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# ANNUALS OF THE NEXT GENERATION

A Journal of the Center for African American Research  
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**ANNUALS OF THE NEXT GENERATION**  
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# ANNUALS OF THE NEXT GENERATION

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Increasing numbers of federal court decisions have lifted desegregation orders; consequently, elaborate student re-assignment plans are replacing court ordered racial balancing. Magnet schools, as a means for racial and economic integration, are crucial for enhancing equity in growing numbers of urban districts. Therefore, the quality of integration in magnet schools should be of interest to parents, educators, and policymakers. Using qualitative data attained through 14 in-depth student interviews and 10 hours of classroom observations, the authors explored middle school students' perceptions of community in a racially and socially diverse magnet school. While most students attest to the importance of diversity, our single-case study reveals that most students do not interact across racial lines, nor do they recount friendships across social class. Thus, our analysis shows that while students value diversity, few capitalize on opportunities to engage meaningful relationships across race and social class.

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This study examines the influence of the teacher and parent on the academic achievement of African American students. The participants were African American students enrolled in a public high school in northern Colorado. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed to determine the influence of teachers and parents on the academic achievement level of African American students. The results of the data analysis indicate that African American female students are encouraged to achieve in school more by their teachers than African American male students. The results also revealed that parents and teachers both play a vital role in the success of African American students in the classroom.

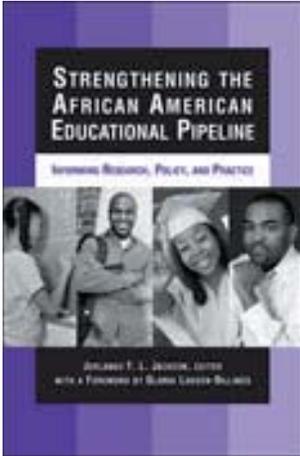
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Despite the removal of institutional barriers, persistent gaps still remain in postsecondary participation among groups of U. S. youth, current National Center for Education Statistics (2005) comparisons indicate that gender, racial-ethnic identification, and privilege continuously contribute to these enduring divides. In an effort to further elucidate traditional choice models, this study investigates the differences in predisposition influences among students of different gender, racial-ethnic background, and levels of privilege. The investigation illuminated the difference in predisposition influences among these groups that potentially bear differential postsecondary participation and education aspirations. The findings highlight some implications these enduring difference have for the methods by which schools, communities, and U. S. society as a whole assist students' transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

**Strengthening the African American  
Educational Pipeline  
Informing Research, Policy, and Practice**



Jerlando F. L. Jackson - Editor  
Gloria Ladson-Billings - Foreword

Focusing on pre-K–12 schools, higher education, and social influences, this book examines the following question: What systemic set of strategies is necessary to improve the conditions for African Americans throughout the educational pipeline?

“This book is a must read for all policy agents responsible for making decisions in reference to African Americans in education and will surely emerge as the seminal piece on this topic.” — Congresswoman Gwendolynne S. Moore, 4th District of Wisconsin

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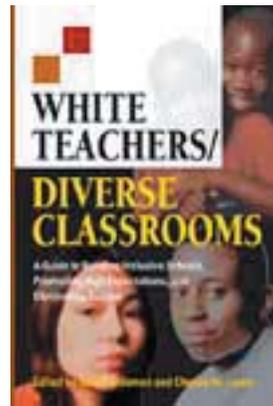
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**White Teachers / Diverse Classrooms  
A Guide to Building Inclusive Schools, Promoting  
High Expectations, and Eliminating Racism**

Julie Landsman - Editor  
Chance W. Lewis - Editor

This book encourages reflection and self-examination, calls for understanding how students can achieve and expecting the most from them. It demonstrates what’s involved in terms of recognizing often-unconscious biases, confronting institutional racism where it occurs, surmounting stereotyping, adopting culturally relevant teaching, connecting with parents and the community, and integrating diversity in all activities.

“The amazing thing about the book is that these authors wrote separately from one another, from different locales, yet there are common themes that all 20 hit on for building inclusive school communities and eliminating the monster racism from that place we wish could be a safe haven for every boy and girl....This is a very good book for teachers to put on their shelves; I recommend its use at the university level as a teaching tool as well.”  
-- Henry C. Griffith, Sr., Dublin, OH, City Schools ,  
Multicultural Review



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## **Introduction: Start of a New Era**

*Brandon D. Daniels*

*The University of Wisconsin - Madison*

When The Center for African American Research and Policy was created in 2005, our goal was to engage in scholarly research in order to advance critical discourse and promote informed decisions as it pertains to policy issues confronting African Americans in both the academy and the society at-large. The Center staff felt that that one way to advance this critical discourse, was to provide a outlet for African American graduate students to showcase their research. We wanted to create a publication where these emerging African American scholars could not only feel comfortable submitting their work, but a publication that stimulate dialogue among all scholars of color. Soon *Annals of the Next Generation* was born with the charge to start a new era by showcasing research produced by African American graduate students.

The three articles that were selected for the inaugural issue of the *Annals of the Next Generation* exemplify the intended purpose of this journal - to showcase innovative scholarship and questions pertaining to African Americans through a critical lens. The first article by Aaron A. Baker and Sheneka M. Williams of the Peabody College at Vanderbilt University use qualitative data to explore middle school students' perceptions of community in a racially and socially diverse magnet school. Next, Bruce B. Douglas of Colorado State University used data to examine the influence of the teacher and parent on the academic achievement of African American students. Lastly, Baranda J. Fermin from Michigan State University used data to examine how gender, racial-ethnic identification, and privilege continuously contribute to the gap in postsecondary participation.

Overall, the studies in this inaugural issue personify the name of this journal: *The Next Generation*. The authors in this issue and future issues are the next generation of African American researchers and scholars; these are the individuals that will be teaching and molding the next group of African American scholars. Let the new era begin!

*You may contact the author at:*

*Brandon D. Daniels - [bdaniels@caarpweb.org](mailto:bdaniels@caarpweb.org)*

## **Adolescent Perceptions of Diversity within Educational and Social Settings: Implications of Race and Social Class**

*Aaron A. Baker and Sheneka M. Williams*

*Peabody College, Vanderbilt University*

Since the Brown decision in 1954, magnet schools have become a preferred reform vehicle for addressing desegregation in urban districts nationally (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Blank & Archibald, 1992; Rogus, 1996). Once used extensively as part of court ordered desegregation plans throughout America in the 1970s (Clincy, 1995; Yon, Nesbit, & Algozzine, 1998), most magnet school plans are now touted as effective desegregation tools (Black, 1996; Blank & Archibald, 1992; Clincy, 1995). Many researchers believe that they are both popular as a policy option and successful at achieving racial diversity because magnet schools attract diversity rather than mandate it (Gersti-Pepin, 2002). Nevertheless, scholars differ on the overall efficacy of magnet schools in terms of the “quality” of education they provide all children within the school and in terms of whether students within magnet programs interact across racial lines (Dickinson, Holifield, Creer, & Holifield, 2000; McNeil, 2000).

Although the bulk of research on magnet schools has targeted high school students, the majority have focused on effects of racial diversity on students’ outcomes (e.g., Orfield, 2002), few field-based studies have focused on adolescent middle school students. Additionally, relatively little research has been conducted to examine how successfully “magnet schools create physical mixing of students of different races within school walls, let alone constructive relationships among them” (Dickinson, Holifield, Creer, & Holifield, 2000, p. 392). Thus, while magnet programs are popular mechanisms for achieving racial diversity, we know little about how these programs impact student experiences and their views of race (Gersti-Pepin, 2002). Therefore, in an effort to better understand how magnet school students make meaning of their lived and perceived racial experiences, this study asked: How race conscious<sup>1</sup> and class conscious<sup>2</sup> are middle school magnet students? In this study, we attempt to capture and describe the extent of race and/or class-consciousness among magnet school students, and the nature and orientation of their values regarding diversity by engaging the students in rich discussions about their experiences at school. Thus, our intention is to offer new insight into the manner in which magnet school students perceive and experience the physical mixing of students of different races and social classes by giving voice<sup>3</sup> to students’ attitudes, values, behaviors, and beliefs. In-depth interviews

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<sup>1</sup> Race consciousness refers to one’s awareness of his/her racial identity and group membership (Cross, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Class consciousness refers to one’s perception of the meaning of social class as generating factors that influence social position (Durrant & Sparrow, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this manuscript the terms Black and African-American are used. Most often when “Black” is used, this is because we are quoting a student or an author. We feel it is important to use the language and the sentiment provided by our interviewees.

regarding how students perceive and value racial diversity at school, and their thoughts on the social climate and social relations were conducted with students from a single magnet school in middle Tennessee. The primacy accorded the students' voices reflects a deliberate effort to capture their truths and avoid distorting their stories.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks**

All social research rests on a set of assumptions concerning the nature of the problem they address, and the characteristics and needs of the target population (Morris, 2004). The following theoretical frameworks and review of relevant literature helps to illuminate some of the assumptions related to this study, and provides a background on some of the concepts needed for evaluating perceptions and experiences of the students. The key concepts and theories grounding this study are derived from research on race and identity development (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990), contact theory (Allport, 1954; Cook, 1969), and social balance theory (Brockner & Swap, 1976; Moody 2002).

#### *Race and Class Consciousness*

Interestingly, despite recent (and imminent) federal court decisions to eliminate court ordered school desegregation—decisions tantamount to exclaiming race no longer matters in our schools— researchers continue to argue that race matters to all people in our country; whether White or not, especially in our schools (Banks, 1998; Milner, 2003; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Many hold that the world consists of racial individuals, including teachers and students, who reap the benefits, privileges, as well as hardships of racism because of their racial heritage. Thus, some research has concluded that such racialized experiences give rise to race consciousness, which emerges for members of both the dominant group and the subordinated racial class (Durant & Sparrow, 1997; Ferguson, 1936; Handy, 1984).

For the purposes of this study, race consciousness is defined as one's awareness of his/her racial identity and group membership, as reflected by attitudinal expressions of identity, devotion, pride, behavior, etc (Cross, 1991). As a function of racial identity development (which is discussed further below), race consciousness may be expressed in different forms, and is not static due to social changes, transformations, and stratification occurring within a racial group (as well as within the larger society). Therefore, the type and degree of race consciousness of members of a particular racial group may vary over time.

Another assumption explored in this study is that attitudes toward race and class are shaped by students' experiences and their status within race and class hierarchy. Since social class also stratifies America, just as race consciousness can emerge from racialized experiences, class-consciousness can emerge among members of both dominant and subordinate groups (Durant & Sparrow, 1997). With this in mind, class-consciousness is defined as one's perception of the meaning of social class as generating factors that influence social position. Interestingly, some social scientists argue (e.g. Handy, 1984; Wilson, 1987), like those proponents of unitary status and the end of court-ordered desegregation, that race and racism no longer matter as much as social class and classism.

While W.E.B. Dubois (1969) proclaimed, over a century ago that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men...in America" (p.17) and as suggested above, some researchers contend that the problem no longer persists in twenty-first century. Wilson (1987), for example,

argues that race is much less a factor in the lives of minorities than it once had been. According to Wilson, the problem of the color line has evolved into economic and social structure problems best described by Wilson as “social isolation” and “concentration effects.”

Social isolation and concentration effects are generated by increases in the size of the service sector, and decreases in the size of the production sector (Wilson, 1987). Consequently, the residents of the inner city who possess the necessary level of education earn better jobs, take those jobs, and ultimately move away from inner cities. It is in this manner that concentration effects and social isolation are produced: educated minorities who possess financial capital, human capital, and social capital leave the inner city, taking all of their capital with them. Thus, in the context of this study, as we try to determine how race and class impact adolescent perceptions of diversity within educational and social settings, it is critical that we consider the extent to which students perceive and experience both social isolation and concentration effects.

