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"I have to be three steps ahead": Academically Gifted African American Male Students in an Urban High School on the Tension between an Ethnic and Academic Identity

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Abstract This case study investigation of three Academically Gifted African American male high school seniors in a predominantly African American urban high school examines the interplay between their ethnic and academic identity. Using an embedded micro-ethnographic approach, we explore the extent to which these students value educational attainment, the extent to which they connect with their ethnicity, and those "significant others" who inhibit or dissuade the development of their ethnic and/or academic identity. Consistent with the conclusions of more recent educational literature, findings indicate participants in this investigation value the purpose and intent of schooling and the mobility associated with it, express "Blackness" is an essential component of their academic achievement and overall self concept, and credit people within their immediate social network for opening their eyes to social injustices within the world at an early age. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords Ethnic identity · Academic identity · Black males

Introduction

Although public schools in the United States strive to create equitable learning environments, the reality is students experience education differently. There is a significant amount of research on the academic underachievement of African Americans in public schools that suggest the traditional approach to education

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"works less well" for African American and Latino children (Davidson 1996, p. 22). Recent data collected by the Schott Foundation for Public Education (Holzman 2006) suggests no ethnic group is primarily excluded more from the educational system than African American males. Based on data from the National Center of Education Statistics, the Foundation reported that only 45% of African-American male students enrolled in public schools nationwide received diplomas with their cohort. The National Center for Education Statistics (2001) reported African American males accounted for 23% of all expulsions and 21% of all suspensions nationwide in 1998. These data confirm previous research that explicitly indicates African American males have the highest suspension rates in public schools (Raffaele et al. 2003; Skiba et al. 2002).

In addition to these data is the alarming overrepresentation of African American male students in special education classes and the low high school graduation rates. Kunjufu (2005) indicates only 41% of African American male students in the general school population graduate from high school nationwide while only 27% of those African American males identified as special education students graduate from high school. Recent literature suggests the disparate proportions of African American males struggling academically is linked to sociopolitical issues within school contexts such as exclusionary disciplinary practices (Cartledge et al. 2001; Townsend 2000), cultural differences (Cooper and Jordan 2003; Maag 2001; Vavrus and Cole 2002), or subjectively implemented zero-tolerance policies (Cooper and Jordan 2003; McFadden et al. 1992; McGinnis 2003).

Current educational scholarship indicates some African American students feel pressured to choose between a positive ethnic identity and a strong academic identity (Davidson 1996; Ferguson 2000; Ogbu 1987). Researchers suggest ethnic minority students must give up their ethnic identity to engage in school-sanctioned activities, which is associated with a White cultural frame of reference or what some African Americans perceive as "acting White" (Fine 1991; Fordham and Ogbu 1986). Recent studies provide numerous rich descriptions of the intersection between ethnic and academic identity of students of color; however, limited attention has been focused specifically on African American males. For those few investigations with a foci on African American males, scholars have chosen to examine the issue with a deficit model perspective, or one that compares Black versus White achievement differences, rather than an achievement model. With a steady decline in the academic achievement of African American males and a steady increase in the number of African American males being suspended, dropping out, and being identified by the label "special education", there has never been a more critical time to examine the interplay between academic and ethnic identity on the academic success of this population from an achievement model perspective where a within-group analyses can be performed. Given this context, we sought to answer the question, "How do academically gifted African American male adolescents at a predominantly African American urban high school negotiate the tension between their academic identity and ethnic identity?" We believed a focused approach to a murky subject riddled with negative conclusions and implications could shed light onto possible pragmatic ideas and solutions at the classroom, school, and community level.

Theoretical Framework

Ethnic Identity of African American Students

Scholars contend an ethnic identity, or the extent to which a member of an ethnic minority group feels a part or a connection to a cultural group, is essential to the academic performance of ethnic minority students (Banks 1981; Gay 1985). The degree to which one feels connected to an ethnic group is influenced significantly by a number of factors, including the composition of one's social network and the language spoken within one's home. Bennett et al. (2006) explain "there are developmental differences specific to individuals over the span of their lifetime, as well as tremendous variability within any given ethnic group in terms of strength of ethnic identification" (p. 538).

Among African American youth and adolescents, ethnic identity has been investigated for quite some time by various scholars (Banks 1981; Cross 1972; Gay 1985). Contemporary research literature documents many instances of African American adolescents choosing between their ethnic identity and academic success. Hemmings (1996) found African American high achievers in a working-class school were pressured to conform to peer images of "Blackness", which left these students to pursue academic achievement the "Black way" (e.g., cheating, joking in class, rejecting Whiteness). Fordham (1988) cites examples of young African American students expressing their concern about adopting a persona of "racelessness" to engage in academic-related activities. With respect to African American males, Davidson (1996) presents a case of a high school-aged African American male who masked his ethnic identity in the classroom to do well academically. Majors and Billson (1992) also offer compelling instances of adolescent African American males who disengaged academically to maintain their "cool pose", or the attitudes and behaviors that present an African American man as calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough. According to Majors and Billson (1992) young African American men use this facade to deliver a message of control in the face of adversity and seemingly insurmountable obstacles, which forces them to choose between their ethnic identity and academic success.

A growing body of scholarship pertaining to ethnic identity has moved away from using questionnaires and surveys to measure the extent to which an individual identifies with a chosen ethnic group (Helms 1990; Phinney and Alipura 1990). These scholars argue "cultural practices—socially patterned activities organized with reference to community norms and values—are important for the enactment and formation" of an ethnic identity (Nasir and Saxe 2003, p. 14). In essence, an individual's ethnic identity is created, shaped, reshaped, and negotiated through daily life (Holland et al. 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991; Martin 2000). Gathering information about how an individual lives and the choices made throughout the course of one's daily interactions, activities, and other cultural practices provide ample information about the extent to which one affiliates with a particular ethnic group. This investigation uses this framework to examine student connectedness to their heritage.

Academic Identity of African American Students

Academic achievement is connected to one's academic identity, or "the personal commitment to a standard of excellence, the willingness to persist in the challenge, struggle, excitement and disappointment intrinsic in the learning process" (Welch and Hodges 1997, p. 37). A dimension of a larger, global self-concept, a student's academic identity is central to his/her academic performance and achievement motivation. An academic identity is developed when a student perceives himself to be capable of doing academic tasks. Research concludes several factors influence academic identity development (Burke and Hoelter 1988). Individual psychological variables affect academic identity such as the evaluation of one's work independent of grades, perceived academic ability, and perceived capability of getting good grades. There are also social variables that affect academic identity such as parents, peers, teachers, or "significant others" (Burke 1989; Burke and Hoelter 1988). The more valued a student perceives these individuals than the greater the influence that individual will have on the student's academic identity.

