Black Female Community College Students' Satisfaction: A National Regression Analysis

Terrell L Strayhorn, The Ohio State University
Royel M Johnson, The Ohio State University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/royeljohnson/3/
Black Female Community College Students’ Satisfaction: 
A National Regression Analysis

Terrell L. Strayhorn and Royel M. Johnson

Department of Educational Studies, College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

Data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire were analyzed for a sample of 315 Black women attending community colleges. Specifically, we conducted multivariate analyses to assess the relationship between background traits, commitments, engagement, academic performance, and satisfaction for Black women at community colleges. Descriptive results provide a profile of Black women who attend community colleges in terms of age, native language, units taken, and grades. Hierarchical linear regression results suggest that our statistical model accounted for 22% of the variance in satisfaction. Significant predictors of Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges include age, effect of family on school work, and social engagement with faculty. Grades may also be significantly related to Black women’s satisfaction, although the relationship was reduced to nonsignificance over successive models. Implications for future policy, practice, and research are highlighted.

College enrollment and attainment rates in the United States reveal an unsettling trend, as we appear to be losing our competitive edge globally. For example, in 1996 the United States ranked second in the world for the number of young people earning associate degrees or higher; today, the U.S. ranks 14th (The Century Foundation, 2013). Gaston Caperton, former president of the College Board, has noted that the growing education deficit is as serious a threat to our nation’s economic well-being as the financial crisis (College Board, 2010). In response to this downward spiral, President Obama announced a goal to increase the nation’s college completion rate to 60% by 2020, adding at least eight million more graduates. To achieve this goal, we will need to provide greater access to college for students and direct more attention to community colleges as vital educational pathways for students and workers in the 21st century (The Century Foundation, 2013).

Indeed, college access has been expanded for many groups over the last 30 years, yet significant gaps across racial/ethnic groups persist. For instance, although 75% of all White high school graduates enroll in college almost immediately following graduation, only 35–50% of African American high school graduates do so (Strayhorn, 2011a). Research reveals that
when African Americans do enroll, they tend to do so at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), less-selective four-year institutions, and two-year community colleges (Baum & Payea, 2004; Ellwood & Kane, 2005; Thomas & Perna, 2004). Community colleges serve as critical pathways for African Americans who go on to earn associate and bachelor degrees.

Presently, about 11 million students are enrolled in community colleges, representing 45% of the college student population nationally. While the majority of students who enter community colleges upon completion of high school have clear intentions for transitioning to four-year institutions, very few do so (The Century Foundation, 2013). Recent data suggest 81% of first-time or beginning community college students intend to obtain a bachelor’s degree in the future; however, less than 12% achieve that goal. Significant racialized gaps exist in terms of community college student degree completion rates; African Americans have the lowest community college completion rates among all races (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Given recent efforts to promote diversity in higher education in tandem with demographic shifts in society, community college students are much more diverse (both economically and racially) today than ever before. Despite enrollment gains in terms of diversity, there has been little-to-no change in terms of degree attainment. For example, upwards of 50% of all African Americans begin their postsecondary career at two-year community colleges, many of whom leave before earning their degree (Chenoweth, 1998; Mortenson Research Seminar on Public Policy Analysis of Opportunity for Postsecondary Education, 2001). More recent data indicate that only 8% of first-time beginning community college students earn associate degrees within five years, and rates vary significantly by race/ethnicity and sex (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). It is important to note that this statistic only includes full-time certificate and degree seeking students. We recognize that students who enter community colleges have many goals in mind. Indeed, some will transfer without earning an associate degree while others will earn certificates or complete courses as desired.

A confluence of factors is associated with degree attainment for African American community college students. Prior research reveals the importance of academic preparation for postsecondary education (Adelman, 1999; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Strayhorn, 2013). For example, development of critical skills deemed necessary for college success (e.g., writing, critical thinking, computation) and access to, and frequent use of, college advising services have shown to be important for community colleges.