Before adolescents can truly perceive diversity, they must understand how they perceive themselves as racialized beings. To that end, one’s racial identity development may affect the way he/she perceives diversity within educational and social settings. We offer Cross’s Model of Nigrescence and Helm’s Model of White Identity Development to better explain adolescent racial identity development.

### *Cross’s Model of Nigrescence*

Cross’s (1991) model of Black racial identity development provides a method by which we can begin to explore and understand endemic racism and its impact on race consciousness. The model, outlined below, follows five stages in a process called “Nigrescence,” the journey to a healthy Black identity; those stages include Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization/Commitment.

During the *Pre-Encounter* stage, Black people have not confronted racism personally. Many perceive their Blackness as inferior or deficient. People in this stage may harbor anti-Black feelings, rejecting any symbols of Blackness, or they may purport race neutrality with statements like “I am a human-being who happens to be Black.”

In the *Encounter* stage, a racist circumstance or particular event (e.g., recognition of racial profiling) transform a pre-encounter Black person’s understanding of his or her racial self. “A person’s identity filters incoming experiences so that the information ‘fits’ into his or her current understanding of self” (p. 200). Provoked by feelings of anger, guilt, and confusion, Black people in this stage begin to perceive and acknowledge experiences of racism. Ultimately, this stage initiates a deeper search for understanding Blackness (Laughter, Baker, Williams et al., 2005).

The point of *Immersion/Emersion* marks a period of transition; a Black person in this stage wants to shed the pre-encounter identity, but remains uncertain about what Blackness should mean to them and how to become the “right kind” of Black person. In an attempt to tear down their old perspectives on race and construct a new identity, Black people in the Immersion part of this stage surround themselves with symbols of (e.g., dress, hairstyles, and flags) and reject Whiteness. Their worldview is polarized and simplistic: “Black is beautiful; White is evil.” Emersion begins the process of emerging from this simple, dichotomized view of race. For example, a Black teacher may expand his or her understanding of students of color to include more than just Black children (Laughter, Baker, Williams et al., 2005).

A development of security and pride in one’s sense of Black identity characterizes *Internalization*. As Locke (1925) suggests, Black people in the internalization stage profess,

“We wish our race pride to be a healthier, more positive achievement than a feeling based upon the realization of the shortcomings of others” (p. 9). The new and robust identity performs three dynamic functions in a person’s daily experiences: (a) it protects a person from psychological insults resulting from endemic racism; (b) it provides a sense of belonging; and (c) it provides a foundation for carrying out transactions with people across race and culture (Cross, 1991).

The final stage of *Internalization/Commitment*, which is not necessarily reached by those in the internalization stage, is characterized by a “sustained interest in Black affairs” (Cross, 1991, p. 220). Thus, this stage is exemplified by people for whom racial awareness becomes a permanent way of life (e.g., Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Dr. King). Other than such a commitment, this stage is virtually indistinguishable from Internalization.

### *Helms’s Model of White Identity Development*

As the “norm” of American society, the White racial identity by definition seeks to camouflage itself and become the invisible lens through which everything else is seen and judged (Scheurich & Young, 1997). By making this “Normal” strange in some way, it can be brought into focus and recognized as a creation susceptible to deconstruction. In her psychological work, Helms (1990) established a series of six identity statuses<sup>4</sup> (Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy) used to conceive White identity development. In the *Contact* status, one sees White as normal, as the status quo. From this position, anything not White is seen as deficient, as not measuring up, and the benefits to being White are thought of as appropriate. A White student in this status thinks in terms of colorblindness, unwilling to admit the systemic and institutional nature of racism.

Movement to the second status of *Disintegration* occurs through increased contact with other races, when overt differences between races become obvious. Often, guilt and anger occur in this status as Whites refuse perceived guilt, claiming no fault in the system still benefiting him or her. Moving past these emotions to the status of *Reintegration* can turn White students against people of color. A White student in reintegration sees America as a meritocratic society where anyone can work hard and succeed (Laughter, Baker, Williams, et al., 2005).

The fourth status, *Pseudo independence*, marks an important shift in thinking. The pseudo-independent White person begins to see that racism is not comprised of individual acts of discrimination but remains a systemic problem, leading the person to deny his or her own Whiteness. *Immersion/Emersion* brings the desire to deny Whiteness full circle as one begins to seek a personal identity based on “accurate information about what it means... to be White in the United States as well as in the world in general” without relying on myths and stereotypes. White people in this stage seek to understand Whiteness and search for other White people who have established a stable sense of their own identities.

As a secure theory of Whiteness develops, White people may approach the final status of *Autonomy* with a stable and positive White identity. At this status, White people develop “a lived commitment to antiracist activity, ongoing self-examination, and increased interpersonal effectiveness in multiracial settings” (Helms, 1990, p.5). In an effort to better understand adolescent perceptions concerning diversity, one must consider the context of the

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<sup>4</sup> The term status is an update from Helms’s previous delineation of six stages, emphasizing that this is not necessarily a linear progression and that one can progress and regress over the course of a lifetime.

educational and social setting. This study examines both contact theory and social balance theory as they relate to how adolescents, in general, interact with each other (Laughter, Baker, Williams, et al., 2005).

### *Contact Theory*

Allport's (1954) social psychological contact theory contends that before contact between two differing groups will result in positive attitudes toward each other, both groups must meet three conditions: (a) equal status; (b) cooperative interdependence; and (c) positive support of those in authority. Cook (1969) added two more conditions: (a) the situation should encourage acquaintanceship and (b) the behavior of the group in question should contradict stereotypical beliefs.

In order for conditions of equal status to be met, no group should hold positional hierarchy over another group. If the setting is structured such that positional hierarchy is correlated with race, then interracial friendships are unlikely (Moody, 2002). The second condition, which suggests that groups must depend on each other, fosters cross-racial interaction. For instance, if students of different races play the same team sports or participate in the same extracurricular activities, then cross-racial interaction will take place. This, in turn, could be a catalyst for developing cross-racial friendships. Allport's (1954) third condition suggests that persons in authority should support cross-racial mixing. In the case of a racially mixed school, school administrators, teachers, and coaches should support cross-racial relationships. Stockard and Mayberry (1992) suggest that we are more likely to find cooperative school climates in settings where extracurricular activities are integrated or where the faculty is racially mixed.

Given that administrators, teachers, and coaches have authority to select students into extracurricular activities, their actions could either promote or inhibit cross-racial interactions. If contact theory holds true, then as cross-race exposure through courses and extracurricular activities increases, then cross-racial interactions are more likely to expand. However, Allport (1954) contends that increased intergroup contact would not necessarily mean less hostility or lead to interracial friendships. Instead, contact may reinforce previously held stereotypes and increase intergroup hostility (Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999). The intent of this study is to examine the degree to which students interact or uphold stereotypical beliefs about certain groups.

### *Social Balance Theory*

Further supporting the premise of contact theory, social balance theory suggests interpersonal attraction through three domains: propinquity, similarity, and status. Moody (2002) defines *propinquity*, or functional proximity, as the necessary condition for peer relationships. In essence, peer relationships form when individuals can interact with each other. The more that people come in contact, the more likely they are to become familiar with one another (Brockner & Swap, 1976; Moody 2002). Although necessary for cross-racial friendships to form, propinquity does not guarantee that such relationships will be positive. It is possible that propinquity can lead to negative interaction among individuals. In that regard, Moody (2002) notes that it is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for interaction.

*Similarity*, one of the strongest predictors of interpersonal characteristics, may explain why race is more or less relevant in a setting. With respect to race, social balance can

amplify peer relationships. If race is an important attribute for initial peer relationship to be formed, then social balance will magnify its importance by building cliques around race-based peer relationships (Moody, 2002). Social balance theory suggests that individuals with like characteristics draw to each other. Therefore, sex, race, and ethnicity are salient factors in interpersonal attraction.

A third factor that affects peer relationships is *status*. The halo effect, which suggests that higher status may act as a source of attraction for members of a lower status, can confer status on the other person (Blau, 1964; Huston & Levinger, 1978). In turn, the halo effect can motivate minority group members to be open to contacts with members of the dominant group. However, dominant group members who are status conscious may avoid peer relations with minority group members (Khelmov & Hallinan, 1999).

### *Adolescent friendships and extracurricular activities*

Ability grouping and classroom organization have the potential to negate cross-race peer relations, but extracurricular activities provide an opportunity for students of different racial and ethnic groups to engage with each other. Clotfelter (2002) explains that the degree of interracial contact in school organization depends on three factors: (a) the racial composition of the school; (b) the degree to which students participate in extracurricular activities; and (c) the evenness with which students are distributed across organizations.

In regards to context, a school's racial composition is directly reflected in the racial composition of its teams and organizations. Thus, a racially mixed school, which has non-White students, should also have non-White students who participate in extracurricular activities. The second factor, which relates to student participation, suggests that if students of any group join organizations at a lower than average rate, the potential for interracial contact is necessarily lessened (Clotfelter, 2002). The third factor discusses how students are dispersed in organizations. Clotfelter (2002) adds that if a significant number of clubs or teams are comprised of students of one racial group, then the potential for interracial contact will be lessened. Such is the case for nearly all-White soccer teams or all-Black basketball teams and segregated cafeterias (Clotfelter, 2002). Combined, these factors note the importance a racially mixed school plays in not only increasing the likelihood of cross-racial interaction, but also in the formation of cross-racial friendships.

Slavin and Madden's (1979) work found that students who participated in sports teams in racially mixed high schools tended to have more cross-racial friends. They also reported that these students held more positive racial attitudes compared to students who did not participate on athletic teams (Khelmov & Hallinan, 1999). In addition, Hallinan and Teixeira (1987) studied the importance of Black and White students engaging in activities together. Their study found that Black and White students who participated in the same co-curricular activities were more likely to choose each other as best friends than those who were not engaged together in at least one activity (Khelmov & Hallinan, 1999). Patchen's work (1982), which included both qualitative and quantitative data, found that high school students in integrated schools who participated in cooperative extracurricular activities had improved racial attitudes. Research indicates that extracurricular activities, especially sports, increase the likelihood of cross-racial friendships. Thus, it is important for parents, teachers, and administrators to encourage student participation in extracurricular activities. With respect to cross-racial friendships, some minority students may be encouraged to develop friendships with students of the majority race. However, these students must keep in mind that a status-conscious majority member may reject them.

Ultimately, contact theory and social balance theory provide a framework for better understanding how students perceive race in a racially mixed school. Not only are these theories pertinent for understanding how students “mix” inside school, but they also explain how students interact with each other outside of school. As sociological research has shown, all of the processes of interpersonal attraction are influenced by the social characteristics of the setting in which interactions occur (Khelmov & Hallinan, 1999).

### *Magnet Schools, Quality of Community, and Desegregation*

According to Rossell (2003), “Magnet schools are an attempt to introduce market incentives into school desegregation policy” (p. 697), an attempt, which may be unsuccessful, and in fact, detrimental to desegregation efforts because voluntary magnets may cause White flight (Rossell, 2003.) Nevertheless, researchers have long contended, “magnet schools can desegregate across lines of social, class, achievement, and race, and serve all their students well” (Metz, 1988, p. 55). Several researchers, in fact, support the concept of magnet schools because they believe that for the good of society, all children need to be in desegregated schools (e.g., Metz, 1988; Ascher & Burnett, 1993; Estes et al., 1990; Orfield, 2001). Nevertheless, while these studies do avert to the importance of desegregation, as well as the importance of magnet schools in the desegregation process, few accept the assumptions that simply because the students are enrolled in a school together that they will interact in a meaningful manner, across race. That is, little qualitative research has examined the nature of the relationships among students of different races within magnet schools.