Research on African American students have led to the hypothesis that involuntary minorities or those people unwillingly brought to the United States through slavery or colonization develop oppositional identities where academic success is perceived as "selling out" (Davidson 1996; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 1987). Contrariwise, immigrant minorities who have voluntarily come to the United States subscribe to the ideals of the American Dream, believing hard work and academic success will payoff. Those ethnic minority students who subscribe to this mode of thinking develop strong academic identities as they relate to the mission, objectives, and goals of formal schooling. However, research (Foley 1991; Flores-Gonzalez 1999; Hemmings 1996) finds not all ethnic minority students sacrifice their ethnic identity for academic success. These studies provide numerous examples of ethnic minority students who connect with the ideals of academia while simultaneously exuding confidence in their ethnic and racial identities.

Scholars like Graham et al. (1998) have found African American male adolescents face extreme challenges in public schools to develop a positive sense of school attachment. After utilizing an "Admiration Ladder" in a predominantly African American setting and then in an interracial setting to determine who students admired, respected, and wanted to be like within their school, they concluded, "Minority boys, more so than other adolescents, must cope with the dual stressors of academic challenge and negative stereotypes about their group and these stressors can undermine the endorsement of achievement values" (p. 618). Additionally, Osborne (1997) uses data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) on African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian children to measure statistically academic identification and how its presence may affect academic achievement. Although he finds African American students have higher self-esteems than the other ethnic groups, he also concludes their grades and achievement scores dropped over time, especially between the 10th and 12th grade years, with African American boys experiencing "disidentification" more than any other group between 8th grade and 12th grade.

The Clash Between Ethnic Identity and Academic Identity for African American Students

African Americans have traditionally held a certain level of conviction and respect for education, perceiving it as a pathway to social mobility (Mickelson 1990). Perhaps more than any other ethnic group in the United States, African Americans have held onto this belief more fervently because of their extensive history and experiences with slavery, oppression, and racism (Davidson 1996; Mickelson 1990). For decades, African Americans have viewed education as the vehicle to escape subservience. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) chronicle how some academically successful African Americans felt compelled to become "raceless" (i.e., lose one's ethnic identity) in order to negotiate the system to attain academic success. Additionally, Fordham (1996) described middle-income African American children whose parents were frustrated by their children's underachievement: "Their parents perceive their actions as deliberate rejection of academic success, success that they can easily achieve if they are willing to do so. Instead, the daughters perceive success in school-sanctioned learning as physical and mental separation from the black community" (p. 194).

More recent research contradicts the notion of an oppositional identity framework (Ogbu and Fordham 1986) among African American students in school contexts. Bergin and Cooks (2002) found African American students with a mean grade point average of 3.3 who participated in their study rejected notions of acting White, and some were quite offended by the implications of this phrase. Sanders (1998) found that of 10 students who were highly aware of racism and racial barriers, six were high achievers; "however, instead of reducing their motivation and academic effort, this awareness seemed to increase them" (p. 89). In his case study investigation of one African American high school male enrolled in Advanced Placement courses, Grantham (2006) found this particular student sought to register for more rigorous courses where he was often the only African American student because he saw it as his opportunity to educate his Caucasian peers African American culture; moreover, this student was able to maintain his relationships with his African American peers as well as establish new social bonds with Caucasian students in these courses.

These mixed findings and the scant literature focusing specifically on African American males led us to question if African American adolescent males within the context of a predominantly African American urban high school in western North Carolina experienced any tension by having to choose between a positive ethnic identity and a strong academic identity. More specifically, we were concerned with three primary questions:

(1) To what extent do these African American males value educational attainment in this urban high school?
(2) To what extent do these students identify or affiliate with their chosen ethnic group?
(3) In what way do "significant others" encourage or dissuade the tension between these students' ethnic identity and academic identity?

These questions provide insight into the academic experiences of these participants.

Methods

To investigate the interplay between the academic and ethnic identity of academically successful African American males in this urban high school, we employed a case study approach (Merriam 1998; Stake 1995) using an ethnographic perspective (Denzin 1997; Miles and Huberman 1994). Case studies are particularly appropriate for capturing the insights and experiences of individuals within their natural environment. Stokrocki (1997) would contend this particular investigation is actually a microethnography because it is a study of a few individuals rather than a whole group, which allows for the investigation of cultural activities and practices in everyday life. This particular methodology created a context and the appropriate framework us to provide "thick, rich description" (Mertens 1998) of the participants. Because micro-ethnographic studies do not have predetermined agendas or protocols, it requires many levels of investigation and analysis.

Researchers' Positionality

Before conducting the research investigation, we found it necessary to briefly describe our positionality since it may have some influence over interpretation of results. The first author is an African American male who was born in the 1970s and reared in a rural section of eastern North Carolina. Having never attended a formal school setting prior to kindergarten, Anthony struggled to transition from his daily home routines to the practices of a formal school setting. Consequently, Anthony was tracked into lower educational groups for much of his K-8 educational experience before engaging in academics after being placed in an Advanced English course by a Caucasian woman English teacher in the 8th-grade. From that point forward, Anthony experienced more rigorous Advanced and Honors courses and participated in more school-related extracurricular activities, opening the doors to new experiences, opportunities, and friends. Supported by his mother, four siblings, and a strong Christian church family, Anthony proceeded to a predominantly Caucasian state-supported university to continue his education.

The second author is an African American male who was born in the 1970s and reared in a rural section of Eastern North Carolina. Kenneth describes most of his K-12 educational experiences as successful, meaningful, and somewhat challenging. Kenneth chose the term "somewhat challenging" because he was never given an opportunity or encouraged to take Honors or Advanced Placement courses, which were considered the most "rigorous" as it relates to school curricula. Many of the school-related accomplishments achieved by Kenneth can be attributed to his faith-based [Christian] upbringing, family members, select school personnel, and personal fortitude.

The Context and Participants

This particular investigation was conducted at Heritage High School (a pseudonym), a historically Black high school located in western North Carolina. We selected this particular location for several reasons. First, the school had a rich and proud reputation within the community, especially the African American community, for producing strong African American leaders. Loved and supported by numerous boosters and parents, the community involvement within the school would lead one to believe that on the surface it was doing exceptionally well with its students academically.