Another significant predictor of Black community college students’ success is satisfaction with college—that is, one’s subjective evaluation of their college experience (Borgium & Kubala, 2010; Strayhorn, 2011b, 2012). For example, Strayhorn analyzed data from 503 Black students who responded to the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) and found that background traits and initial commitments accounted for 13% of the variance in their community college satisfaction. Significant predictors included age and family’s impact on school; older Black community college students tend to be more satisfied than younger peers, and those whose families take a lot of time from their schoolwork are less likely to be satisfied than those with no family. Because so few Black community college students earn degrees, and satisfaction is a consistent predictor of success, there is a clear need for more information about factors related to Black students’ satisfaction in community colleges. In this context, success is generally defined as retention and persistence to degree (e.g., Borgium & Kubala, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Strayhorn, 2012). Satisfaction reflects students’
subjective evaluation of their experience at particular institutions (Elliott & Shin, 2002), which led Astin (1993) to conclude: “It is difficult to argue that student satisfaction can be legitimately subordinated to any other educational outcome” (p. 273). It holds importance in and of itself. Second, prior research has shown that some students of color leave two-year community colleges voluntarily—of their own volition—due to unmet expectations, disengagement, or inadequate support that leads to dissatisfaction (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Strayhorn, 2011a, 2011b). All of these suggest the significance of the present study that focuses on a subset of Black students at community colleges.

A large majority of the research on Black community college students focuses almost exclusively on Black men, perhaps in response to the discourse about the “Vanishing Black Male” crisis in higher education (Esters & Mosby, 2007, p. 45). For instance, Strayhorn (2012) estimated the impact of academic and social integration on retention using a sample of African American males at multiple community colleges. He uncovered a statistical association between social integration and satisfaction in college. Several others have conducted studies on Black male community college students’ demographic characteristics, faculty perceptions of academic success, and predictors of leaving school (Wood, 2012, 2013; Wood & Turner, 2011). The weight of scholarly attention directed at Black men in community colleges is warranted given that 50% of all Black men begin their postsecondary career at two-year colleges and many drop out before completing their degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Yet, Black men represent just one segment of the community college student population.

Obscured in the present literature is the situation of Black women who enroll in two-year community colleges in large numbers. Recent reports document that enrollment rates have increased dramatically for Black women at community colleges since 2000 (The Century Foundation, 2013). Black women’s dominant presence at community colleges justifies scholarly attention. But there are other reasons for studying Black women at community colleges. For instance, we have known for some time that Black women and men experience college differently (Cuyjet, 2006; Fleming, 1983; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010); consequently, findings from studies of Black men at community colleges may not apply to Black women. It is also often assumed that Black women must fare well in higher education because they, on average, perform better in high school, on standardized tests, and entrance or placement exams than their same-race male counterparts. This is not always the case. Without empirical testing, assumptions about Black women’s academic success proceed without support and wrongly equate the challenges of K–12 education with the demands of higher education. Assumptions of this kind also diminish the role that external commitments such as work and family life play in terms of shaping one’s odds for academic success in college (Weis, 1985; Strayhorn, 2011a, 2011b, 2012), especially for women studying at community colleges.

The need for research on Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges is clear. What is known about Black women at community colleges can be organized into three major categories. First, researchers have examined trends among faculty members at two-year community colleges, quite often employing large, national databases such as the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) to disaggregate samples by race/ethnicity and sex (Eagan, 2007; Jacoby, 2006; Valadez & Antony, 2001); the weight of evidence suggests that Black female faculty at community colleges tend to be less satisfied with their jobs than their same-race male peers (Flowers, 2005) and other women faculty (Townsend, 1998). A second line of inquiry focuses on Black female administrators at community colleges. For instance, Robinson (1996)
interviewed 14 Black women in senior-level administrative posts at community colleges and found that most exhibited early signs of leadership, have strong spiritual beliefs, and value supportive networks. Other studies have documented Black women’s career trajectories to senior-level positions (Latimore, 2009).