Research has shown that magnet schools (based upon student interactions) may be characterized as having one of four orientations, each with important implications for students. According to Schoenfeld (2001), a desegregated magnet school may: (a) try to avoid any particular response to the diverse nature of the student body; (b) encourage assimilation, where schools tend to see success as achieving an endpoint whereby minority group members do not differ from their White counterparts in values, orientations, skills, and the like; (c) promote pluralistic coexistence, where different historical experiences and values are accepted, but no effort is made to foster increased understanding; or, (d) achieve integrated pluralism. Integrated pluralism, which seems the most difficult orientation to achieve, starts with the recognition and acceptance of differences, but adds emphasis on fostering respect and interaction. Considering the goals for magnet school initiation- to enhance racial and social diversity (Gerts-Pepin, 2002; Goldring & Smrekar, 2002; Orfield, 2001; Schoenfeld, 2001)— it is critical that we examine how students both perceive and act out issues of race and class, if we are to understand which orientation magnet schools reach, how students think about race and class, and/or whether any of these issues matter to them at all.

In the next section of this manuscript, we will discuss methods used to capture adolescent perceptions of diversity within educational and social settings.

## **Method**

The purpose of this study was to describe the manner in which adolescents experience race and understand diversity within a magnet school setting. This study employed qualitative methods to gain students’ perceptions on diversity, race, and social class and how these perceptions impact their race consciousness. The sample selection technique use for this was purposeful (Patton, 2002), yet representative of typical adolescent students.

Perhaps we need to say that our sample size is a limitation; however, we need to defend our stance by saying that our study is transferable.

### *Rationale for Method*

The intent of this study was to describe the perceptions and experiences of adolescents in a magnet middle school. The qualitative design was selected for this study because “it is largely an investigation of a social phenomenon, undertaken by intensively comparing, contrasting, and classifying participants’ experiences, and perceptions” (Yon, Nesbitt, & Algozzine, 1998, p. 78). Most studies in the magnet school context have examined student achievement and have been quantitative in nature. To that end, students’ voices have been minimized. Hence, the research strategy developed for this study involves a series of in-depth interviews with students. The qualitative methodology selected corresponds to the nature of the data sought: student attitudes, self-reported behavior, and exploration of interactions and exchanges (Yin, 2003).

### *Site Selection*

This manuscript is based on a subset of qualitative case studies that are part of a larger, multiple-methods research project funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, beginning in 2001. The larger study involves district data and survey research across 26 schools (two clusters) in Metropolitan Nashville over a period of three years. To study student perceptions and interactions across grade levels, we selected students at a single magnet, middle school.

Thus, the site for this study was a magnet middle school located in an urban community, adjacent to public housing, in middle Tennessee. The school, founded in 1993, was established as part of a district-wide commitment to desegregate the system, which had begun 10 years earlier. Thus, the school-community was selected for its appropriateness, familiarity, and proximity.

At the time of the study, the neighborhood community was primarily composed of low income Black families; however, the school community was much more diverse. With an enrollment of 590 students in grades 5-8; of these, 58% are African American, approximately 34% of the students are White 7% are Asian, 2% are Hispanic, and less than one percent were Pacific Islander or other. Approximately 30% of the students that attend the school are zoned into the school by the geographic location of their residences within the surrounding neighborhood of the school.

Interestingly, all of the students in the school are now part of a single unified school-body – commonly referred to as a “full-site magnet” –where each student participates in the magnet program. Until two years preceding this study, the students had been segregated within the school. “Magnet students” (those students who had been enrolled through an intricate lottery system), had their classes in a different part of the building and with different teachers than the “zoned students” (those who attended the school because it was their neighborhood school). This type of magnet is referred to as a “program within a school.” Consequently, while the district had been committed to desegregation, the students in this magnet school had previously been segregated primarily by social class (and race to an extent) for eight years.

## *Sample Characteristics and Selection Criteria*

This study is comprised of 14 adolescent Black and White students who attend a single magnet middle school. For a qualitative study, this sample size represents a reasonable balance between time and researcher resources (Patton, 2002). In addition, this sample size allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of cross-racial friendships.

Students were selected from a random stratified sample; several students' parents were interviewed, and the parents gave permission for their children to participate in the study. In addition, participants provided names and telephone numbers of classmates who would be interested in participating in the study. Combined, these strategies created a sample that was random within grade level (grades 6-8), friendship patterns, and race. From a sample of 14 participants, ten participants are Black and four are White.

## *Data Collection*

Data collection took place over a three-month period using semi-structured interviews with Black and White adolescents as the primary source of data. Students were contacted by telephone to participate in the study. If students (with parents' permission) consented to an interview, then an interview was scheduled. On occasions, some of the families that lived in the housing project adjacent to the school had their phones disconnected, or had moved to new homes. Consequently, we were only able to interview one student from the neighborhood zone.

## *Interviews*

Qualitative inquiry—strategically, philosophically, and therefore, methodologically—aims to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data (Patton, 2002). The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were audiotaped with the interviewee's permission (and their parents' permission), and they were transcribed verbatim. Students' names and other identifying characteristics remain anonymous; thus, pseudonyms are used to protect students' privacy. The interviews took place at locations convenient to parents and students. Several interviews were conducted in friendship pairs in an effort to maximize comfort during the interview process.

Interview questions are clustered around four major themes and are intentionally non-directive (Yin, 2003) to trigger broad, comprehensive responses. The core clusters include: (a) social climate and social relations, (b) ideas about desegregation and post busing programs, (c) perceived level of familiarity, caring and support at school, and (d) experiences outside of school (e. g., extracurricular activities). Collectively these broad categories will provide insight on the race consciousness of adolescents inside and outside the school setting (see Appendix A for the interview protocol).

## *Field Notes*

Additional field notes include personal notes to self and questions raised during the fieldwork experience. A journal was kept to capture impressions made in interviews and performance while conducting interviews. As Patton (2002) notes, the observer takes in information and forms impressions that go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed field notes.

## *Data Analysis*

This is a qualitative study; therefore, data analysis was continuous throughout the fieldwork. Data analysis focused on recognizing themes and patterns that emerged based on the study's conceptual framework and interview protocol. We utilized two primary sources to draw from in organizing the analysis: (a) the questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phases of the study; and (b) analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection (Patton, 2002). Using this premise, we identified and coded themes that are relevant to the study's theoretical propositions. An "open coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 223) technique was used to combine data from interviews and field note observations. This process strengthened the study's findings by exposing commonalities across individual cases and data sources. In addition, this process strengthened the study's internal validity. We have a relatively small sample size; therefore, the richness of the data adds rigor to the study. As Patton (2002) explains:

The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size. (p. 245)

## *Limitations*

*Sample size.* Because this study was exploratory in nature, its purpose sought to understand how middle school students perceive diversity, and issues regarding race and class. In that regard, this study sought depth opposed to breadth. With a sample size of approximately 14 middle school students, all but one of the students were true "magnet" students, which is to say that only one student interviewed lived in the school's zone (which is largely a low-income, housing project neighborhood) and attended the magnet school as their neighborhood school. Unfortunately, having so few of the "zoned" students may limit our ability to understand how class is perceived by the low-income students attending the school. Adding more neighborhood students to the study may have contributed to the richness of that data, and enabled cross class comparisons.

*Generalizability.* Although qualitative findings may not be generalizable (Patton, 2002) to a population, results may be transferable to other populations. Since "[social] phenomena are neither time- nor context-free" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 238), providing thick description of phenomena studied within its setting/context offers opportunities to "fit" findings from one study to other similar context. Ultimately, we are more interested in authentically understanding specific cases within a context than in hypothesizing about generalizations, because as Guba and Lincoln state: "one can easily conclude that generalizations that are intended to be context free will have little that is useful to say about human behavior" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 62).

## **Findings**

### *Students' perception of Race and Diversity*

During the course of each interview, we asked each of the students to describe their school as if they were writing an advertisement for television. Prominent among responses

that referred to newness of their facility and the strong academic focus of the institution was racial diversity. All of the students interviewed reported that their school is diverse. While one White sixth grade girl said that the school is diverse because it is “mostly like a mix of African American and White” students, a typical description of the school, like this one from a White 5th grade girl, pointed out that students perceived far more races around them at school:

*We have a whole lot of different cultures at our school. We have Hispanics, African American people, people from Afghanistan and things. We have, it seems like there is a whole lot, but probably more than I'm saying.*

An African American sixth grade student elaborated further: “I mean you have Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, we have people from Asia, Korea, Japan, Africa.” In addition to perceiving that their environment is diverse, each of the students attested to the importance of attending a diverse school. An African American sixth grade boy, when talking about a Puerto Rican boy in his class, explained that his school environment is important because it enhances his understanding of different cultures:” It helps us learn more about their race... I learned where [he] came from, like what they do, like in their country.”

Most students, however, provided two particular reasons why diversity at school is important to them: some students felt that diverse school environments helped eliminate racism, and others held that their school experience would help them learn how to interact with different people in their future work life. For example, a White sixth grade girl speculated:

*If you don't go to school with people of other races and stuff, then you'll hold prejudice against them or something. Here I am learning how to get along with people different from me.*

Similarly, a White sixth grade boy, who no longer attends the magnet school, averts to the effect that he believes a diverse student body has on the development of racism:

*I kind of miss [the magnet school] actually... Some of [the kids at my new school] are racist... [They] refer to people by their color or their race, and stuff like that, which I don't like. I don't know if you can really be racist at [the magnet school].*

One Black, sixth grade girl, when asked if attending a diverse school had any benefits, explained:

*It would help me to know and work with other races. Like if I had went to a school with all Black children, it would probably make me feel that I need to have a job with all Black people. I am learning how to interact with different kinds of people.*

Another African American sixth grade girl agreed, and explained that diversity was of particular importance for her White counterparts:

*They need to get to know other cultures and know what their customs are, and get along with those people because soon they are going to have to work with people like us sometimes.*

While the students perceive their school to be diverse, students report that the curriculum does little to teach students of difference races how to interact and fully enjoy the benefits of the school's diverse atmosphere. One student wished that the school would provide programs for that purpose: "Teachers and the principal could organize a lesson plan that had to do with the culture of others... to teach about others people's culture (sixth grade Caucasian girl)."

Certainly, each of the students agreed that diversity at school was important to them; however, when asked about whether they had friends of other races the answers varied. Seven of the twelve students interviewed said that they had friends of other races. They responded similarly to a White girl, who stated: "Some of my friends are African American, and some of my friends are White. One of my friends is Asian." However, five other students simply stated, "no." They did not have friends of other races, and they were not sure that other students had friends from other races.

The above perceptions of the students regarding diversity provide some insight into the quality of the racial interactions among students. Moreover, their responses point to a potential mismatch between what they say they value, and how they live out their values at school. Even among those students who said that they had friends across races, the nature of their friendships seems to be influenced, in some ways, by race. For example, we discovered that only one of the White students who had minority friends had ever visited those friends' homes. It was much more common for minorities to visit their White friends homes. Below, we shift focus from friendships to conflicts. There, we try to describe the nature of disputes at the magnet school. In particular, we seek to provide further insight into the racial climate at the magnet school, the quality of community, by considering how the students perceive the conflicts that erupt during the course of a school day.