However, the school was categorized as "low achieving" by the Department of Public Instruction, and there was great concern from educators and legislators about the academic performance of its students. According to the North Carolina ABCs of Public Education, the statewide accountability system that assesses student academic growth via standardized tests, Heritage High School ranked well below average in the district and the state in the areas of English, Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology, Chemistry, Physical Science, and History for several consecutive academic years. Based on this academic measure, approximately 55% of the students at Heritage High School functioned well below average each academic year during a 4-year time frame. When examining these data in terms of ethnicity during this period, African Americans performed significantly worse than any other ethnic group in the school with approximately 38% performing at or above grade level each academic year compared to approximately 47% of the Hispanics and 57% of the Caucasians. Consequently, the school was one of 19 schools within the state that faced the possibility of being closed by a Wake County Superior Court Judge because of students' poor performance on state end-of-year assessments. These conflicting views of the school intrigued us and led us to want to know more about its history, alumni, faculty, and students.

In this context, we sought a small number of African American male students who were classified as "Seniors", who had taken the SAT at least once, and who had applied to a 4-year college or university. Based on the definitions of academic identity (Welch and Hodges 1997), these criteria suggested these students were committed to academic success and a standard of excellence despite the subpar academic performance of their classmates within the school. From the list of possible participants ($N = 8$) provided by the guidance office, only three African American males consented to participate in this investigation. Although a small sample size, this small number of participants allowed us to paint a more robust picture of these students' experiences. Moreover, the small sample was not viewed as problematic because we understood that the intent of this investigation was not generalizability to other contexts, but an effort to comprehend the experiences of these particular students in this learning environment. Table 1 provides a brief profile of each participant.

Procedures and Instrumentation

Driven by the theoretical framework, this study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques utilized by previous scholars examining

Table 1 Heritage high school participants

Participant name	Description	Grade point average	SAT scores (Math/Verbal composite)	Parental information
Kevin (pseudonym)	A 17–year old African American male who was the Co-President of the Senior Class at Heritage High School. His long-term goal was to attend Wake Forest University while pursuing a major in Chemistry or Chemistry Education.	4.34	1,160	Father an accountant with a B.S. degree Mother an educator with a B.A. degree
Jamal (pseudonym)	A 16-year old African American male who was a native New Yorker and member of Heritage High School's marching band. His long-term goal was to major in Marine Biology at UNC-Wilmington or music at UNC-Greensboro.	3.38	1,010	Father a "laborer" with a high school diploma Mother a homemaker with "some college"
Junior (pseudonym)	A 17-year old African American male who was a member of Heritage's Partnership for Academic eXcellence (PAX) program since his ninth-grade year. His long-term goal was to attend Princeton University.	3.18	1,040	Father an engineer with a B.S. degree Mother a banker with a B.S. degree
Mean		3.63	1,070	

academic and ethnic identity of African American students. We collected data approximately three times per week over the course of 4 months (November to February) using the following strategies: (1) three open-ended interviews with each participant; (2) one narrative interview with each participant; (3) one open-ended interview with a "significant other" whom the participant nominated; (4) three classroom observations; (5) one open-ended interview with the teacher of the classroom observed; (6) one interview with the 12th-grade guidance counselor; (7) an "Academic Identity" survey and the "Admiration Ladder" instrument; and (8) data collected from artifacts.

Much of this study is driven by the participants' interviews, those interviews conducted with significant others, and observations. This decision was made purposefully to allow these students to share their expert knowledge and to observe their behaviors as they occur in natural, uncontrolled environments. Each student was interviewed a minimum of three times. The first two interviews followed an established protocol (see Appendix B) and the third interview was a follow-up interview that asked questions based on the responses of the first two interviews, designed to fill in any gaps. Also, a number of informal conversations took place within the school or at home. These conversations were not audiotaped but field notes were used to document these interactions.

A fourth formal interview in which each participant responded used a narrative approach. Participants were asked to respond for at least 30-min to the prompt "Tell me about your educational experience." This interview method allowed the participants to be the authors of their own biographies. A narrative is a collection of peoples' stories, which are told with certain patterns and priorities, and the analysis of those events (Casey 1995). Narratives give voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and, usually, attention to those people forgotten by society. In a sense, it converts the term "research" into "I-search," a time for participants to reflect on their livelihood experiences and share those moments and events with the world. They allow the narrator to tell what he believed happened and what he recalls. Using the given prompt, students were able to reflect on those "significant others" throughout their lives, those people who they perceived as inhibitors or inspirers of their educational pursuits, and other events and experiences that contributed to their development as not only a student but also as a person.

Each participant also recommended one person he felt was "extremely significant" to his academic progress and to his development as a young adult. This person was interviewed to gain more information about how they perceived their respective participant and to ascertain more data about what they did to impact the student's life. Although each interview varied in length, the average time of these interviews was approximately 45 min. These sessions were recorded using field notes rather than an audiotape so each "significant other" would feel open to express himself/herself freely. Our intent was to make these participants feel comfortable enough to speak candidly.

During the course of the study, students were observed three times in their general core classes (i.e., English, mathematics, history, science). Because each of these participants were part of a newly established program at Heritage High School, these students did not take their core classes on campus. Instead, they took

these courses at the local community college or one of the local universities. For this reason, our original plan to audiotape classes was not approved but field notes were allowed for each observation. These data were chronicled after each observation session. Each instructor of these courses was also interviewed once immediately after a classroom observation.

The participants also completed an "Academic Identity" survey borrowed from the research of Burke and Hoelter (1988) and an "Admiration Ladder" (Graham et al. 1998). These instruments provide a glimpse into each student's aspirations, self-perception, parent's occupation and income, and reasoning for wanting to attend college as well as an indication as to whom they respect and value within their peer network. These surveys allowed us to check the participants' narratives and interviews for validity and accuracy (see Appendix C), creating internal triangulation. Additionally, artifacts such as Standardized Achievement Test (SAT) scores, attendance reports, disciplinary referrals, academic transcripts, awards, student newspaper articles, and other pertinent physical documents were used to create internal validity. More importantly, this information helped create a complete picture of the participants, their feelings toward academics, themselves, their communities, their school, and their world. These data assisted us in getting to know more about the participants, creating a deeper understanding of each participant.

Data Analysis

We employed an inductive analysis approach to analyze the plethora of qualitative data collected throughout this investigation. All individual interviews were transcribed and field notes taken during observations were inputted into 2×2 tables in Microsoft Word. During this stage, we performed a member check by meeting with each participant to share the transcripts with them to ensure they were accurately represented within the study. After the participants indicated they saw no errors, misquotes, or inaccuracies, we conducted an analysis of these data using a three-phase approach. In Phase I, we identified keywords and phrases in the transcriptions that appeared repeatedly after going through the data in the tables line by line (Strauss 1987). As these keywords appeared, we tested them against the research questions to determine their applicability to this investigation. In Phase II, we used those keywords that fit this study to seek patterns across the data sources. For example, if a student identified "friends who hate" as a source of tension between his academic and ethnic identity, we examined this concept across other data sources to see how many times it occurred. If these keywords emerged as patterns across numerous data sources, we labeled the phrase or keyword as a pattern. In Phase III, we identified all the patterns that emerged throughout the analysis and generated broad categories for them. These categories were renamed as themes for this investigation. After a lengthy and detailed analysis process, three major themes emerged: (a) School is serious to me; (b) I'm real big into knowing your heritage, and (c) Without guidance, we'd all be heathens.