A final group of studies examine Black community college students’ experiences and their motivations for attending college (Weis, 1985; Wood, 2012, 2013). Weis was one of the first to clarify that Black men in her study saw attending community college as a way to “get off the streets,” while Black women saw it as a means of upward social mobility for them and their children, as well as a way to independent living without welfare. Still, we uncovered no contemporary studies that examined Black women’s satisfaction with their community college experience and variables associated with their subjective evaluation of the community college experience. Our study addresses these gaps in the existing literature.

PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

In this study, we analyzed survey data from 315 Black women attending two-year community colleges across the country to explore the relationship between background traits, expectations, engagement, performance, and students’ satisfaction with college. The following research questions guided our analysis:

1. What is the relationship between Black women’s background traits, expectations, engagement, academic performance, and satisfaction with college for those attending two-year community colleges?
2. Which of these factors are the strongest predictors of Black women’s satisfaction with their community college experience?

Answers to these questions have significant implications for future policy, practice, and research, many of which will be discussed in a later section.

THEORETICAL MODEL

The study’s theoretical model (see Figure 1) was developed from an exhaustive review of extant literature on college student satisfaction, community college student experiences, and college student retention, given that nearly 30 years of research suggests satisfaction as an intervening variable for retention/persistence decisions (e.g., Bean, 1980; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bean & Creswell, 1980; Zhang, Han, & Gao, 2008). Our blended theoretical model consists of three major domains that can be organized both temporally and sequentially. The first domain includes fixed factors or background traits, as well as students’ expectations of college, and her initial commitments to the institution and degree, as posited by Tinto (1993) in his well-cited model of student departure from college. Background traits include a student’s race/ethnicity, sex, and marital status. Expectations include one’s educational aspirations and perceptions about the value, quality, and utility of earning a college degree. Commitment refers to the degree to which students are devoted to: (a) the goal of earning a college degree (i.e., goal commitment); and (b) earning their degree from the institution in which they are enrolled (i.e., institutional commitment).
A second domain in our model includes aspects of students’ experiences in college. For example, the model considers community college students’ activities and forms of engagement, based on prior research suggesting the importance of meaningful involvement in campus programs and services and the benefits that accrue to students who are meaningfully engaged in educationally purposeful activities such as clubs, organizations, and out-of-class interactions with faculty members, to name a few (Astin, 1991; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003; Pike, 1996). A long line of research has demonstrated the relationship between academic performance, as measured by grade point average, and college students’ satisfaction and subsequent retention (e.g., Bean & Bradley, 1986; Hagedorn et al., 2001). The weight of empirical evidence suggests a reciprocal relationship exists between performance and satisfaction, as reflected in the study’s model.

Satisfaction, our dependent variable, is shown in the third, and final, component of the model. College student satisfaction is posited as a function of community college students’ background traits, perceptions, and commitments. Satisfaction is also the extent to which students are frequently and meaningfully engaged in educationally purposeful activities that have been deemed *good practices* or important socializing activities that positively influence students’ subjective evaluation of their college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Bean & Creswell, 1980; Strayhorn, 2011b). We agree with Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) about the following:

One of the most inescapable and unequivocal conclusions we can make is that the impact of college [on outcomes like satisfaction] is largely determined by the individual’s quality of effort and level of involvement in both academic and nonacademic activities. (p. 610)

Understanding what Black women do in community colleges may reveal what they learn (i.e., outcomes); how they experience college (i.e., process); and how they feel about their overall experience. The study’s theoretical model provides language for talking about such variables, categories for understanding the relations amongst them, and guidance for making methodological decisions described in the next section.
Method

Design

The study represents a secondary analysis of data drawn from the 2004–2005 administration of the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) sponsored by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Memphis. Since its publication, the CCSEQ has been administered to more than 18,000 students at 56 community colleges. Development of the CCSEQ was guided by research that demonstrates the relationship between academic achievement and the amount of time students devote to college, both in and outside the classroom. It was designed to measure the extent to and frequency with which students involve themselves in the curricular and extracurricular life of college. Uses of the CCSEQ range from institutional assessment and planning to statewide reporting and empirical research on community college students (Douzenis, 1994; Pike, 1996; Strayhorn, 2011b).