### *Perceptions of racial conflict*

All students agreed that there were few if any racial conflicts, across race, at school. While one student pointed out students fight at school: "Sometimes it is boys against girls, and sometimes it is girls against girls. Sometimes it is Black against Hispanic... but we don't have racial conflicts," many students; however, perceived that there were conflicts within races. Specifically, the students recalled fights among the African American students: "Most of the times it is just the African Americans... Most of the time they get into arguments, one just pushing somebody, and it will turn into a big fight." Another African American boy agreed: "Yes, it is mostly the Black kids. White kids don't do it as much."

Some of the students speculate that the conflicts among African American students arise from differences in values across social class: "It is usually the Black people, and if you don't live by any of them, like in the ghetto, I'm just going to say it, and then they probably ain't going to like you... they just won't get along with you."

### *Students' perceptions of within-school segregation*

It was evident from the interviews that each of the magnet students averted to the importance of diversity at school; however, many students perceived segregation among classes at school—across both race and social class. An African American fifth grader explained—"the AP classes, that is when they take, like all the smart kids in fifth grade, and put them in special classes in the sixth grade"—are perceived to include few minority students:

*The reading class I go to, it has, let me see; a girl that goes to that classroom is an African American girl. Anna, she is from Russia. And then, I think there is one Jewish boy in our classroom. The rest is all White. (Sixth grade Caucasian girl)*

Her friend, an African American sixth grader explained that her experience was almost completely the opposite:

*The one I go to, it has a whole bunch of Black kids, I should say African American. And, they live in the projects next to their school, it is not a very good background because that is the kids that mess up and disrupt the class. There is the other kid; she is kind of weird because I'm not sure about her background because I don't her all that well. But most of the kids in my class are African American, so they come from the projects by the school.*

When asked how she felt about attending classes with students zoned into the school from the nearby housing project, she explained that she was not learning much and that she did not enjoy the classes:

*I think they are a lot of slow kids. They don't catch on to things easily, it kind of makes it less enjoyable to learn because you have to wait...and it gets boring. It makes it kind of [difficult] to learn about certain things when there are slow kids there.*

### **Discussion and Implications**

Both Handy (1984) and Wilson (1987) report that many believe that increased social mobility among African-Americans and the reduction of racial prejudice and discrimination have led to an increase in class-consciousness and a decrease in race consciousness. This study seemingly supports their position. It revealed that middle school magnet students, based on their perceptions and experiences, are not race conscious, but instead, are more class conscious. For example, the middle class magnet students (from primarily middle class families) believed that zoned students (largely poor families) had more racial conflicts, and they believe that zoned students behave badly in classes. However, we did not include all of these findings in this manuscript because our study may be biased toward the perceptions of the wealthier student population (only one zone student, which is to say, only one student who attends the magnet as a neighborhood school, was interviewed).

Nevertheless, while students do appear more class conscious, their level of racial identity development may have had an impact on their perceptions. Both Cross's and Helms's research indicates that students become race conscious at varying degrees and at varying times. Thus, if some students have not begun to date, or apply for jobs, etc., and if the school chooses not to address (as one girl suggests) issues of race/diversity in the curriculum, then the students may not have experienced race or racism often or significantly enough. They may still be in the Pre-Encounter stage or Contact status. In essence, their level of racial identity development may dictate how they perceive the racial climate, or quality of community, in their school. Furthermore, the quality and climate of their school may affect how students proceed through racial identity development. In others words, school environments that ignore race may inhibit racial identity development.

In addition to their perceptions on race, students seem to have a limited perception of diversity. The data reveals that middle magnet school students think their classes are

diverse whenever they are 100% of a particular race. In other words, if there is one African American student in a class of 25 students then the students perceive the class as diverse. Additionally, many attest that there is a level of pluralistic co-existence, where different historical experiences and values are accepted, but no effort is made to foster increased understanding. The class-consciousness revealed in this study closely aligns with how students of different races interact with each other. For instance, students who are placed in more advanced level courses have little, to no, interactions with students who are placed in regular classes. Such class-conscious issues are similar along racial lines. Classroom observations indicate that advanced level classes have a smaller percentage of Black students. This, in turn, leads to fewer Black-White interactions. However, this disparity is not as noticeable in extracurricular activities such as band, football, etc.

## Conclusion

In an effort to understand how middle school magnet students perceive and make meaning of school desegregation efforts, we asked the question: How race and/or class conscious are middle school magnet students? Our study, shaped by this question, and informed by in-depth interviews with students, ultimately revealed a complex picture of students thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Students professed that they are more class conscious than race conscious (as theory suggest); however, their behavior indicates that race does matter to them. Specifically, while most students attest to the importance of racial and social diversity at school, our single-case study reveals that most students do not interact across racial lines, nor do they recount friendships across social class. More important to them than diversity is access to strong academic institutions. Thus, our analysis shows that while students value diversity, few capitalize on opportunities to engage meaningful relationships across race and social class.

Considering these findings, we suggest that a follow-up study with these students in 10th grade, and again in 12th grade will provide more insight into their race consciousness. Additionally, we believe that in order to better understand the significance of class-consciousness, a replication of this study would need to involve more of the zoned student population.

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*You may contact the authors at:*

*Aaron A. Baker - aaron.a.baker@vanderbilt.edu*

*Sheneka M. Williams - sheneka.m.williams@vanderbilt.edu*

## APPENDIX

### Student Interview Protocol

#### *Social Climate, Social Relations*

- How would you describe this school if you were writing a TV ad? What stands out in terms of climate or the feel of the school? How would you describe the school climate to a friend?
- If I take a tour of this school, where should I go, specifically? What would you want me to see? What will I see?
- Are fights a problem in this school?
- Do you know any students who use alcohol or drugs? Here at school?
- Is vandalism a problem?
- Is this school a safe place for students? Can you share an example? Were you ever scared here? What do you worry about at school?
- How would you describe relationships between teachers and students? (Close or distant? What about students who aren't in your classes?
- How well do you know other kids here? How do you get to know other students? What about students who aren't in your classes?
- How would you describe the students who attend this school in terms of their backgrounds?
- Do students mix outside of class?
- Do students of different races mix?
- Are groups separated by certain characteristics? Can you give me an example?
- Do certain groups of students take certain classes? Describe the different groups of students.
- How would you describe relations between students of different racial or ethnic groups? How much tension is there?
- How do you make friends in school? Are most of your friends the same race as you are? Do you have friends of other races?
- How comfortable are you discussing controversial issues, like race? Do you discuss these issues, in class? Outside of class? At home?

### ***Desegregation and Post-Busing Programs***

- Did you ride a bus to school last year or the year before? For how long? (Were you a part of the cross-town, Nashville school busing program?)
- What do you think about busing kids across town so that Black kids and White kids can be taught together in the same school?
- Is it important for kids of different races to go to school together? If so, how should we accomplish that goal? If not, what's more important?
- How do you think your school experiences will affect your ability to work with people of other races and ethnic groups?
- How do you think your school experiences will affect your ability to understand people of other races and ethnic groups?

### ***Perceived Level of Familiarity, Caring, and Support***

- How would you describe teachers' attitudes toward students?
- How well do teachers know you and other students? What do they know about you? How do they learn this information?
- How well do you know teachers? What do you know? How do you learn this information? Do you talk to teachers outside of class time?
- What do teachers most care about, in terms of their students? In terms of this school?
- What do teachers expect of students, in terms of achievement? Do they expect more from certain students? Or less from certain groups of students? Do teachers demand less of students in certain classes and more in other classes?
- What do students care most about, in terms of their teachers? In terms of their school?
- What are students' expectations, in terms of achievement and their classes, (and grades)?
- How would you describe the students' (your friends') attitudes toward school?

### ***Outside of School Experiences/Family Demographics***

- Do you participate in any extracurricular activities- sports, school government, theater?
- What do you do after school? Where do you like to go? What is your favorite thing to do?
- How do you get to school each morning? How do you get home?

- How would you describe your neighborhood?
- Do you have friends that live in your neighborhood? If so, are these friends the same race as you? Are these friends of another race?
- What do you like to do on the weekends? Where do you like to go?

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## **The Influence of the Teacher and Parent on the Academic Achievement of African American Students**

*Bruce B. Douglas*

*Colorado State University*

The social structures that exist in the educational system in the United States consist of students and teachers (Urban, 2000). Based on the roles assigned to them in the educational system, students are dependent persons and teachers are independent persons (Urban, 2000). The educational system creates expectations and evaluates outcomes based on ideas, beliefs and values generally accepted by the culture of the school. As the United States moves into the 21st century, African American students constitute a greater proportion of the student population. When the student is of a race or background that is subordinated within society and the teacher is of a race or background that enjoys majority status, the student must then cope with the possibility that their efforts may not be valued for a number of reasons other than the quality of their educational performance (Darder, 1991). African American students, basing their self-evaluations on the values and expectations of a person not of their race or cultural background, may face pressures that students who share the race and cultural background of the teacher do not (Martin & Baxter, 2001).

The discussion about the lack of academic success for African American students tend to lead to discussions about factors external to schools such as inadequate preparation and lack of family support. The question of what is happening to African American students in the school and classroom is often overlooked, and when it is examined, the recognition of the shortage of African American teachers is noted (Avery & Walker, 1993). According to Ayers (1995) and Kohl (1998), relatively little is known about the effectiveness of White public school career teachers on African American students. Given that an underlying tenet of multicultural education is that all students benefit from information about or models of persons with similar racial and cultural backgrounds, this is a limitation in the literature that consistently undermines the efforts of teacher education programs across the country to adequately prepare White adult education students as future teachers of African American students (Pang & Sablan, 1995). This is especially problematic at a time in history when African American students are very likely to be educated by primarily a White teaching force (Fielder, 1993). Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to explore the influence of the teacher and parent on the academic achievement of African American students.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Describe the African American students enrolled in a public high school in northern Colorado on the following demographic characteristics: (a) age; (b) ethnicity; (c) gender; (d) parent's ethnicity; and (e) favorite teacher's racial group.

2. Determine if the influence of the teacher is different between male and female African American students.
3. Determine if male and female African American students differ in their feelings of how successful they are in school.
4. Compare the differences in the parent's racial group and whether or not they consider school important to their child's economic future.
5. Determine if there is an association between encouragement from the teacher to achieve, student's grade point average, the family income, the student's favorite teacher's racial group, and whether or not the student's parents inspired them to stay in school.

### **Significance of the Study**

Historically, the two major racial groups in the United States have been identified as being African American and Whites (Myrdal, 1944). These groupings have led to many divisions in the United States. Pang and Sablan (1995) noted that race is a powerful aspect of schooling given its impact on attitudes towards African Americans. Pang and Sablan also noted that teachers may assume that African American students lack the ability to do as well academically as White students. Because of their skin color, certain assumptions are being made about African American students in terms of their ability to be successful in school. Cochran-Smith (2000) states that the mainstream educational community has historically ignored the significance of what the African American community values in the education of its people. Because of this, teachers have missed the opportunities to both understand and value what this information can tell us about educating African American students successfully. The significance of the study is further highlighted by the fact that research on the race of the teacher as a factor in students' personal and academic success is still an emotionally charged and often misunderstood phenomenon. As a result, it impedes successful teaching across racial lines and also impedes effective teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2000).