Findings

In the ensuing section, we present each of the emergent thematic areas in great detail using the words of the participants and intertwine research-based discussion to make meaning of their experiences. Throughout the findings, we use the language of the participants, which is inclusive of slang and Southern dialect. Presenting the findings in this manner authentically captures the feelings, emotions, and thoughts of the participants.

Theme I: "School is Serious to Me"

According to the "Academic Identity" survey, all participants believed their teachers perceived them as "successful" and as "better than most" Heritage High School students. Two of the participants believed their work was "good" compared to other students, and one felt his work was "excellent." Furthermore, all three participants felt their academic abilities were "among the best" when compared to other students at Heritage. When thinking about their academic futures in college, all participants believed they were capable of getting "A's". Thus, their responses indicated they were convinced they possessed the cognitive ability to do well academically in the future based on their past and current performance.

These participants partially credited themselves for their academic success. They possessed great confidence in their cognitive abilities and believed the only persons who would stop them from excelling academically were themselves. They prepared well for their course work because they perceived school as having a significant impact on their future lives. Jamal explained:

> School is serious to me. It's something that can't be played around with. It's your future and you need it. It's what separates those who really want it from those who would like to have it, and it's not easy and you have to be serious about it.

Because Jamal perceived school to be essential in his life, he approached his academics with a positive, insistent attitude. During his early education, he described a study schedule he followed after school to ensure his performance was consistently high, working on homework immediately after school and after dinner before he could watch television. His devotion to academia at the high school level remained high, although he admitted he eased off his routine during his junior and senior years because of his work commitment after school. He stated:

> I just have a lot to do now. Takes up more time. Like, I'm in the band, and I work and do community service. So it's more to do in a day than before. Before I could focus on homework more. Read and study more, but I don't have the time to do that now. Not as much at least.

Although his time toward academic coursework diminished somewhat over the last few years, his attitude toward the importance of school in his life remained, and his belief in performing well academically was still intact. Thus, he remained loyal

to the idea of studying and completing assignments on time, demonstrating that his understanding of "school" influenced his academic identity.

Kevin's perception of school was also positive. He believed the purpose of school was to keep students informed and aware of historical and current events. He deduced, "You can't make a difference if you don't know what's happening around you, you know?" Similar to Jamal, Kevin approached academia with an aggressive attitude, improving himself with challenging courses and studying consistently. He explained his reasoning for taking such an aggressive approach:

> Nobody else is going to determine how far I go except me. I remember I was watching the making of "Ali", you know, the movie with Will Smith. It was on HBO I think or something like that. Anyway, I remember he said he told his father that he wouldn't let anyone in Hollywood outwork him because he wanted to be the best, and that's kind of the attitude or the, uh, I guess the mindset that I've taken. I'm not going to let anybody at Heritage outwork me—do more than me. That's how I am. I'm going to outwork everybody.

The notion of hard work and being the best one could be echoed throughout these participants' commentary. Their desire to improve and impact those around them seemingly motivated them to work tirelessly to achieve academically.

Like Kevin and Jamal, Junior perceived school as a place to gain knowledge rather than grades. He remarked, "I mean, learning is the main reason you're there. You can have all the fun with all the friends, but if you're not learning, then you're defeating the purpose of being there in the first place. You have to learn." Because he held this view of academia, he worked hard to prepare himself to gain knowledge, which he set as a goal for himself, establishing a psychological attitude toward academia that would positively influence his academic performance. However, he was not as detailed or strict in his approach as Kevin or Jamal, choosing to keep up with his academics on a much looser schedule rather than adhering to weekly planners or assigned times to perform homework. He explained, "I do get sidetracked though. I don't want to sound like I'm perfect. I get caught up in doing things and having fun sometimes, but I have to refocus to get myself back on track, and I think that's a decision that only you can make. Only an individual can decide that. That's how I see it."

This sense of individuality and nonconformity were characteristics these participants valued. On the "Admiration Ladder" survey, participants indicated they appreciate their classmates who do not conform to the social pressure of working below standard, and they respected those persons whose work ethics were similar to their own. According to this instrument, the participants nominated 11 fellow high achieving students (i.e., grade point averages between 3.00 and 4.00) as people they admired and respected compared to only two average students (i.e., grade point averages between 2.00 and 2.99). Of the 11 high achieving students nominated, eight females were nominated while only three males were nominated, and each person nominated was African American. Thus, these students looked at females at Heritage High School as people they held in high esteem. This type of nomination pattern was consistent with Graham's study (1998) and went against

stereotypical gender beliefs that suggest males are more prone to look to other males as role models.

Although their physical approaches toward studying differed slightly, these participants were quite similar in their perception of academia, possessing positive attitudes of school and connecting its significance to their long-term goals. Instead of being impacted by the grades they received, they set their minds on the attainment of knowledge and information and strived to reach this goal. Rather than holding onto negative feelings of school, they converted those attitudes into positive energy by preparing themselves sufficiently for academic tasks, which was evident in their high grade point averages and SAT scores. Thus, according to these students, their superb academic performance was the result of proper planning, hard work, a desire to challenge themselves, and a focus on improving themselves and their community. These factors pervaded their thoughts and provided them with the motivation to overcome possible deterrents from success.

Theme 2: I'm Real Big into Knowing Your Heritage

Consistent with more recent research finding (Bergin and Cooks 2002; Grantham 2006), these young African American male students demonstrated a strong connection to their ethnicity, which seemingly strengthened their academic identity. Because they connected to their African American heritage and ancestry, they adopted positive, yet aggressive attitudes toward schooling, believing it was one of the most important variables in life to improve race relations while dispelling myths and destroying stereotypes. They were cognizant racism existed in their schools and communities, and they possessed strong beliefs educational attainment was the best way to overcome this adversity.

None of the participants in this investigation contended school reinforced beliefs learned at home. They felt schools often encouraged them to be invisible and silent rather than visible. Jamal's mother argued this point most passionately, remarking:

> [The principal at Heritage] is horrendous. He is the worst thing to ever happen to Heritage, and that's sad because you'd think he'd be more willing to make sure that this predominantly Black high school was on top, be he doesn't do his job. He won Principal of the Year two years ago but they gave him that award to keep him in his place … to help insure that we—and when I say we, I mean our Black students—to make sure we are limited in success and opportunity. That's all. That's why I said it's a conspiracy. He's there to make sure that these kids don't ever succeed.