Sample

The analytic sample was restricted to African American or Black women only (N = 315). Specifically, we included only those individuals who were currently enrolled in associate’s of arts (AA) or associate’s of science (AS) degree programs at accredited, degree-granting two-year community colleges that offered grades to compute grade point averages (GPAs). In consonance with the theoretical framework upon which this study is based, the analytic sample was delimited so as to account for differences in initial reasons for enrolling between degree- and nondegree-seeking students. This was because those who enroll in community college with intentions of earning a degree are more inclined to be engaged, academically and socially, than those who enroll for other reasons (Borgium & Kubala, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Although this limited the sample to fewer than 400 individuals, (a) the CCSEQ is administered by many predominantly White community colleges that may enroll relatively few Black women; and (b) the sample is still large enough to yield meaningful results from significance tests (Friedlander, Pace, & Lehman, 1990; Stevens, 2002). In addition, confirmatory factor analysis results revealed that the psychometric properties of the CCSEQ were retained in the subsample of Black women (see alpha reliability coefficients in next section).

A large majority of the analytic sample spoke English as a native language (98%). Approximately 68% of the Black women in our sample took classes during the day while only 21% took some day and evening classes at their community college. Fifty-three percent of the sample consisted of African American women under 23 years old, and 74% planned to transfer to a four-year school, in keeping with national trends. Only one-third indicated that they had no job, and approximately 49% of them spent one to six hours (per week) on campus not in class. Table 1 presents a summary of details for each of these traits including their community college grades.

Variables

The dependent variable used in this study reflected the degree of Black women’s satisfaction with their community college experience. College satisfaction is generally defined as a psychological,
subjective evaluation of one’s college experience (Bean, 1980). Drawing on theoretical underpinnings from both attrition and retention research, satisfaction with college is a consistent predictor of intent to remain at an institution, which is highly correlated with actual retention and persistence decisions. We assessed students’ satisfaction using two items designed to measure (a) whether a respondent would choose the same college if she had to do it over again and (b) the extent to which college is stimulating and exciting. Responses were averaged to create a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–19 years</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28–39</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 and above</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English native language?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes meet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day only</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening only</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some day &amp; evening</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In work-study program?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most important reason for attending?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare to transfer</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for new job</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay current or advance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interest</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve basic skills</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades at 2-year college?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A−/B+</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B−/C+</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/C− or lower</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No grades</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on campus not in class?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 hours</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–6 hours</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–9 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–12 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Students attending two-year community colleges without a grading system (i.e., ‘no grades’) were removed from the analysis, because GPA was included as an independent variable. Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.
composite variable representing a participant’s overall satisfaction with her two-year college experience (alpha = 0.71). This procedure is consistent with suggestions offered by Pace (1984), and reliability coefficients reflect those reported by others in previous CCSEQ-based studies (Lehman, 1991; Strayhorn, 2012).

The independent variables for the present study were conceptualized according to the theoretical framework that informed our work. For instance, one set of independent factors measured Black women’s social engagement with community college peers. One item asked students to rate the frequency with which they “talked with students from different religions.” Responses were placed on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (very often). For this analysis, we operationalized three social engagement scales: social engagement with faculty members (2 items, alpha = .61), peers (6 items, alpha = .90), and with campus life (7 items, alpha = .83).