In her research, Cross (1993) emphasized that teachers' values, beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices do affect their teaching. Beady and Hansell (1981) noted that teacher race was strongly associated with expectations for students' future success, and from their results, they revealed that African American teachers had significantly higher expectations for their African American students than White teachers. In his study of African American principals, Lomotey (1989) agreed that the race of the teacher may affect how teachers view African American students and what their commitment may be to the education of these African American students. According to Branch (1994), racial attitudes and ethnic identity influence the learning and development of African American students. Branch also noted that racial attitudes may play a critical dimension in the learning equation in that those attitudes may create or discourage the development of a sense of academic growth and development through the expansion of African American students' knowledge base.

Fielder (1993) points out that professional education literature encourages the recruitment, training, and retention of more African Americans as teachers. Although this is a noble goal and should be vigorously pursued, how many African American teachers will be needed to address the academic needs of all African American students? The impact of teachers on the academic achievement of African American students has not had sufficient study and it is becoming increasingly critical that the dynamics of this relationship be understood. Society needs educators who can help all African American students prepare

for intensifying national and international competition, and to handle the change that will determine how competitive the United States will be in a global system (Pang & Sablan, 1995). The findings of this study should help in the training and development of educators to meet the challenge of teaching African American students and other students of color.

### **Review of Related Literature**

There are marked disparities in the outcomes of education for African American and White students (King, 1994). In its 2004 report, the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) noted that African American students do not achieve as well in school as White students. In 2004, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the United States Department of Education reported that African American students continue to trail White students with respect to educational access, achievement, and attainment (NCES, 2004). Unfortunately, the report of the United States Department of Education does not discuss who is teaching African American students or whether these teachers are prepared to teach African American students effectively.

Research on effective teachers of African American students emphasizes, among other items, the teachers' collective belief that African American students' potential will not be realized in classrooms where teachers view African American students from a deficit perspective (King, 1994). Most often associated with White teachers, this approach does not assume African American students' potential, but aims to compensate for what is presumed missing from the student's backgrounds (Foorman, Francis, & Fletcher, 1998). Because a deficit model of instruction attempts to make students fit into the existing system of teaching and learning, it cannot build on the strengths of cultural characteristics or cultural preferences in learning. Compounding the problem of some White teachers' cultural ignorance or indifference, additional research suggested that the gap between White and African American students is exacerbated by powerful social conditioning that cultivates actual negative attitudes towards African American students (Pang & Sablan, 1995). Boykin (1992), Darder (1991), and Scheurich (1993) agreed that many White teachers work from within a hegemonic, Western, epistemological framework, often unconscious and almost always unstated that predisposes them to have lower expectations of African American students and a lack of respect for the students' families and primary culture. Therefore, the possibility of effective teaching by these teachers is eliminated.

This predisposition may account for the fact that, historically, African American students have fared less well than White students, not only on standardized tests and measures, but also in graduation rates and college admissions rates (Ogbu, 2003). This is not to say that the presence of an African American teacher guarantees academic success for African American students or that the race of the teacher can be expected to overcome known debilitating effects on school performance. Lower income levels, inferior school resources, and less parent involvement, for example, have long been associated with African American students' under-performance in school (Ogbu, 2003). However, the research does suggest that White teachers' failure to address or value African American student's primary culture can also be a significant factor in their academic success.

The gap between the achievement of African American students and that of White students is one of the most infuriating problems afflicting education. Singham (2003) points out that there are no genetic or other immutable traits that could conceivably be the cause of the gap. "The repeated attempts to explain and solve the vexing problem of the achievement gap have clearly been inadequate..." (Singham, 2003, p. 586). Part of the problem is that the

topic is filled with myths. “The difficulty with myths is not that they are necessarily false, but rather that they are beliefs whose truth or reality is accepted uncritically” (Singham, 2003, p. 586). There are a number of causes for this gap. Singham (2003) points out that:

You will find a range of analyses (and a corresponding variety of suggested solutions): biased standardized tests, tests that do not match the learning styles of black students, less money spent on educating black students, socioeconomic differences, lack of motivation, negative peer pressure, lack of family support for education, teacher biases, and many other possibilities. All of these figure prominently in the menu of causes. (p. 587)

Deeply embedded in American society, racism negatively affects the quality of teacher-student relationships. “Because school performance depends on the quality of teacher-student relationships, the neglect of poor quality interactions between White educators and Black students only insures that the Black-White achievement gap will persist” (Martin & Baxter, 2001, p. 381). Schools have not totally ignored the problem of racism. “As a way to combat the negative effects of racism and improve interracial relations, schools have embraced Multicultural Education, the curricula that expose students to a socially diverse variety of heroes, historical events, and holidays” (Martin & Baxter, 2001, p. 382). The authors also discuss the Antiracism Education model as a way to change the achievement level of African American students. Antiracist Education principles work to provide both a basis for teachers to develop a common language around the problem and experience of racism and a means for the creation of instructional practices that promise to ameliorate its negative impact on school children (Martin & Baxter, 2001).

Carter and Goodwin (1994) argue that “when race is subsumed, the current and historical role that it has played and continues to play in the educational sense is distorted and clouded” (p. 292). Bowser and Hunt (1981) maintain that racism in America is a White problem because the racist attitudes, behavior, and social structures of the dominant European American culture directly and indirectly undermine Whites’ capacity to grow and develop. “To move beyond racism, White people must take a look at how they, as a race, have participated in constructing and maintaining hierarchical racial identity structures, discordant models of White racial identity” (Martin & Baxter, 2001, p. 384).

Although outright discriminatory practices in schools based on race have been banned by law, they continue in other guises. “Among the most pervasive is the use of various types of tests as a so-called objective or neutral tool to discriminate and separate students for purposes of instruction” (English, 2002, p. 298). English (2002) also points out that the assessment tools used by many state accountability systems are based on false notions of fairness and equity. Sacks (1997) states that from its inception, standardized tests have consistently demonstrated that the children of the poor perform less well than their affluent counterparts. Wealth consistently makes a difference in better test scores. Hernstein and Murray (1994) suggest that the assumption of fairness rests on an assertion in which there is a surrogate national curriculum called “the content domain” and is the basis by which test scores are assumed to form a “bell curve.” Although conceding that poverty carries a statistically significant impact on test performance, test advocates often explain away its effects through “coded racism” based on eugenic arguments that have been scientifically rejected (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). “This is a significant displacement of the relationship between curriculum development and curriculum evaluation. What it does is replace a curriculum (that which is ostensibly being assessed) with a test score (a sample of the

curriculum)” (English, 2002, p. 300).

The Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1995) reports that almost 87% of the United States elementary and secondary teachers are White and 8% of those teachers are African American. More and more, African American students are being educated by people that are not of their race or cultural background. Given that a significant number of African American students in public education programs will be largely educated by White teachers, and teachers can play such a significant role in students’ lives, there is a pressing need to know more about the effect White teachers have on African American students. What role do White teachers play in facilitating African American student success or contributing to their academic failure? Do their views of African American students allow them to address the educational needs of these African American students? Do African American students have perceptions of White teachers’ ideas, beliefs, and values that get in the way of their academic achievement? Can the lack of success of African American students be fully attributable to factors outside of schools, such as their family lives, influence of their peers, or their lack of ability?

## Methodology

### *Sample*

This study involved African American students enrolled in a public high school in northern Colorado. Because of the geographic area and limited resources, the researcher selected a convenience sample of participants for this study. This type of sampling cannot be considered representative of any population.

### *Instrumentation*

The scales and items in the instrument were developed by the researcher after a thorough review of the related literature. The instrument contained a demographics section to provide a description of the samples used in this study. The face and content validity of the proposed instrument was evaluated by an expert panel of university faculty and doctoral level graduate students. The instrument was pilot tested with 10 African American undergraduate students who recently completed high school. Changes indicated by the validation panel and field test were made. These changes occurred in the wording of items and in the instructions for completing the instrument. Internal consistency coefficients for the scales in the instrument were as follows (Cronbach’s *alpha*): Overall Educational Experience Subscale (- .60); Parental/Guardian Influence Subscale (- .61); and Teachers in your Educational Experience Subscale (- .77).

### *Data Collection*

The researcher administered the instrument to the participants at their place of employment, which was convenient for them. The researcher explained the purpose and objectives of the survey, the specific format of the items, how the confidentiality of the data is to be handled, and who will have access to the individual responses. This method usually results in a high response rate. Other advantages are the low cost and the fact that the researcher was present to provide assistance or answer questions. Each participant was asked to fill out the instrument to the best of their ability and to leave their names off the

instrument form. The researcher was present while participants completed the survey and collected them upon completion.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher used descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. An independent sample T-test was used to determine if there is a difference between means of variables with two levels. The researcher ran a single factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the difference between means of variables with more than two levels. A Pearson product-moment correlation test was used to determine if there is a relationship between variables.

### *Results*

These outputs provide descriptive statistics for all the variables labeled as ordinal and scale. The Valid N is 50, which is the number of participants in the data file. The sample size was a result of convenience sampling. Orcher (2005) suggests that using a small number of participants may be acceptable for a term project, depending on the requirements of the instructor. The Minimum and Maximum outputs are within the appropriate codebook range for each variable. All Mean scores are between the Minimum and Maximum outputs, which indicate that the Mean scores are within the expected ranges. In reference to normality, from the output we see that most of the variables have skewness values between -1 and 1 except one variable, *Question 5* (I am planning on going to college after graduation) with a skewness of -1.079. Since this core is more than +/- 1.0, we cannot assume that this variable is normally distributed.

Table 1 provided the number of participants for whom we have valid data for the variables labeled nominal and ordinal, which is what we expected. For the variable *Gender*, 50% of the participants are male and 50% are female. For the variable *Age of Student*, 60% of the participants are between 15-17 years old and 40% are between 18-21 years old. For the variable *Racial/Ethnic Group*, 100% of the participants are African American. For the variable *Favorite Teacher's Racial Group*, 40% of the participants responded that their favorite teacher is African American and 60% responded that their favorite teacher is non-African American. For the variable *Mother's Racial/Ethnic Group*, 60% stated that their mother is African American, 20% stated that their mother is White and 20% stated that their mother is of a racial/ethnic group other than African American or White. For the variable *Father's Racial/Ethnic Group*, 50% of the participants stated that their father is African American, 30% stated that their father is White and 20% stated that their father is of a racial/ethnic group other than African American or White.

A T-test analysis was used to answer the following question: Is there a difference between gender and question 3 (I feel I have been successful in school), student's grade point average (GPA), and question 17 (My teachers have encouraged me to achieve in school more than my parents/guardians) (see Table 1)? The output shows that males are significantly different from females in reference to question 17,  $p = .033$ ,  $p < .05$ . Inspection of the two group means indicate that the mean score for males (2.80) is lower than the mean score (3.60) for females. The difference between the means is -0.8. The effect size is  $d = -.62$ , which is between a medium and large effect size.

