference? If so how many times?
   a. Yes   How many times? _________
   b. No

6. Have you held any leadership positions with the National Black Graduate Student Association? Please list these positions below.
7. What aspects of your BGSA have you found to be most helpful, and why?

8. What services/programs not sponsored/offered by your BGSA do you think would be helpful to you and other Black graduate students?

9. If you are not as active with your Black Graduate Student Association as you would like to be, what are the primary reasons why you are not as active as you would like to be?
Please respond true or false to the following statements.

1. I have considered leaving my current institution. T F
2. My graduate school experience would not have been as enjoyable without participation in the BGSA. T F
3. Being in the BGSA made me feel a part of my university’s community. T F
Appendix B
Demographic Information

Name of Institution _______________________________________________________

1. Student Classification
   a. Master’s Student
   b. Specialist Student
   c. Doctoral Student
   d. Medical Student
   e. J.D. Student
   f. Veterinary Medicine Student
   g. Pharm. D. Student

2. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other __________________________

3. Race/Ethnicity
   a. African American/Black
   b. White
   c. American Indian or Alaska Native
   d. Asian
   e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   f. Hispanic
   g. Biracial/Multiracial
   h. Other __________________________

4. Marital Status
   a. Single
   b. Married
   c. Divorced
   d. Separated

5. Age __________

6. Undergraduate Education
   a. Predominantly White Institution
   b. Historically Black College or University
   c. Other ______________________________

7. What year did you graduate from your undergraduate institution?

__________
8. What year did you begin the graduate program in which you are currently enrolled?  
______________

9. Approximately how many Black graduate students are in your department?  
______________

10. Approximately how many Black faculty members are in your department?  
______________

11. Are you a member of a fraternity or sorority?  
   a. Yes  
   b. No  
If yes, did you join as an undergraduate or post-undergraduate?  
______________

12. What was the racial makeup of the neighborhood you lived in for the majority of your childhood?  
   a. Predominantly White  
   b. Predominantly African American/Black  
   c. Predominantly Hispanic  
   d. Equal mixture of racial groups  
   e. Other ______________________________

13. Which of the following activities were you involved in during your undergraduate career? (Please circle all that apply.)  
   a. Black Student Association  
   b. Student Government Association  
   c. Social Fraternity or Sorority  
   d. Professional Fraternity or Sorority  
   e. Professional Organization  
   f. School Newspaper/Radio  
   g. Sports Team  
   h. Debate Team  
   i. Performing Arts Organization  
   j. Honor Society  
   k. Community Service Organization  
   l. Political Organization
Appendix C
Dear Black Graduate Student Association Member,

Please assist me in completing my dissertation by participating in a study entitled “The Impact of Black Graduate Student Associations on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Graduate Students.” The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between participation level in a BGSA and the various aspects of psychological well-being including alienation, depression, social support, and racial identity. Through participation in this study, you may be offering information that will be useful in developing quality programming for Black graduate students across the country.

If you are interested in participating in this study, your contact person will arrange a date and time for you to complete the survey packet. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at (804) 501-8062 or psychdoc@uga.edu. Your assistance with this project is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Joy K. Harden, M.R.C.
Ph.D. Candidate, Counseling Psychology
The University of Georgia
(804) 501-8062
psychdoc@uga.edu
Appendix D
Duties of the Contact Person

Dear Contact Person,

Thank you so much for agreeing to help me collect data for my dissertation entitled “The Impact of Black Graduate Student Associations on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Graduate Students.” Your assistance is truly appreciated!

In this package, you will find a letter to prospective participants describing the study, a prepaid postage label for return mailing, and 75 survey packets. Additionally, you will find a list of frequently asked questions that may be useful to you when you administer the survey packets to the members of your BGSA. Any questions beyond those listed should be directed to me. Below you will find a list of your responsibilities as a contact person.

1. Share the contents of the enclosed “Letter to Participants Describing the Study” with the members of your Black Graduate Student Association.
2. Set up an hour block of time when participants can meet to complete the survey packets.
3. Direct any difficult questions about the surveys or the research to me.
4. Collect completed survey packets.
5. Mail completed survey packets to me at the following address using the provided postage label:

   Joy Harden
   3157 Ellwood Avenue, Apt. B
   Richmond, VA 23221

If you have any questions about your role as the contact person, please do not hesitate to contact me at either (804) 501-8062 or psychdoc@uga.edu.