Another set of independent factors measured Black women’s academic engagement in community colleges. Similar to social engagement, we operationalized academic engagement using two scales: academic engagement with faculty members (6 items, alpha = .83) and in class (10 items, alpha = .88). Based on previous research, we included three other measures of students’ academic engagement: time spent studying; number of credits/units taken in recent term; and total credits/units taken at the college they attend. Number of units taken ranged from 1 (less than 6) to 5 (more than 15). Precedence for using this item as a measure of commitment was set by prior studies (Strayhorn, 2011b, 2012; Sutton, 2006).

Academic performance was measured in keeping with prior research. For instance, Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, and Pascarella (1996) found it useful to view academic integration as a function of grades. Thus, we used an item that measured participants’ grades ranging from 1 (lower than C–) to 6 (mostly A’s). Academic performance has long since been the strongest predictor of college student success, even at community colleges (Strayhorn, 2013).

Lastly, we employed a rigorous set of statistical controls. Statistical controls included background traits such as age (in years) and native language. There also were measures that assessed the impact of one’s family commitments (Nora et al., 1996) and job responsibilities (Astin, 1993) on her schoolwork at the community college. Impact of family and job commitments on one’s schoolwork was rated by two separate items placed on the same scale ranging from 1 (no job/family) to 4 (big impact/takes a lot of time). Statistical controls were introduced to isolate the net effect of academic and social engagement on African American females’ satisfaction with their community college experience. Net effect refers to the “effect after having controlled for the effect(s) of some [intervening] variables” (Vogt, 1999, p. 189).

Before discussing how data were analyzed, one point about how we operationalized variables and developed scales. Use of single-item versus multiitem scales has been hotly contested over many decades. Most recommend using multiple items when developing scales in survey studies as results may vary across studies depending on the criterion variable under consideration and whether single- or multiitem scales were employed (Gardner, Cummings, Dunham, & Pierce, 1998). Multiitem scales help to “average out errors and specificities that are inherent in single items, thus leading to increased reliability and construct validity” (Diamantopoulos, Sarstedt, Fuchs, Wilczynski, & Kaiser, 2012, p. 436). Despite their widespread use, there is persuasive evidence that single-item measures can have predictive validity similar to multiitem scales when “an attribute is judged to be concrete, [thus] there is no need to use more than a single item [. . .] to measure it . . .” (Rossiter, 2002, p. 313). Given the concreteness of certain attributes and
experiences (e.g., age, grades, family commitments), we used single-item measures from the CCSEQ database. We used multiitem scales for all other attributes.

Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviations for all independent and dependent variables included in the analysis. Second, correlation analyses were conducted to explore preliminary linkages amongst the variables. Third, hierarchical linear regression tests were employed to measure the influence of predictor variables on satisfaction with college among a sample of African American women at two-year community colleges, controlling for differences in background traits and external commitments.

Hierarchical regression analysis is defined as follows:

... a method of regression analysis in which independent variables are entered into the regression equation in a sequence specified by the researcher in advance. The hierarchy (order of the variables) is determined by the researcher’s theoretical understanding of the relations among the variables. (Vogt, 1999, p. 129)

In the present study, variables were entered into the equation in three blocks: (a) background traits and initial commitments; (b) students’ academic and social engagement variables; and (c) academic performance as measured by grades. The next section presents results from the statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Correlation analyses (see Table 2) revealed a number of statistically significant associations among the dependent, independent, and control variables at both the \( p < .05 \) and \( p < .01 \) levels. We expected several of these to be significantly associated because they represent multiple measures of a hypothesized construct (e.g., academic engagement with faculty, social engagement with peers). Exploratory correlation results also justified the use of multivariate regression techniques to estimate simultaneously the net effect of individual sets of variables (i.e., Xs) on the outcome (i.e., Y). Thus, we proceeded to analyze sample survey data using hierarchical linear regression techniques.