Kevin shared similar sentiments when describing a situation that occurred to him the previous academic year as the editor of the school newspaper. He explained:

> I decided to write this article about the importance of taking pride in your Blackness. I'm real big into knowing your heritage ... Well, I wrote this article last year that really didn't attack anyone. It outlined the history of Black people who stood up for what they believed in. You know, people like Dr.

> King, Rosa Parks, Muhammad Ali. People like that—Malcolm X, can't forget Malcolm. Anyway, after I wrote the article, I decided I needed something to finish it—something that would capture Black pride. Something that would show that we're proud to be Black, and I thought back to Jesse Owens when he stuck his fist up after winning the gold medal in the Olympics. Gave the crowd the "Black Power" sign. I thought about the "Black Power" sign and the importance of what that meant. What better way to show pride in your heritage than the "Black Power" sign? So I decided to add it with the article.

He continued:

> Well, probably a few days [after the paper was published], I'm sitting in class and the intercom comes on, right? They wanted me to come down to the office to talk with the principal ... when I got to his office, he starts telling me about all these phone calls that he's getting from parents about the 'Black Power' sign in the paper, and I'm like, 'what?' That really blew me, for real.

These participants argued their school did not encourage their Blackness through curricula, nor did it promote the expression of their Blackness. They conveyed schools worked bureaucratically to suppress their ethnic identities by forcing them to become invisible by not mattering, which would impact their academic identities adversely. These participants realized these subtle, hidden behaviors and worked to change them by visibly and vocally asserting themselves in school. Essentially, these participants discovered the importance of possessing a "voice" in all avenues of their lives.

These lessons were apparent during several observations in their classes, school, and in the community. They were not comfortable with being ignored or overlooked, and they worked hard to be visible. Observations of these participants in their classes confirmed they had a "voice" that needed to be heard. In his English composition course at a local community college, Jamal asserted himself as a major contributor in the class. Although he did not speak frequently in class, only participating seven times during the first observation, nine times during the second observation, and four times during the third observation, the quality, depth, and length of his comments and his interaction with the instructor separated him from other students in the class. During one observation, he engaged in a small debate with the instructor about the importance of relying on the Internet to conduct research rather than spending large amounts of time in the library, explaining to the instructor, "This is the Information Age and computers were made to help us become more efficient and save time ... If we find information this way, why shouldn't we use it? Keep in mind, not all of us in this class have cars." After class, his instructor, an African American man, commented, "Jamal is a good student. He's a real 'go getter' ... of course I encourage that and really push him, trying to make him go beyond his own limitations." His ability to be assertive and aggressive made him visible to his instructor, which assisted him in developing a positive relationship with this instructor, who added, "I try to mentor him."

Kevin's demeanor in his English composition class at the local university with college freshmen was similar to Jamal's, but he was much more outspoken. During

the first observation of his class, Jamal participated much more than any other student in the class, commenting 28 times. He confessed the text, an excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, sparked his interest, forcing him to speak frequently. He explained, "How can you not want to talk about it? I think everyone should have to read it. Black. White. Hispanic. Whatever. That's how good it is." Several weeks later, he continued to shine in his class, leading the way on an exercise about figurative language in prose and how it excludes various audiences. Therefore, these participants were visible to their classmates and their instructors because they chose to have their "voice" heard. They possessed strong academic identities as a result of their earlier educational and home experiences that translated into self-confidence, even in foreign academic contexts.

While these participants were asserting themselves academically in other locales, they continued to be "visible" at Heritage High School. Kevin was the Senior Class Co-President and the editor of the student newspaper, a position that meant a great deal to him. He explained:

> Now I just write for the newspaper. That's important to me. I take that seriously. Cause these students, they don't know what's going on around them, so I feel like I have to make them aware of things. They walk around school everyday and kind of go with the flow. They don't ever stop to think about things. That's the one thing my dad always tells me. He always tells me to watch the news and read the paper. Everyday he'll say that because you need to know what's going on around you in the world ... I feel like I have to make the people at Heritage aware of things that they're not thinking about.

His positions at Heritage High forced him to be physically visible and heard. His decision to hold these positions, which were open to any senior in the school, demonstrated his conscientious decision to be noticeable to his peers. His confidence in his ability to lead was a product of his academic identity, strengthened by his experiences.

Junior was also visible at Heritage High School, as many of his peers bestowed upon him the nickname "Mr. Princeton," a name initiated by his guidance counselor because of his outspoken desire to attend Princeton University. She acknowledged Junior was "in the upper echelon" of his senior class, but she distinguished his abilities from many of the other high achievers in Heritage. She stated:

> [Junior has a] high gpa, good SAT score, so on paper, he looks good to colleges. Very competitive. But we have a lot of students like that here. Look good on paper but when you meet with them face-to-face, you ask yourself, 'who is this?" We're killing these kids here. A lot of them have 3.0 gpa's but haven't even read certain literature. Now I'm not saying that you have to read books to be smart, but there's certain books that will stretch you and challenge you and make you grow. But these kids, they don't read. In "x" number of weeks, we can't find a way to get them to read a novel? C'mon now. And we have a scholarship committee that interviews seniors, and they can't talk. All these high gpa's and wonderful accolades, and they can't talk. And these are our upper level students. You ask them what their aspirations are and they say,

> 'uh, uh, naw, and you know what I'm saying' and ain't said nothing yet. And when they do talk, it's a lot of surface stuff. Cliches and things they think you want to hear. No real substance whatsoever. But there's a few who stand out. Junior and [the Senior Class Co-President]. Kevin and [the Senior Class treasurer]. They handle themselves well. Very articulate ... good *strong* examples of what you would like Black men to be.

The school officials at Heritage were able to see Jamal and Kevin because they proved that they possessed academic identities that separated them from other peers. Their ability to think critically and to make use of available resources impacted their identification with academics, making them more respected in their school context.

Much of their aggressive attitude toward being heard and seen in school stemmed from a combination of their challenging classes, home instructions, and community involvement. In each of these contexts, these participants found more resources that they could access and negotiate to help them understand not only class material but also their place in the world. They also learned the importance of responsibility and decision making, which influenced their academic development. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, these participants discovered the value of being visible and possessing a voice. As Kevin's father remarked, "I'm most proud of Kevin because he stands for something."