Sincerely,

Joy K. Harden, M.R.C.
Ph.D. Candidate, Counseling Psychology
The University of Georgia
(804) 501-8062
psychdoc@uga.edu
Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to write my name on any of the instruments in the survey packet?
No, your name should not be placed on any of the instruments in order to protect your anonymity.

Will someone be able to figure out which survey is mine?
Unless you write your name on the instruments, there will be no way to identify which instruments are yours. The purpose of this study is not to single out individual responses but rather to get a collective view about participation in Black graduate student associations.

Can I select more than one answer for some of the questions?
Unless it specifically states that you can choose more than one answer for a question, please do not do so. Please just answer the question with the response that you feel best captures your thoughts or experiences.

Will it be possible for me to find out the results of this study?
If you would like a summary of the results of this study, please email the researcher at psychdoc@uga.edu and let her know that you have participated in the study and would like to be notified of the results. The researcher will keep a list of email addresses, and a summary of the results will be emailed to you.
Appendix E
Cover Letter Consent Document

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study titled “The Impact of Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSA) on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Graduate Students.” The study is being conducted by Ms. Joy K. Harden, a doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. Deryl F. Bailey in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, The University of Georgia, 402 Aderhold Hall, (706) 542-1812.

This study examines the relationships between participation level in a BGSA and the various aspects of psychological well-being including alienation, depression, social support, and racial identity. Through participation in this study, you may be offering information that will be useful in developing quality programming for Black graduate students across the country. Additionally, by participating in this study you have the opportunity to enter yourself into a raffle for a $25 gift card for use at a Barnes & Noble Bookstore. The raffle will occur after all research packets have been collected by the researcher.

Participation in this study involves:

• Completing this survey. It is expected that it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete the survey. Please do not provide your name at any point while completing the survey.

• If you are interested in participating in the raffle, sending an email to Joy Harden, psychdoc@uga.edu, after you have completed the survey. This email should contain only your name and email address so that you can be entered into the raffle for a $25 gift card for use at a Barnes & Noble Bookstore. This email should not contain any information about your responses to the survey so that there will be no links between you and the information you provided in the survey.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can discontinue your participation in the study at any time without penalty by contacting Joy Harden at (804) 501-8062 or psychdoc@uga.edu. Your results will be removed from the research records or destroyed upon your request. You may also skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering. You are asked not to provide your name at any point while completing the survey so that there will be no links between you and the information provided. Any information obtained in this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential except as required by law. By completing the survey online, you are reminded that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the completed survey is received by the investigator standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. Data from the survey will be stored in a file to which only the principal investigator will have access. The results of this study may be published in aggregate form at some point. By clicking the “Next” button below and completing the survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study during the completion of the survey packet or after, please do not hesitate to contact Joy Harden at (804) 501-8062 or psychdoc@uga.edu. Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,

Joy K. Harden, M.R.C.
Counseling Psychology Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Counseling and Human Development
The University of Georgia
(804) 501-8062
psychdoc@uga.edu
Appendix F
Email Announcement of Electronic Version of Study

Dear Black Graduate Student Association Member,

If you have not already completed a survey, please help me collect data for my dissertation by completing a survey on "The Impact of Black Graduate Student Associations on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Graduate Students" by clicking on the link provided below. By completing the survey you have the opportunity to enter a raffle for a $25 gift card for use at Barnes and Noble. The raffle will be held in August 2006 once I have completed data collection. I would really appreciate your help with this. Please send the link to all of your friends as well!

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=833112072968

Sincerely,
Joy K. Harden, M.R.C.
Ph.D. Candidate, Counseling Psychology
The University of Georgia
Department of Counseling and Human Development
(804) 501-8062
psychdoc@uga.edu
Appendix G
Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study titled “The Impact of Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSA) on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Graduate Students.” The study is being conducted by Ms. Joy K. Harden, a doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. Deryl F. Bailey in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, The University of Georgia, 402 Aderhold Hall, (706) 542-1812.