Hierarchical linear regression tests were conducted to evaluate the relationship between background traits, commitments, engagement, grades, and Black women’s satisfaction with their community college experience. The linear combination of factors had a statistically significant influence on Black women’s community college satisfaction, \( F(16,298) = 5.16, p < .01 \). The regression coefficient was 0.47, indicating that approximately 22% (adjusted \( R^2 = .18 \)) of the variance in Black women’s satisfaction was explained by factors in the final regression model. Four statistically significant predictors of satisfaction were identified: age (\( B = -0.14, p < .01 \)); affect of family on school work (\( B = -0.11, p < .05 \)); social engagement with faculty (\( B = -0.22, p < .01 \)); and grades (\( B = 0.05, p < .05 \)). Table 3 presents a summary of the final regression results.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SATIS</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>LANG</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Job EFF</td>
<td>−0.15**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Family EFF</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>WRKSTU</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>−0.27**</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>−0.23**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AE-FAC</td>
<td>−0.19**</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>AE-Class</td>
<td>−0.26**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>STUDY</td>
<td>−0.16**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Units-T</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>−0.30**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>−0.16**</td>
<td>−0.15**</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Units-T2</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>SE-C</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>−0.12*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SE-FAC</td>
<td>−0.31**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>SE-Peers</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* SATIS = Satisfaction; LANG = English is native language; Job EFF = Job affects schoolwork; Family EFF = Family affects schoolwork; WRKSTU = Work study; AE-FAC = Academic engagement with faculty; AE-Class = Academic engagement in classroom; STUDY = Hours spent studying; Units-T = units taken during term; Units-T2 = Units taken total; SE-C = Social engagement with campus; SE-FAC = Social engagement with faculty; GPA = Grades.

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.
Given the hierarchical design of this study, we are able to discern the added predictive validity of variables for each block of the equation. For instance, while the last, full model (including all predictors) accounts for 22% of the variance in Black women’s community college satisfaction, background traits and initial commitments alone account for 13% of the total explained variance ($R^2_{Model1} = .134$). Academic and social engagement variables explain another 8% ($R^2 = .21$, $\Delta R^2 = .076$) and grades, while significant, add about 1% of explained variance ($R^2 = .22$, $\Delta R^2 = .007$). Part and partial correlations suggest that age ($r_{partial} = .24$) and social engagement with faculty ($r_{partial} = .21$) are the strongest predictors of Black women’s community college satisfaction. We discuss these findings in the context of existing knowledge in the next section.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between background traits, expectations, engagement, performance, and Black women’s satisfaction with community college. The following research questions guided our analysis:

1. What is the relationship between Black women’s background traits, expectations, engagement, academic performance, and satisfaction with college for those attending two-year community colleges?
2. Which of these are the strongest predictors of Black women’s satisfaction with their community college experience?
Results from this analysis not only answer our primary research questions but also suggest several major conclusions that advance our collective knowledge about Black women’s experiences at two-year community colleges.

First, results demonstrate that there is a relationship between Black women’s background traits, expectations, engagement, performance, and satisfaction with community colleges. This is in consonance with the study’s theoretical framework. Recall that the statistical model accounted for just under a quarter (22%) of the variance in Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges. And while this lends partial support to the hypotheses embedded in our theoretical model—for instance, that background traits like age are significantly related to Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges—results also raise questions about the applicability of traditional satisfaction models to community college students. Explaining 22% of the variance in satisfaction leaves 78% of the variance in satisfaction unexplained by the model. Future researchers should consider this point when building upon this work. They should include factors untapped by our model—such as finances, psychological variables such as emotional awareness or self-efficacy—and more environmental assessments that elicit students’ perceptions of campus climate, which have all shown to be important for community college students (Downey, 2003; Morris & Daniel, 2008).