These participants understood schools were a microcosm of society and, consequently, reflected people's diverse beliefs. They were able to make sense of a global picture, which suggested to them education was the key to being heard and visible in today's society. Yet, they also understood school and society worked to limit and weaken their connection to their "Blackness." Kevin's commentary on the current societal state epitomized these participants' beliefs. While discussing the Malcolm X autobiography he was currently reading, he described how much he loved Spike Lee's adaptation of the book, but how disappointed he was Denzel Washington did not win an award for his portrayal of Malcolm X. He explained:

> Denzel should've won an award for that movie, but instead, they give him an award for playing a crooked, crack head cop [in "Training Day"]. Shows you how much the Academy thinks of us.

These participants believed the "Academy" (i.e., academia) thought very little of them as African Americans. However, their connection to their ethnicity and their firm grounding in their "Blackness" by significant others kept them striving for the acquisition of more knowledge and education, which they perceived as the only true way to demolish stereotypes and overcome barriers just as their ancestors believed and proved many years before.

These participants' assertive and aggressive approach toward their classes appeared to be directly connected to their ethnic identity, which was strong among these participants, as they demonstrated high levels of pride in their "Blackness." Their quest for self-improvement through educational channels included an understanding of a larger picture, improving the African American community. Moreover, they often admitted they gathered strength to overcome academic barriers from African Americans who came before them, who not only fought to

overcome far tougher obstacles but also who opened doors of opportunity for them. Their respect for their African American ancestry left them with a sense of obligation to be seen and heard in class, school, the community, the state, the nation, and the world.

Theme 3: Without Guidance, We'd All be Heathens

Throughout this investigation, participants revealed their beliefs were often conditioned by "significant others" throughout their lives who challenged them to understand the significance of African American heritage and its place in their lives. Jamal's mother admitted she preached frequently to her son about the importance of school and its connection to his ethnicity. She explained:

> And that's what I try to tell [Jamal]. Don't take no handouts from anyone. You got to work hard to get ahead, and these kids need to be challenged, especially our young African American men. They need to be challenged to make sure that they can make it in this world. You see, Black girls are going to be okay. They'll find something in society to do. They'll find work somewhere. That's been a trend since slavery, you know? Black girls could sneak up to the back door and get whatever they wanted because they were women. It had to be done quietly and discreetly, but they could be taken care of. But the Black man, that's a different story. If a Black man don't have his act together and have his education and his intelligence, then it's real tough to make it in this society. The Black man will struggle if he don't get what he needs and that's what Heritage needs to push to these kids. I don't want to have my son struggling because Heritage didn't do what they were supposed to do. That's why I'm glad [Jamal] is my last one to have to go through Heritage.

Jamal's mother instilled in him a sense of pride about his ethnicity and a sense of urgency in attaining an education, making his connection to academia more meaningful. Moreover, she infused in him the importance of being visible as an African American man rather than adopting the persona of the Black woman who had to do things "quietly and discreetly" (i.e., invisibly).

Kevin's father admitted his personal pro-Black beliefs impacted his son's progression as an academician. He acknowledged he frequently shared with Kevin why it was important for "Black kids to get as much education as possible, especially Black men because they are always going to be stereotyped, so he has to prove that he's capable of doing many things well." Junior agreed his father's advice to him was extremely important to his focus and success:

> Basically, [my dad] just always reminds me that I can do anything as long as I stay focused. He always tells me that I'll have to work twice as hard and do more than the next person because I'm a young Black man, and I try to remember that even now in school. I know I have to be three steps ahead because it's tougher for me, and that's what he reminds me of everyday it seems.

These messages from their homes were not lost upon these participants, as they took their parents' advice and began to develop work ethics and attitudes that would encourage and promote the growth of their academic identities. Their willingness to be visible to their peers would become byproducts of their connection to academics and their ethnicity.

The Associate Pastor of Junior's church, to whom he was very close, understood many of his African American youth members possessed nonchalant attitudes about their African American history and he attempted to instill a sense of pride in them about their past. He stated:

> These kids today, man, they don't respect their ancestors and those people who marched, and those people who died. I mean, they gave their life and died. It's because people like that that we have all the opportunity we have today. You know, there are young Black professors and administrators like you because of those people and God and his Blessings? That's right, it's a Blessing. All this opportunity that you young Black kids got today is a Blessing, because all those people died to make sure that you all would have that, and these kids around here don't understand that, you know?

Junior's Pastor attempted to connect him to his ancestry, hoping to strengthen his ethnic identity. He believed these stories of African Americans who gave their lives would inspire Junior to feel obligated to make the most of his opportunities. His father took a similar approach in a less aggressive manner. He stated:

> This world ain't kind to Black men, you know? You know how they are. When you're a Black man, you already got two strikes against you. That's what I've always told Junior. See, things different today than they were 30 years ago. A whole lot different. When I was in school, the teachers knew your mama, your daddy, your brothers, your sisters, whole family. Everybody in town about knew you. It ain't like that now. People don't know each other no more. Ain't nobody out there looking out for you, trying to help you.

To what these gentlemen encourage in their African American male children is the necessity of knowing their history and respecting the sacrifices made by their ancestors.

These participants also implicitly learned from these "significant others" the importance of individuality. They held fast to their beliefs they did not want to conform to images portrayed as "mainstream" by their peers or media, nor did they want to behave in those manners. Furthermore, they did not care what other people thought or felt about them because they were comfortable with being themselves. When asked on the "Admiration Ladder" whom these participants wanted to be like, their responses demonstrated their need for individuality and their admiration for those who chose not to change to emulate the style of others. Junior explained he nominated one male because he "most like[d] the fact the he doesn't conform, especially when it comes to music. We both listen to hip hop music, and a lot of young people do, but we listen to a different kind of hip hop but we don't change for anyone else." The fact he and the young man he nominated do not change their style

for other people because they see them as "smart" was important to him, even in the face of "a lot of criticism."

When asked the same question, Kevin and Jamal responded similarly. Jamal answered:

> If I were a freshman and I was looking up to seniors, I think I would choose me, you know? Yeah, other people are always saying how talented I am. I really don't see it but others see it in me, but I'm beginning to see it as I get older, you know? I'm good with music and people see that, so I wouldn't mind being like myself.

Kevin's reply echoed this assertion:

> I don't believe in being like anyone. I don't like copying people. I like to be me. Set my own style. Leave my own mark. My goal is to be the best person that I can be, and that's all that matters. I don't come to school to see what everyone else is doing because 9 times out of 10, they're not doing anything worth copying, so why would I want to do that?

These participants had no reservations about getting to know their classmates at Heritage High School and did not segregate themselves from their peers. They enjoyed getting to know their classmates and often felt that their classes were structured in a manner where they were forced to interact with their peers. However, they maintained they wanted to remain individuals, leaving their own marks and not copying anyone. They appreciated and respected students who chose not to conform regardless of what other people believe.