**Table 1. Comparison of Male and Female on Success in School, Grade Point Average, and Teachers Encouragement to Achieve (N=25 Males and 25 Females)**

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Success in School			-.667	48	.508
Male	3.80	1.19			
Female	4.00	.91			
Grade Point Average					
Male	2.84	.47	1.26	48	.214
Female	2.68	.43			
Teachers Encouragement to Achieve			-2.19	48	.033*
Male	2.80	1.19			
Female	3.60	1.38			

\* p is significant at the .05 level

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to answer the following question: Are there differences among the mother's racial group on question 7 (My parents/guardians do not consider school important to my economic future) and question 8 (My parents/guardians inspired me to stay in school) (see Table 2)? A statistically significant difference was found among the three levels of the mother's racial/ethnic group on question 7,  $F(2, 47) = 12.800$ ,  $p = .000$  ( $p < .001$ ), and on question 8,  $F(2, 47) = 8.677$ ,  $p = .001$  ( $p < .05$ ). The question 7 mean for the first racial/ethnic group level (African American) is 1.83, 2.50 for the second racial/ethnic group level (White), and 3.50 for the third racial/ethnic group level (other). The Tukey HSD post hoc test was used to determine which specific means are different for mother's racial/ethnic group on question 7 because the Levene test was not significant. The Tukey post hoc test indicated that the first level racial/ethnic group and the third level racial/ethnic group differed significantly on question 7, ( $p = .000$  [ $p < .001$ ],  $d = -1.70$ ), which has an extremely large effect size with a negative direction, and the second level and third level racial/ethnic groups differed significantly on question 7, ( $p = .047$  [ $p < .05$ ],  $d = -1.88$ ), which has an extremely large effect size with a negative direction. The Games-Howell post hoc test was used to determine which specific means are different for mother's racial/ethnic group on question 8 because the Levene test was significant. The Games-Howell post hoc test indicated that the first and second racial/ethnic group levels differed significantly on question 8, ( $p = .000$  [ $p < .001$ ],  $d = 1.95$ ), which has an extremely large effect size with a positive direction.

**Table 2. One-Way Analysis of Variance Summary Table Comparing Mother's Racial Group on Parents Considering School Improvement and Parents Inspire Me to Stay in School**

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Parents Considering School Important					
Between Groups	2	21.33	10.67	12.80	.000*
Within Groups	47	39.17	.83		
Total	49	60.50			
Parents Inspire Me to Stay In School					
Between Groups	2	12.00	6.00	8.68	.001*
Within Groups	47	32.50	.70		
Total	49	44.50			

\* p is significant at the .05 level

In reference to correlation, the following question was posed: Is there an association between question 17 ( My teachers have encouraged me to achieve in school more than my parents/guardians), student's grade point average (GPA), the family income, question 28 (Student's favorite teacher's racial group, and question 8 (My parents/guardians inspired me to stay in school).? The output shows that four pairs were significantly correlated. There is an association between question 17 and student's GPA,  $r(48) = -.374, p < .01$ . The relationship is negative and the effect size is  $r = -.37$ , which is between a medium and large effect size. There is also an association between question 17 and question 28,  $r(48) = -.339, p < .05$ . The relationship is negative and the effect size is  $r = -.34$ , which is just above a medium effect size. There is an association between question 17 and question 8,  $r(48) = -.815, p < .001$ . The relationship is negative and the effect size is  $r = -.82$ , which is a much larger than typical effect size. There is an association between question 28 and question 8,  $r(48) = .303, p < .05$ . The relationship is positive and the effect size is  $r = .30$ , which is a medium effect size.

## Discussion

This study addressed the influence of the teacher and parent on the academic achievement of African American students. The result of the T-test indicates that African American female students are encouraged to achieve in school more by their teachers than African American male students. There was not a significant difference between African American males and females on their feelings of being successful in school, nor their grade point averages.

The results of the ANOVA and Tukey HSD post hoc test revealed that mothers of African American descent and mothers of the "other" racial/ethnic group differ significantly when considering school importance to the economic future of their children. This result indicated that students whose mothers were of the "other" racial/ethnic group felt their mothers did not consider school important ( $M = 3.50$ ) to their economic future. Students whose mothers were of African American descent felt their mothers considered school important ( $M = 1.83$ ) to their economic future. The results also revealed that White mothers

and mothers of the “other” racial/ethnic group differ significantly when considering school importance to the economic future of their children. This result indicated that students whose mothers were White neither agreed nor disagreed to whether their mothers considered school important ( $M = 2.50$ ) to their future, and students whose mother were of the “other” racial/ethnic group felt their mothers did not consider school important ( $M = 3.50$ ). Further data analysis of the ANOVA and the Games-Howell post hoc test revealed that African American mothers differed significantly with White mothers on whether they inspired their children to stay in school. This result indicated that students whose mothers were of African American descent felt their mothers inspired them to stay in school ( $M = 4.50$ ), and students whose mothers were White neither agreed nor disagreed to whether their mothers inspired them to stay in school ( $M = 2.50$ ).

**Table 3. Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Five Variables (N=50)**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. Teachers Encourage Me to Achieve in School More than Parents	--	-.37**	-.20	-.34*	-.82**	3.20	1.34
2. Grade Point Average	--	--	.07	.16	.27	2.76	.45
3. Family Income	--	--	--	-.19	-.10	3.40	1.51
4. Favorite Teacher’s Racial Group	--	--	--	--	.30*	1.60	.50
5. Parents Inspire Me to Stay in School	--	--	--	--	--	4.10	.95

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Further analysis of the correlated data revealed that African American students who scored high on whether their teacher encouraged them to achieve in school more than their parents have lower GPAs and vice versa. African American students who scored high on whether their teachers encouraged them to achieve in school more than their parents scored lower on their favorite teacher’s racial group and vice versa. African American students who scored high on whether their teachers encouraged them to achieve in school more than their parents scored lower on whether their parents inspired them to stay in school and vice versa. Also, African American students who scored high on their favorite teacher’s racial group also scored high on whether their parents inspired them to stay in school.

### Conclusion and Implications

The findings above reveal that teachers and parents have an influence on the

academic achievement level of African American students. Both teachers and parents play a vital role and must take personal responsibility in the effort to close the gap between African American students and White students. Teachers must understand their personal frame of references and the impact it may have on African American students. African American students often view teachers as mentors and role models in their lives. Through their actions, teachers send messages to children about whether they are accepted and competent enough to accomplish tasks given and about whether they are true members of the teaching/learning environment. Teachers and administrators must seek and secure involvement and form partnerships with parents if children are to succeed academically. Every attempt should be made to hold all African American students to the same academic standard as their White peers in the classroom, pushing them towards greater academic achievement. There are two specific limitations to this study. Because a convenience sample from two public high schools in northern Colorado was used, the results from this sample may not be representative of African American students from other high schools in Colorado or across the United States. Also, due to the small sample size, there is very limited power and interpretation of results.

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*You may contact the author at:*

*Bruce B. Douglas - [Bruce.Douglas@ColoState.edu](mailto:Bruce.Douglas@ColoState.edu)*

## **Enduring Postsecondary Divides: Gendered, Racialized, and Privileged Differences in Predisposition Influences and Aspirations**

*Baranda J. Fermin*

*Michigan State University*

Extant educational research (e.g., Alexander, Holupka & Pallas, 1987; Cameron & Heckman, 1998; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1992; McDonough, Antonio & Horvat, 1996; St. John, 1991; Willis & Rosen, 1979) provides several models that describe and explain the processes associated with youth participation in postsecondary education. One model that is widely accepted is the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-phase college choice model, which divides the process into the phases of predisposition, search, and choice. Although this model is widely accepted, of the extant research informing our understanding of the model, much of it has concentrated on the stages of search and choice, rather than the first stage, predisposition.

This manuscript describes a study of secondary youth and the influences they understand to be most influential in the predisposition phase. In an effort to better understand the stage of predisposition, it elucidates some of the existing research on the college choice process, illuminating a framework currently lacking critical examination of predisposition. Through this description of the literature, several questions emerge that structured the design of the present empirical study of secondary youth. After a description of the research questions that guided the investigation, a summary of the empirical work and the results are presented. The results highlight differences in predisposition influences based on gender, racial-ethnic identification, and privilege. Based on the findings, the discussion section engages the implications these enduring divides have for the methods employed by schools and communities, and U.S. society as a whole, to assist students transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

### **Literature Review**

Among the models of the college choice process, the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-phase college choice model, which divides the process into the phases of predisposition, search and choice, has been the framework most widely used in the contemporary research. Much of this research unfortunately, has concentrated primarily on the stages that follow predisposition – search and choice (cf., Alexander, Holupka, & Pallas, 1987; Astin, 1980; Chapman, 1981; Dixon & Martin, 1991a; Gilmore, Spiro & Dolich, 1981; Hearn, 1984; McDonough, 1992; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Smith & Matthews, 1992; Willis & Rosen, 1979).

Chiefly, the contemporary empirical focus has been with understanding the institutional search and selection process for students based upon aspects of race, gender, and privilege<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, the literature provides an incomplete understanding of the influences that move students from predisposition through these subsequent phases of the model. The examination of the college choice process in this manner has led to the dismal conclusion that the structural mechanisms of race, gender, and privilege are continually intractable.

Decades of sociological research (e.g., Discenza, Ferguson, & Wisner, 1985; Dixon & Martin, 1991; Gilmore, Spiro, & Dolich, 1981; Horvat, 1996; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Thomas, 1998) have produced analyses of the significant influences upon the search and selection phases of the original Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. With few exceptions, much of this work continues to accept that family background has the greatest influence on students throughout the college choice process. The strong influence of family background is widely accepted because of the understood impact that one's family status has on the perception of one's own status and where one fits into the society – or one's habitus. Habitus establishes one's perception of appropriate and viable options and social activities (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Much of the work on college choice models and processes extend Bourdieu's theories regarding habitus, and the related concept of field, to focus on how students make sense of the set of possibilities and impossibilities that are discovered by individuals as they enter into various fields (Astin, 1980; Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Tierney, 1980).

Privilege is conceptualized theoretically as a composite variable indicative of human, cultural and social capital. When considering predisposition to college and its influence considering only income or socioeconomic status lacks analytic subtlety since both are episodic and do not capture the cumulative advantage of resources across time and social institutions. In order to attempt to overcome this issue, privilege in this study is operationalized as the mother's highest level of education<sup>2</sup>. This is justifiable since highest level of education is predicated upon and determines various levels of human, cultural and social capital throughout the lifecourse.

McDonough et al. (1997) highlight the influence of social relationships and the capital they generate on the college attendance of African American students. This influence is also highlighted by Thomas (1998) as it concerns Latino students, and by McDonough (1992) as it concerns working-class and low-income white students. The findings of these researchers clearly identify the need to adjust traditional college choice models to account for the habitus of minorities<sup>3</sup> and other distinct social, economic and/or racial groups; however,

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<sup>1</sup> An understanding of the work of Pierre Bourdieu leads to an acknowledgement that any of the factors included in an analysis based on parental educational achievement level or family income is a factor or variable that measures the influence of inherited social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital indicates how privileged an individual may be in her or his ability to be socially or economically mobile. For more on this conception of social and cultural reproduction see Pierre Bourdieu (1973) "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" in *Power and Ideology in Education* (Karabel & Halsey, Eds.).

<sup>2</sup> Although traditional sociological studies of education and social mobility utilize father's highest level of education, research (for example, Hamrick & Stage, 2004) has shown that for communities of color modeling social capital and educational aspirations is most powerfully done using variables based on the educational and occupational background of the female guardian. This methodological and theoretical conclusion is logical due to an understanding of unstable patrilineal ties via the work of William Julius Wilson (1987; 1996) and Elijah Anderson (1990).

<sup>3</sup> The concepts of minority, youth/person of color and racial/ethnic minority are not used interchangeably. Concepts including the term minority are those that are from the perspective the institution, since the sociological conceptualization of minority status is dependent upon persistent historical structural oppression of a group. The concepts of youth or person of color are used when writing based on the intentionality or potential intentionality of the subject.

their research is concentrated heavily on the search and selection phases.