Second, results from this secondary analysis of CCSEQ data suggest that age is the strongest predictor of Black women’s satisfaction with their community college experience. It has a greater influence on her satisfaction than other factors like number of credits taken, social engagement with campus life, or her intentions to transfer to a four-year institution. While perhaps surprising, given previous research on student satisfaction at two- and four-year institutions suggesting the importance of academic and social engagement (Bean, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), results from this study may indicate that age takes on heightened importance for Black women at community colleges. Given the paucity of research on racial/ethnic minority women at community colleges, it is difficult to discern whether our findings reflect a unique discovery for Black women or generally reflect those presented elsewhere in the community college student literature. For example, in a previous study of Black men, Strayhorn (2012) found that age was related to their satisfaction with college, suggesting that older Black male community college students tend to be less satisfied than their younger counterparts. The reverse is true for Black women in our study—older students tend to be more satisfied than their younger counterparts. Because community college students tend to be older, results from the present study may be far-reaching and suggest the need for intervention. It may be the case that younger Black women encounter academic or social challenges (e.g., use of technology, faculty perceptions, role conflict) that negatively influence their overall evaluation of community college. On the other hand, this finding may reflect the impact of detractors or external commitments such as work duties, family responsibilities, children and other dependents, financial worries, and even health concerns on Black women’s educational experiences at community colleges. With time and age, perhaps Black women develop strategies for managing these responsibilities in tandem with schoolwork and, therefore, feel more satisfied with their experience than those who may be younger, less experienced, and face difficulty balancing multiple roles. All of this suggests a clear need for additional research on Black community college students disaggregated by age and sex. Results from our study add to the existing literature by clarifying the relative strength of each factor’s impact on satisfaction for Black women at community colleges, the first contemporary study of this kind. Third, Black women’s social engagement with community college faculty members
was positively associated with her satisfaction with college. That is, Black women in our sample who engaged faculty socially in frequent and meaningful ways tended to be more satisfied with their collegiate experience than their peers who did not engage faculty often, if at all. We also learned that Black women’s engagement with faculty members at community colleges exerted the second largest influence on satisfaction, based on partial correlation results. Our results are consistent with previous studies on college student engagement and the role that faculty members play in promoting positive outcomes about college (Kuh et al., 2003; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991). Indeed, students benefit from meaningful engagement in educationally purposeful activities and social involvement with faculty, although past engagement research focuses mostly on four-year colleges. Results from our study, however, demonstrate that the same holds true for Black women at two-year community colleges. Regardless of their background characteristics and initial commitments, Black women at community colleges who engage faculty frequently and meaningfully tend to be more satisfied than their peers who do not. Satisfied students often go on to become academically successful students, too.

Related to our finding regarding age that was discussed in a previous section, we also uncovered an inverse relationship between family effect on school work and Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges. In other words, Black women in our sample who reported that their family responsibilities greatly affect their schoolwork tended to be less satisfied with college than their counterparts with no family or whose families have little effect on school. Sociologists and education scholars have directed considerable attention to the role that family plays on students’ success in higher education, although our study contributes new information to what is known about Black women at community colleges. Examining ecological factors, such as family or work responsibilities, has been the approach of choice of those who believe that social identities of race, class, and gender intersect and simultaneously influence students’ beliefs, choices, and pathways. In this study, we found evidence that some Black women at community colleges may struggle to succeed due to shouldering enormous family responsibilities (e.g., child-rearing, finances) or facing difficulty balancing such responsibilities with demanding schoolwork. Again, results not only extend previous understandings but also may provide clues to areas that can be addressed through future program interventions and workshops.