Because they cared little how others perceived them, these students had no issues with asking other individuals for assistance because they learned at early ages it was acceptable to ask for guidance. When asked to whom he turned for help throughout his educational career, Jamal responded, "My mom. She's always been there to help me with things. Then my sister was around a lot, my youngest sister. She's helped me a lot, too ... So it's like I grew up with two mothers instead of one." Jamal was not alone in his perception and appreciation of who assisted him in times of need. Junior responded similarly:

> My mom. She helped me most often. She stayed on top of me, asking questions. 'Have you done your homework?' Stuff like that. She always pushed me to work hard, even when I didn't see the point of it. She's worked real hard to help me understand things. New tactics and strategies to hold things together, to retain information. She's just been real tough on me and it's paying off."

Junior's father also acknowledged the role of his wife in helping his son stay on top of his academic workload. He explained his employment often left him little time to assist Junior with his homework as he focused on his daily routine to make sure that bills could be paid. However, he conceded:

> Well, I really haven't done too much. My wife and my daughter have really done a lot of work with Junior. I know when he was younger, he had some

> trouble in school and my wife would talk to his teachers on the phone or she'd go to the school to meet with them ... I don't think we ever sat down and talked about staying in school. More than anything, I've told him that he needs his education cause this world is crazy these days. Can't go nowhere without it.

This type of culture generated within the home led Junior to feel he had to do his work and achieve success but was introduced to the idea of using resources to accomplish his goals.

Kevin's father seconded the notion of utilizing available resources by introducing to him the idea of planning with the end in mind. He stated:

> See, I've been behind Kevin since he was a little boy. I always told him that if you're going to do something then you need to put forth your best effort. If you're not going to do something all out, don't even bother with it. That's the bottom line. I'm an accountant, man, and that's how I look at things. I'm all about the bottom line. All that other stuff doesn't matter to me. In the end, are you producing? That's it. Nothing else matters. But if you're going to produce, you have to plan. Any accountant will tell you that. I tell Kevin all the time 'proper preparation prevents piss poor performance.' If you're not busting your butt in the beginning, then the end is going to be a bunch of mess. Nothing but a bunch of crap. It's that simple. It's a fact of life, man, and that's been proven over and over again.

Kevin's attitude was a product of his father's influence who he reminded him constantly of the expectations of African Americans in academia and the stereotypes of African American men in the real world. Subsequently, his academic performance and his behaviors in school and after school reflected his desire to prove to the world that African American men are more than the monolithic generalizations portrayed within media and indicated by poor test scores. When asked about his 4.3 grade point average, he replied:

> You know, I think about it more than you probably think because I know it's not really about me. Yeah—my dad said this and I remember it—that number is proof, you know? It's like evidence to the world. It says to those people that want to hate, "Yeah, Black men are capable of doing what you do—and can probably do it better than you can—if we just get the chance," you know? That's what [the grade point average] means to me ... it's really bigger than me.

These students also learned this lesson in many of their classrooms over time. Junior explained, "School forces you to interact with people and get to know people that you might not have if you weren't in school, so it's fun in that regard." To what he alluded is the nature of a rigorous and challenging curricula that forced these participants to look for assistance rather than performing assignments alone. Kevin recalled how his 6th-grade science teacher challenged him. He stated, "Most of our assignments in her class were like hands-on experiments. We would always have to do projects, science projects. Seems like every week we had to do one." Kevin acknowledged his teacher's challenging methods every week forced him to ask for

help. He concluded, "My dad used to help me a lot with some of [those projects]. I would come up with kind of what I wanted to do, and he would really help me put it together." Similarly, Junior commented these challenging courses forced him "to think a little more for myself, independently. I started being able to connect things to other things and just being able to see things a little bit differently, you know?" Kevin philosophized that the reason teachers gave him challenging assignments was "to see how bad [I] really wanted an education because a lot of it [was] not necessary. It was more like busy work to see how real [I was] ... How persistent [I was]."

Because teachers challenged these participants, they became more open to the idea of asking for assistance from parents, other teachers and administrators, which helped them to establish relationships with key people and expanded their social network. Jamal explained he developed a great relationship with one of his junior high school teachers because she challenged him, and he turned to her for assistance on a regular basis. He commented, "She really pushed me and opened doors for me, you know? She saw this potential in me that no one else did. She saw a lot of strength in me and she just encouraged me to go after what I wanted, so she really did a good job with me." Similarly, Junior explained his initiative and willingness to ask questions helped him develop a relationship with guidance counselors at Heritage High School who assisted him with getting into the Partnership for Academic eXcellence (PAX) program, which he believed was significant in his life because it helped him develop into a better student. He explained:

> It's a program that helps you become more of a professional while still in high school. That's how I got my job at Wachovia. And every week, what they do is send home a progress report. And, it's required that your parents have to make—is it 2 or 4? I think it's 2 visits to the school every semester. And if your grades fall below a C, then your teachers call home. It's been a good program for me. I've learned a whole lot. Responsibility. Decision making. The value in working hard and efforts. It's been a great program.

From the academic rigor of the curricula, the structure provided by teachers in their classes, and challenging course work, these participants were able to reap the benefits of academia, including lasting relationships with key personnel. They also credited these items with them understanding the larger purpose of school. From these challenging experiences and relationships, Jamal deduced:

> [School is] a disciplinarian. That's all. It provides you with that discipline you need and that guidance, direction to be successful. Without guidance, we'd all be heathens out here in the world. And I think that without school, there'd be no great minds. It helps shape those minds into greatness.

Discussion and Implications

Although this investigation is very local in nature and its results cannot be generalized to other contexts, the findings suggest Academically Gifted African

Americans in this urban high school valued educational attainment very much even when those around them seemingly did not (Mickelson 1990). While many of their peers struggled mightily to work at proficiency levels, these participants gave no credence to peer pressure or factors that could inhibit their academic progress such as potential social strife nor did they identify "acting White" as a source of tension between their ethnic and academic identities, which is consistent with the findings of Bergin and Cooks (2002). Rather than "acting White", these participants found "Blackness" as a source of strength and inspiration. Unlike the findings of Hemmings (1996) who found African American students were pressured to conform to negative images of "Blackness", these participants chose to exhibit positive behaviors of what they believed "Blackness" was such as being visible and outspoken in the public eye, an undying and tireless work ethic, and a desire to serve their communities as servant leaders (Woodson 1990). In their eyes, adopting an oppositional framework to learning (Fordham and Ogbu 1986) would conform to the weak-minded behavior displayed by the majority of the other Black students in their high school. To them, the real sign of individuality and manhood was to be oneself in the face of social pressure and criticism.