The existing literature has afforded the education community a wealth of information concerning the factors that influence students' decision during search and selection. Social and personal factors have been identified as critical to the choice of institution that a student decides to attend college (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Gilmour et al., 1981; Horvart, 1996; Martin; & Dixon, 1991; Smith & Matthews; 1992). These studies focus on the role that high school climate (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999), counselors and peers (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999), and parental and other family members (Gilmour et al., 1981; Horvart, 1996; Smith & Matthews, 1992) have on the potential college student's decision-making process. These factors individually or in various combinations impact college choice during the predisposition stage as well, but since little empirical work has focused on predisposition in a similar manner, it is not all together understood how important these factors are for students who are just beginning to consider postsecondary education. Furthermore, it is also unclear whether these various factors are equally important to female, racial-ethnic minority, and low-income students and their male, white or otherwise privileged counterparts.

The valuable, although disproportionate, attention given to the search and selection phases of college choice is problematic. While educational aspirations are high among all students, for low-income and minorities students the actual transition into postsecondary education is far less common than it should be based upon student aspirations (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; American Youth Policy Forum, 2000; National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001). Therefore, if increasing college attendance among all students is the goal of policymakers and practitioners, then empirical work must also focus on the earliest stage of college choice.

### **Interrogating Predisposition and its Influences**

This study endeavored to highlight predisposition and help further the understanding of how predisposition influences differ between various social groups. In order to do this, the study investigated which factors students perceive to be most influential in the predisposition phase of the college choice process. Additionally, the study sought to determine if there were any significant differences in the importance of these factors based upon students' gender, ethnicity, and privilege. The design of the study and the analysis of the survey data were guided by the following over-arching research question:

*1. What factors do students in the predisposition phase perceive to be most influential on the level of education to which they aspire?*

Based on previous empirical work (e.g., Pope & Fermin, 2003; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; NCES, 2005) it can be hypothesized that differences regarding the importance of the influences on predisposition and educational aspirations exist based upon gender, race, and privilege. Hence the study was designed so that within a particular high school context the following questions could be examined:

- 2. Are there differences in educational aspirations based upon ethnic identification?*
- 3. Are there differences in educational aspirations based upon gender identification?*
- 4. Are there differences in educational aspirations based upon privilege?*

## Method

### *The Instrument*

The instrument for this study is a variation of the survey used by Pope and Fermin (2003) (see Appendix). It was developed based upon literature related to college choice and the predisposition phase of that process (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Gilmour et al., 1981; Horvart, 1996; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Dixon & Martin, 1991; Smith & Matthews, 1992). Experts in the field were consulted regarding the instrument to assure content validity. These experts included a high school counselor, a faculty member whose research specializes in college student issues, a college admissions counselor, and an associate dean at a college of education. They eliminated some items due to duplication and relevance to the study and made suggestions related to wording of the remaining items.

For this study the demographic questions, which composed the first 11 items of the Pope and Fermin (2003) instrument were also modified. For instance, one question -- "What is your current college major" -- was removed because of its irrelevance. Additionally, based upon feedback from others in the field an additional response option, "Do Not Know," was added to the list of answer choices for seven of the 10 demographic questions. In total, the high school aged respondents who participated in this study were asked to complete a 40 item survey that required a commitment of ten to 15 minutes to complete.

In addition to the 10 demographic questions, the survey used in this study included 28 items related specifically to college choice. The 28 items represent six subscales, which include factors that influence college choice such as family, peers, civic personnel, community involvement, high school/college personnel, and possible economic gain. Each of the six subscales yielded reliabilities ranging from .721 to .956, with the overall scale yielding a total reliability of .93. Respondents answered the 28 items based upon a Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Very Important), with 3 being neutral. Two additional open ended items were also included to inform the future creation of related survey instruments.

### *Sampling and Data Collection*

The study was conducted at a moderate sized exurban<sup>4</sup> high school on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area in the southern United States. The sample pool included 644 students enrolled in 9th and 10th grade English courses, either at the general education or pre-Advanced Placement<sup>5</sup> level. At the time of the study the total enrollment for the school was 1,168 students, with 378 freshman, and 266 sophomore students. The high school's student composition in terms of ethnic identification included 274 black students, which constitute about 24% of the school population; 747 white students, about 65% of the school's population; 129 Latino/a students, about 11 % of the population; and an Asian student population which constituted less than one percent of the total school population.

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<sup>4</sup> *Exurbs are a spatial pattern of settlement located at greater distances from urban centers than suburban developments and are comprised of a different mix of land uses and populations. For more on economic, spatial and social aspects of exurbia please see Tom Daniels (1999) When City and Country Collide or Arthur C. Nelson (1992) Characterizing Exurbia.*

<sup>5</sup> *The Advanced Placement (AP) program was started in 1995 and is administered by the College Board. Students can potentially earn college credit by taking an AP exam because many colleges will give credit if a student gets a high enough score. In 2000, 760,000 students took over one million AP exams (The College Board, 2001).*

Table 1 displays the demographic information for the school and survey respondents, which are proportionally similar. An examination of Table 1 shows that in terms of racial-ethnic identification of respondents, 18.6% of the students were Black; 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander; 56.5% White; 9.1% Latino/a; 1.2% Native American; and finally 12.3% were categorized as “other,” which includes students who identified themselves as multiethnic. In comparison to the entire school population, a student who identified her- or himself as black, white or Latina/o were underrepresented in the study sample and students who classified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander were overrepresented. Some respondents chose to not fill in a gender or ethnic identification category.

**Table 1: Demographic Comparison of School Population and Study Sample**

	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Latina/o	Other <sup>6</sup>	Black	White	Female	Male
Study Sample (N=253)	1.2%	9.1%	12.3%	18.6%	56.5%	49.4%	50.2%
Secondary School Population (N=1168)	0.5%	11.1%	N/A	23.5%	64.9%	Unavailable	Unavailable

From the surveys included in analysis, 49% of the respondents were female; approximately 44% of the respondents indicated that they were 10th graders (sophomores), and approximately 53% indicated that they were ninth graders (freshmen). It is important to note that this was only the third full day of classes for the school year; therefore, it is possible to consider these students to be eighth and ninth graders. Although developmentally they are ninth and tenth graders, when considering the processes of socialization and enculturation at the secondary school level the students in the sample would more appropriately be considered eighth and ninth graders (Table 2). This psycho-social categorization allows for a better understanding of predisposition behavior within the Hossler and Gallagher model, by instituting the boundaries for the three stages as described by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) (see Table 2). An understanding of the model indicates that administering the survey later in the semester would have plausibly captured the predisposition influences of the 9th graders and search influences of the 10th graders rather than the predisposition influences of both groups.

In order to recruit students within the stage of predisposition for the survey a list of all ninth and tenth grade English classes was obtained from the secondary school principal. This list included the number of students enrolled in each class and the curriculum orientation of the class - general or pre-advanced placement. The 644 students in the sampling pool were enrolled in 29, ninth and tenth grade English classes. The survey was completed and returned by 258 these students, aged 14 to 18 years; 253 of these surveys were suitable<sup>7</sup> and included in analysis.

<sup>6</sup> There are several possible reasons the over sampling of respondents who identify themselves ethnically as other. These possibilities range from particular cultural nuances (e.g. West Indian v. Black American) to the limitations of the social categorization of race and ethnicity in survey research (do I choose an ethnicity if I am multiethnic or do I mark myself as other?).

<sup>7</sup> Several surveys were excluded because the respondents were outliers based upon age (older than 16 years) and others were excluded because they were incomplete or completed in an invalid manner.

**Table 2: Boundaries of Three Phase College Choice Model**

Model dimensions	Factors	Student Outcomes
Predisposition: Grades 7-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental encouragement and support</li> <li>• Parental saving for college</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Parental collegiate experiences</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills</li> <li>b. Career and occupational aspirations</li> <li>c. Educational aspirations</li> <li>d. Enrollment in college-bound curriculum</li> </ol>
Search: Grades 10-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental encouragement and support</li> <li>• Educational aspirations</li> <li>• Occupational aspirations</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Saliency of potential institutions</li> <li>• Student ability</li> <li>• High school academic resources</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Listing of tentative institutions</li> <li>b. Narrowing list of tentative institutions</li> <li>c. Securing information on institutions</li> </ol>
Choice: Grades 11-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational aspirations</li> <li>• Occupational aspirations</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Student ability</li> <li>• Parental encouragement</li> <li>• Perceived institutional attributes (quality, distance, campus life, majors, availability)</li> <li>• Perceived ability to pay (perceived resources, perceived costs)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Awareness of college expenses and financial aid</li> <li>b. Awareness of institutional attributes and admission standards</li> <li>c. Attaining scholastic aptitudes and attitudes</li> <li>d. Perceived support from family and friends</li> <li>e. Institutional commitment</li> <li>f. Submission of applications</li> <li>g. Preregistration</li> <li>h. Attendance</li> <li>i. Application for financial aid</li> </ol>

Source: Table Adapted from Cabrera & LaNasa (2000).

### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the importance of the 28 influences measured in the survey. These influences were then ranked based upon the mean scores for each of the responses overall and for groups of students based on gender, race and privilege, and significant differences between the influences and among the groups were determined. A univariate analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) was conducted to determine how well the perceived influences predicted student's educational aspirations (highest level of education the student reported as a goal to attain) when coupled with the variables ethnic identification, gender identification, and highest level of education reported for the respondent's mother. Additional analysis with all variables for gender, race/ethnicity, and privilege was also conducted in order to determine main and interaction effects of gender, racial-ethnic identification, and privilege on the level of education aspired to by respondents.

### **Results**

The major hypothesis underlying this study is that the transition from high school to college is an unsuccessful one for many students when gender, racial-ethnic identity, and privilege are considered. The results of this study illuminate some of the differences in

predisposition influences among students based on these student characteristics. By closely attending to differences in predisposition influences based upon differences in the gender, ethnicity, and privilege, the findings highlight some implications these differences have for the way that schools, communities, and U. S. society as a whole help students transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

*The Top Overall Influences for all Students Surveyed*

The first major question shaping the analysis of the data was: *What factors do students perceive to be most influential in the predisposition phase of the college choice model?* Table 3 displays the means for the top ten responses from participants regarding what they perceived to be the most influential factors. Factors that measure two of the six sub-scales appear to be the most attention grabbing: factors measuring career and personal goals; and high school personnel and support. Factors within the sub-scale measuring career and personal goals are ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th. The factors within the sub-scale of high school personnel and support are ranked 7th and 9th. Additionally, factors ranked 4th, 6th, and 10th were from the sub-scale measuring the influence of *family and friend support*.

**Table 3: Top 10 Influential Factors in Predispositional Phase of College Choice**

Influential Factors	Overall Mean
To earn a college degree is a personal goal of mine	4.37
The possibility of getting a better job upon completion of college	4.29
The possibility of making more money upon completion of college	4.27
Parents encouragement to attend	4.24
Possibility of achieving a career goal upon the completion of college	4.22
Parent’s willingness to provide financing	3.70
Being enrolled in a high school program that prepared me for college	3.69
Opportunity to participate in other extracurricular activities due to a scholarship	3.67
Teacher’s support and encouragement	3.62
Other relatives’ (other than parents) encouragement to attend	3.56

Whether separately or in concert, privilege, race and gender are understood to shape the set of choices of minority students possess by providing group relevant priorities, decision frameworks, and preferences that are unique from those of their privileged white peers during the search and selection stages of the college choice process (Bourdieu & Passeron; 1970/1977; McDonough, 1992; McDonough et al., 1997; Thomas, 1998). Hamrick and Stage (2004) found that for Latina/o and African American students, gender had a significant impact on predisposition influences, resulting in disparate educational aspirations. Analysis of the data from this study also found differences in the mean level of educational aspirations based upon gender, with females possessing slightly higher levels of aspiration. There are noticeable, but not significant, differences in the mean levels of aspirations between female and male respondents in all subgroups. These differences were not present only for Latina and African American students. This gender gap appears to cross ethnic boundaries with the exclusion of those respondents who identified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander and Non-

U.S. citizens or non-permanent resident, all of whom were female.