Fifth, grades significantly predict satisfaction with college among Black women at two-year community colleges. Results are consistent with research that has demonstrated the relationship between academic performance, as measured by GPA, and college students’ satisfaction and subsequent retention (Bean & Bradley, 1986; Strayhorn, 2013). Similar results to ours were reported in Strayhorn’s (2012) study of Black men at community colleges. In short, students’ academic readiness and performance in school is related to their overall evaluation of the community college experience—indeed, community college satisfaction may be a function of how confident one feels about her ability to perform well and accomplish such tasks. The correlational design of this study limits what we can say with any degree of certainty about the causal relationship here—for example, is it that Black women at community colleges who do well academically feel more satisfied? Or, is it that Black women at community colleges who feel satisfied then do well academically? Additional research using experimental or quasi-experimental (e.g., regression discontinuity) designs is needed to test the underlying causal mechanism and to account for additional factors related to academic performance for Black women at community colleges.
Results from the present study have implications for future practice, policy, research, and theory. This study was significant for several campus constituencies. One group that might benefit from the results of this study includes those who work in student services at community colleges. Results from this analysis provide academic advisors and deans with information about the influence that family responsibilities can have on Black women’s satisfaction and subsequent success at community colleges. Recall that Black women in our sample who reported that family life significantly affected school work tended to be less satisfied with their community college experience compared to their same-race female peers who reported that family life had little-to-no influence on their school work. Academic advisors, student support staff, and academic deans might use this information to assess the work-life balance of Black women attending their two-year institution, identify students who may be placed at-risk for failure by shouldering enormous family responsibilities, and provide additional support to such students through childcare services, marital counseling, time management workshops, and even flexible degree programs that offer day, evening, and online courses, to name a few. Talking directly to Black women about their family responsibilities and offering strategies for managing family, work, and school duties can make a difference in terms of community college students’ overall opinion and ultimate success.

Results from this study have important implications for policy. Recall that age was the most significant predictor of Black women’s college satisfaction. Specifically, older Black female students tended to be more satisfied with college than younger peers. Findings may point to both areas of success and concern. For example, what seems to work for older Black women at community colleges that may not work for younger Black women? What can each group learn from the other? And how can admissions staff use these results when establishing university policies about admission criteria, forms of university aid or support, and elements of the application that yield information about students’ work responsibilities, external commitments, and academic readiness for college-level study. Establishing new or revising existing admissions policies might also lead to enrolling many more students who will be satisfied with their college experience, transfer to four-year institutions, and serve as positive alumni ambassadors for the college.

Findings from this analysis are important for future research. As noted, prior research has disproportionately focused on the satisfaction of students at four-year institutions, Black men, and Black students broadly. This study sought to fill this gap by providing information on Black women at community colleges. Still much more is needed. Future studies might employ Black women samples from both two- and four-year institutions, comparing differences across institutional type. While this study represents an initial investigation of the relationship between Black women’s background traits, expectation, engagement, academic performance, and satisfaction with community colleges, future research might expand this line of inquiry in a number of directions. For example, researchers might control for additional variables such as psychological disposition or test scores. Other work might employ qualitative methods, such as interviewing or document analysis, to study closely how Black women experience community colleges, how they negotiate work, family, and school responsibilities, and supports that enable their success.

The study was significant in terms of future theory. To date, satisfaction theory has focused on how students’ background traits, forms of involvement/engagement, and academic performance relate to students’ subjective evaluation of their college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Bean,
1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Much of this research focuses on student satisfaction at four-year institutions using data from students in the 1980s and 1990s. The present study offered contemporary insights into the effect of these factors on Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges. For instance, we found that age, social engagement with faculty, grades, and the effect of family on school work are significantly related to Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges. This information might be used to revise existing, or develop new, theory to include such variables as core elements of a community college student satisfaction model that accounts for the realities of students’ experiences at two-year community colleges, which can be open access, nonresidential, largely vocational, predominantly Black, all or none of these (Carroll, 1988; Levin & Kater, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study provide useful information about the relationship between background traits, engagement, performance, and Black women’s satisfaction at community colleges. Results offer clues about various ways academic and student affairs professionals can respond effectively to the needs of such students, thereby possibly increasing their satisfaction and subsequent success. Findings contribute to what’s known about Black students at community colleges and what’s known about Black women specifically.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors acknowledge the Center for Higher Education at the University of Memphis for providing access to the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) data for the purposes of this funded project.

REFERENCES