These young men were guided a great deal by a social network inclusive of parents and trusted community members. These "significant others" surrounded these students with positive messages often grounded in African American history, providing them with narratives and specific African American heroes and heroines as concrete examples to which they could relate. These significant others also supported these students with encouraging and challenging words but oftentimes this encouragement was steeped in African American heritage or spiritual testimony. Perhaps more importantly than sharing anecdotes of African American heritage, these "significant others" modeled to these students the importance of fighting for equity to attain an education as they advocated for their students against the bureaucratic machine called "school". Using these messages and examples, these young men established within themselves the fortitude to strive for academic and personal success regardless of the obstacles, hurdles, or barriers placed before them. As Junior stated, "If [my ancestors] could walk for miles in the cold with dogs attacking them back in the day, I surely can walk to class to learn something to better myself."

The findings of this study elicit important information for other educators, parents, and community members to heed and consider, especially in urban areas where African American male academic performance is below average. This information can be used to structure learning environments, advocacy workshops, or other school- or community-based efforts to improve the academic success of African American males. The young men in this study emphasized how academic success can be achieved without sacrificing their ethnic identity; however, several factors impact this ability. Being surrounded by "significant others" who continually instill a positive message of what it means to be an African American and an African American man was essential to their academic success. Given this occurrence, educators should strive to ensure the curriculum is reflective of culturally responsive texts and pedagogy that critically explores the struggle and successes of persons of color. Counterbalancing current media images of

"Blackness" as negative with historical and current narratives and concrete examples of "Blackness" as positive provides students with a point of reference for hard work, persistence, and success.

Embedded throughout the experiences of these Academically Gifted young men was the notion of discourse and dialogue, or talking about their feelings and using their voice. For African American males, this skill is typically de-emphasized as many are taught to maintain their "cool pose" (Majors and Billson 1992) by internalizing their feelings and handling their issues independently. The young men in this investigation gave a great deal of attention to the idea of putting their pride aside to talk with their "significant others" about their challenges and perceptions. Given this notion, parents and community members must provide opportunities for African American males to debrief about their feelings in an environment where they do not feel threatened or challenged. Being free to share their thoughts without worry of being perceived as weak may alleviate some of the internal psychological pressure these young men feel, which may reveal itself in external physical violence. Classroom teachers should also adhere to this advice by allowing opportunities for dialogue and discourse within the classroom based not only on culturally relevant texts but also on current events within the school as well as in the community.

Appendix A: The Admiration Ladder (Condensed)

Directions: For each of the following questions, you should nominate three (3) students in your current academic class at your current school who you feel best fits the description. Use the name chart provided for you to nominate students.

1. **Nominate three (3) students in your current academic class whom you admire.**

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. **Nominate three (3) students in your current academic class whom you respect.**

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. **Nominate three (3) students in your current academic class who you want to be like.**

   _____

   _____

   _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Interview #1 Protocol: Academic Identity

1. (a) Why do you admire the 3 students you identified on your Admiration Ladder?
   (b) Why do you respect the 3 students you identified on your Admiration Ladder?
   (c) Why do you want to be like the 3 students you identified on your Admiration Ladder?
2. When I say the word "school," what comes to mind?
3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of school? How do you feel about it?
4. How do you feel about people who do not finish school?
5. How do you feel about your ability to succeed in school?
6. When you've struggled academically, who have you turned to for help throughout your life?
7. Explain things that these people said or did to help you?
8. How often do you and these people talk about school?
9. How do you think other students feel about you?
10. If I got all your current teachers together in one room and I asked them to give me one word that describes your academic ability, what word would they give me? Explain.
11. How do "smart" students at Heritage act?
12. How do other students act?
13. You have a "X.0" grade point average and a [insert score] SAT score. What do those numbers mean to you? What do you think they mean to your peers?

Interview #2 Protocol: Ethnic identity

(1) As an academically successful student at Heritage, how are you treated by your peers? Teachers? Counselors?
(2) To what ethnic group do you feel you most identify? Why?
(3) What does it mean to you to be a member of this ethnic group?
(4) What things have you had to overcome to stay in school?
(5) Because you are successful academically, do you think your peers observe you to see how you would respond to these challenges?
(6) How have your friends and classmates responded to your desire to do well academically?
(7) What kind of college do your parents want you to attend? Why?
(8) What kind of college do your friends want you to attend? Why?
(9) What kind of college does your teachers/guidance counselors want you to attend?

Appendix C: Academic Identity Survey

PART I. Please circle the best answer for each of the following questions or statements.

(1) What is your father's occupation?

Banking/Accounting	Office/Clerical	Automotive	Child Care
Education/Teaching	Entrepreneur	Retail/Sales	Government
Computers	Engineering	Security/Law	Medical/Healthcare

Other (Please specify) _____

(2) What is your mother's occupation?

Banking/Accounting	Office/Clerical	Automotive	Child Care
Education/Teaching	Entrepreneur	Retail/Sales	Government
Computers	Engineering	Security/Law	Medical/Healthcare

Other (Please specify) _____

(3) What is the highest level of education achieved by your father?

K – 6 7 – 9 9 – 12 Some College Completed College Graduate School

(4) What is the highest level of education achieved by your mother?

K – 6 7 – 9 9 – 12 Some College Completed College Graduate School

(5) What is your family's annual household income?

Less than $3000 $3000 - $5999 $6000 - $9999

$10,000 - $14,999 $15,000 - $19,999 $20,000 - $25,000

More than $25,000

(6) How important is attending college to your parents?

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(7) As a student, my teachers think that I am

Smart Stupid

(8) As a student, my teachers think that I am

Worse than most Better than most

(9) As a student, my teachers think that I am

Unsuccessful Successful

(10) Forget for a moment how teachers grade your work. In your own opinion, how good do you think your work is?

Excellent Good Average Below Average Much Below Average

(11) How do you rate yourself in school ability compared to other students?

Among the Best Above Average Average Below Average Among the Poorest

(12) What kind of grades do you think you are capable of getting in college?

A A- B+ B C below C

PART II. If you are planning to attend college or if you think you may go, how important to you is each of the following as a reason for going to college?

(1) Many of my friends are going to college.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(2) I want to participate actively in college social life.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(3) I want to develop my interest and improve my knowledge of community and world problems.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(4) I want to learn more about the careers I might enter.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(5) I want to improve my ability to make my own decisions.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(6) I want to meet the kind of person I would like to marry.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(7) I would be able to earn more money as a college graduate.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(8) I want to get a good general education and appreciation of ideas.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

(9) A college degree is necessary for the kind of work I want to do.

Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant

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