*Educational Aspirations: Gender, Ethnicity, and Privilege*

When gender identification, racial-ethnic identification, or privilege was used in this study to predict educational aspirations, neither gender nor ethnicity proved a significant predictor on their own. In further analysis employing all three variables as predictors, gender ( $F = 7.06$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and privilege ( $F = 4.37$ ;  $p = .001$ ) were significant, while ethnic identification still appeared as an insignificant predictor ( $F = .445$ ;  $p = .873$ ). Across all sub-groups the mean level of education aspired to by students did not fall below  $\mu = 4.29$ , meaning that on average students planned to complete at least some college. Table 4 shows the mean level of education respondents aspired to by gender and ethnic identification. Table 5 shows the mean level of education respondents aspired to by mother's education level (used in this study to represent privilege). An educational aspiration mean of four would indicate a goal of "some college," a mean of five would indicate a goal of a "bachelor's degree," and a mean level of 6 would indicate a goal to attain a master's degree or higher.

**Table 4: Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Gender and Ethnicity**

Demographic Group	Mean Educational Aspiration
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.66
Latina/o	4.56
Other	4.74
Black	4.89
White	4.85
Female	4.87
Male	4.85

**Table 5: Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Mother's Level of Education**

Mother's Education Level	Mean Educational Aspiration
Less than high school	4.294
High school graduate	4.9385
Vocational/Trade School	Unavailable*
Some College	4.847
Bachelor's degree	5.280
Master's degree or higher	5.640

\* Data unavailable because of small N

The information contained in Table 4 highlights that educational aspirations do not differ much by students' ethnic and gender identification. The relatively high levels of aspirations found in this study's participants is not uncommon among students in general

(Adelman, 1999; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). An examination of Table 5, illustrates that the level of education to which a student aspires increases with privilege. This is consistent with extant literature, including Hamrick and Stage (2004), which found that mother's level of education was an indirect influence on the predisposition decisions of Latina and African American male and female students who attend low-income secondary schools.

When comparing Table 4 to Table 5, students possessing different levels of privilege appear to be aspiring to different levels of education, more so than students who differ in gender and ethnic identification. The fact that educational aspirations are so differentiated by level of privilege helps to explain the dilemma that many postsecondary institutions are currently facing regarding socio-economic homogeneity, while concurrently celebrating acceptable levels of gender and ethnic diversity.

### **Study Limitations and Areas for Further Inquiry**

The use of one particular high school, while contextualizing the data and influencing factors, does limit the generalizability of the findings of this study to a moderate sector of communities and high school settings. Cultural and social factors of gender identity, racial-ethnic identity, and privilege vary tremendously based upon context. As a result, although the study's findings may only be applicable to a particular sector of students within the predisposition phase, similar studies within different contexts in the future will continue to add to our understanding of what influences are important to youth during predisposition.

The quantitative design of this study helped to further the understanding of which of the various student characteristics impact the influences perceived to be important to students' predisposition behavior and decisions. The design leads us to support extant evidence regarding the importance of mother's education. Concomitantly, this study sheds light on how some social categorizations of students have less power in impacting or predicting student predisposition behaviors and decisions. However, it does not further our understanding of why or how predisposition is influenced by various factors or student characteristics. Future research designed to focus on questions regarding *how* and *why* are needed.

### **Discussion**

From internet and television ads, to billboards and unsolicited postal and electronic mailings, it seems that information about postsecondary education is ubiquitous. However, even those students privileged by highly involved and knowledgeable parents with high levels of social, cultural, and human capital often find themselves lost when it comes to navigating their way through the college choice process. In a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (15 February, 2005), the U.S. Secretary of Education spoke candidly regarding both her professional and personal opinions regarding the needs of students and parents while navigating through the college choice process saying, "I don't think higher education institutions mean for this to occur. It's a hard process to navigate...you just sort of grasp and grope – maybe you go to a bookstore and buy what you can. I think we can do better." Dr. Spellings is not alone. Many others believe we can and should do better, and have called for better coordination of activities, curriculum, and services between high schools and colleges (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; American Youth Policy Forum, 2000; National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001; National Governors' Association, 2004).

Since the social movements of the 1960s in the United States, minority, socially and economically underprivileged youth have relied upon higher education as the shrewdest nomic pathway to the socioeconomic mobility systemically denied them in prior generations. However, current group comparisons indicate that a far higher proportion of high-income, non-minority students enter postsecondary education than their low-income, non-minority peers. The statements of Dr. Spellings and the work of some current researchers (e.g., Perna, 2006; Kim & Schneider, 2005) indicate that information may be one of the most significant factors influencing predisposition; however, additional empirical evidence is still needed. It is unlikely that individuals are decisively choosing to remain poor and uneducated despite the reduction in institutional barriers. Current educational trends therefore indicate the continuing need for additional interrogation of the underlying forces influencing the predisposition of students to participate in postsecondary education.

Coordinating programs and services that help students move from the predisposition phase of the college choice process and subsequently begin to consider the academic and social decisions associated with the transition from secondary to postsecondary education is no small feat. It will not happen simply by deciding that coordination is necessary. Policy and program initiatives based solely on recruiting students' from racialized groups are not going to benefit students in the ways necessary to increase successful transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Support for this assertion comes from my findings (see table 5), as based on this analysis race was only a significant student characteristic when it was used in concert with gender and parental education to predict the level of education to which a student aspired. Additionally, since gender only becomes a significant predictor of educational aspirations when considered in conjunction with mother's level of education and/or ethnic identification it would seem prudent to reconsider the way in which programs and policies solely target females (in the case of recruiting science and technology majors) or males (in the case of recruiting nursing and teaching majors), and people of color based upon the respective group's under-representation in the field, with the hope that these programs will provide the panacea for disparate secondary to postsecondary transitional ails.

### *Conclusion*

This study illustrated that educational aspirations are better predicted when the gender, racial-ethnic identification, and preexisting privilege of students are taken into consideration. To this end, programs and activities working to shape aspirations and impact influences are better coordinated when these student characteristics are considered. Three main points emerged from this study's findings. The first point is that economic factors are the most important influences for all students, but only the "possibility of achieving a personal career goal upon the completion of college" was found to be significantly influential for predicting educational aspirations when gender, ethnicity, and privilege are considered. The second point that emerged is that educational aspirations are high among all groups of students, but the influences that prove to significantly shape these aspirations differ when gender, ethnicity, and privilege are considered either separately or in concert. Finally, the third point is that differences in aspirations and influences are more strongly impacted by privilege than by gender or ethnic identity.

It should not be surprising that educational aspirations are more accurately predicted when the gender, ethnicity, and parental education level of the student are taken into account. However, rarely do high school curricula, supplemental or enrichment

programming, or educational policies target the whole student in this manner. Those secondary schools, postsecondary schools, and community programs that enter into partnerships with a mission to coordinate services and move students from predisposition into the search and selection processes have difficulty providing both the academic and social services necessary to support all students. Many programs specifically aim to target students within gendered, racialized and underprivileged groups who traditionally often decide that college is not for them and consequently do not enter the search and selection processes in a normative fashion. These programs must go beyond simply creating program structures for these students and contentiously work more diligently in recruitment and retention efforts (e.g., not simply creaming the most academically talented students from these groups).

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*You may contact the author at:*

*Baranda J. Fermin - [ferminba@msu.edu](mailto:ferminba@msu.edu)*



8. What is the highest level of formal education attained by your mother/legal female guardian?

- \_\_\_ (1) Less than high school
- \_\_\_ (2) High school graduate
- \_\_\_ (3) Vocational/Trade school

- \_\_\_ (4) Some College
- \_\_\_ (5) Bachelor's degree
- \_\_\_ (6) Master's Degree  
or higher
- \_\_\_ (7) Do Not Know

9. What is the highest level of formal education attained by your father/legal male guardian?

- \_\_\_ (1) Less than high school
- \_\_\_ (2) High school graduate
- \_\_\_ (3) Vocational/Trade school

- \_\_\_ (4) Some College
- \_\_\_ (5) Bachelor's degree
- \_\_\_ (6) Master's Degree  
or higher
- \_\_\_ (7) Do Not Know

10. What is your parents' gross annual household income?

- \_\_\_ (1) Below \$25,000(4)
- \_\_\_ (2) \$25,000 – \$45,000
- \_\_\_ (3) \$45,000 – 65,000
- \_\_\_ (4) above \$65,000
- \_\_\_ (5) Do Not Know

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO SECTION II**

## II. RELATED ATTITUDES

This section of the survey is designed to assess the level of importance that each of the listed factors had on your decision to attend college. Use the following scale for rating each item: 1=Not important; 2=Of little importance;3=Neutral; 4=Important; or 5=very important.

	Not important	Of little importance	Neutral	Important	Very Important
1. Parents' willingness to provide financing	1	2	3	4	5
2. Parents encouragement to attend	1	2	3	4	5
3. Older brothers or sisters' encouragement to attend	1	2	3	4	5
4. Other relatives' (other than parents) encouragement to attend	1	2	3	4	5
5. Other relatives' (other than parents) willingness to provide financing	1	2	3	4	5
6. Classmates' encouragement to attend	1	2	3	4	5
7. Friends who are attending/ have attended college encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
8. Friends providing information about college	1	2	3	4	5
9. Opportunity to participate in college athletics due to a scholarship	1	2	3	4	5

	Not important	Of Little Importance	Neutral	Important	Very Important
10. Opportunity to participate in other extracurricular activities due to a scholarship	1	2	3	4	5
11. Teacher's support and encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
12. High school counselors' support and encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
13. An admission counselor from an institution of higher education encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
14. An admission counselor from an institution of higher education providing information	1	2	3	4	5
15. Field trips to college campuses	1	2	3	4	5
16. Advertisements of college in your school or community	1	2	3	4	5
17. Encouragement from members of your church or religious group	1	2	3	4	5
18. Information about college gained at church or through a religious group	1	2	3	4	5
19. Financial support from your church or other religious group	1	2	3	4	5

	Not Important	Of Little Importance	Neutral	Important	Very Important
20. Information gained through a community/civic organization (Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Kiwani's Rotary Club, Jack & Jill, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
21. Financial support gained through a community/civic organization	1	2	3	4	5
22. Encouragement of a community/civic organization or it's members	1	2	3	4	5
23. Possibility of getting a better job upon the completion of college	1	2	3	4	5
24. Possibility of making more money upon the completion of college	1	2	3	4	5
25. Possibility of achieving a career goal that upon the completion of a college	1	2	3	4	5
26. To earn a college degree is a personal goal of mine	1	2	3	4	5
27. Being enrolled in a high school program that prepared me for college	1	2	3	4	5
28. Information about college gained from a college recruiter	1	2	3	4	5

29. Are there other factors that were not included in this survey which you felt were important in your decision regarding college attendance?

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30. Do you have any additional comments regarding your decision concerning college attendance?

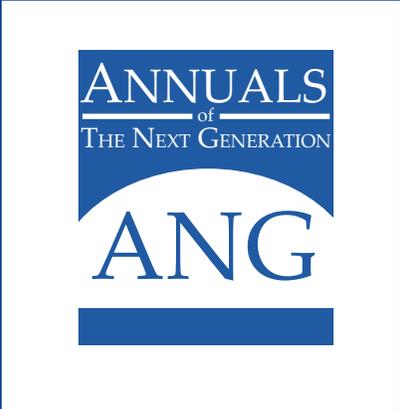
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