This study examines the relationships between participation level in a BGSA and the various aspects of psychological well-being including alienation, depression, social support, and racial identity. Through participation in this study, you may be offering information that will be useful in developing quality programming for Black graduate students across the country. Additionally, by participating in this study you have the opportunity to enter yourself into a raffle for a $25 gift card for use at a Barnes & Noble Bookstore. The raffle will occur after all research packets have been collected by the researcher.

Participation in this study involves:

- Completing this survey. It is expected that it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete the survey. Please do not provide your name at any point while completing the survey.

- If you are interested in participating in the raffle, sending an email to Joy Harden, psychdoc@uga.edu, after you have completed the survey. This email should contain only your name and email address so that you can be entered into the raffle for a $25 gift card for use at a Barnes & Noble Bookstore. This email should not contain any information about your responses to the survey so that there will be no links between you and the information you provided in the survey.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can discontinue your participation in the study at any time without penalty by contacting Joy Harden at (804) 501-8062 or psychdoc@uga.edu. Your results will be removed from the research records or destroyed upon your request. You may also skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering. You are asked not to provide your name at any point while completing the survey so that there will be no links between you and the information provided. Any information obtained in this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential except as required by law. By completing the survey online, you are reminded that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the completed survey is received by the investigator standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. Data from the survey will be stored in a file to which only the principal investigator will have access. The results of this study may be published in aggregate form at some point. By clicking the “Next” button below and completing the survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research.
If you have any questions or concerns about this study during the completion of the survey packet or after, please do not hesitate to contact Joy Harden at (804) 501-8062 or psychdoc@uga.edu. Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,

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Appendix H
Supplemental Findings

Though not addressed as research questions in this study, additional information gathered through the use of the Black Graduate Student Association Questionnaire (BGSAQ) may also be helpful in shedding light on the role that Black Graduate Student Associations play in the lives of Black graduate students. These supplemental findings may also be of use to university administrations and Black Graduate Student Associations in better addressing the needs of Black graduate students.

Below are examples of the responses to the question “What services/programs not sponsored/offered by your BGSA do you think would be helpful to you and other Black graduate students?” These examples were selected in an effort to address the collective themes of the responses given.

“Workshops on writing up research and getting it published.”

“A job placement service to allow students who are about to graduate to interact with potential employers.”

“Workshops on how to invest, buy a home, and how to start a business.”

“The opportunity to do joint programs with other BGSAs at other campuses.”

“Group wellness activities.”

“Speed dating.”

“Business etiquette training.”

“Townhall meetings with the president of the university specifically for BGSA members.”

“The development of cohorts (especially for students who are isolated within their departments) where members occasionally check on each other.”
“Networking workshops with Black alumni.”

“On campus programs on mental health for Black graduate students.”

“I would like to see my BGSA sponsor more events where members of my BGSA can discuss their research in front of each other so we can gain experience in oral presentations. Also, these discussions allow members to become aware of the interesting work their peers are completing.”

“The State of Black Students Panel.”

“Tax and financial planning seminars.”

“Programs which honor the Black history at our particular institution and within the greater African American community.”

Below are examples of the responses to the question “If you are not as active with your Black Graduate Student Association as you would like to be, what are the primary reasons why you are not as active as you would like to be?” Again, these examples were selected in an effort to address the collective themes of the responses given.

“Too much friction and a lack of organization.”

“Time constraints.”

“My schedule of classes.”

“Because I am an older student already invested in my community.”

“I do not have anything in common with most of the people who are involved with the BGSA. Additionally, the types of activities that I am interested in (professional workshops, mentoring, etc.) are either not offered or only offered at times that are inconvenient.”

“The focus was mainly on the 21-25 crowd that was right out of undergrad.”
“Too cliquish, difficult to feel a part of the group when you don’t already know someone.”

“Apathy, I also don’t see where I fit or better yet, where I can make a difference in my participation in the organization.”

“Academic commitments often take precedence over involvement in this and any other organizations.”

“During my last year of study, I was more focused on research and writing, so I was not as active as I would like to have been.”