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ABSTRACT
                This paper provides a critical analysis of African
American adolescents who achieve academically and explores the coping
strategies these individuals employ to achieve academic success. It
is hypothesized that African American adolescents achieve because
they possess intrinsic values such as persistence and patience, or
perhaps they are socialized to believe that academic achievement is
paramount. It is suggested that their coping strategies enable them
to achieve academically, and that most of these strategies are
culture specific. Types of acculturation are examined and it is
postulated that: (1) high achievers are academically successful
because they acculturate to the school culture; (2) high achievers
exhibit two typological patterns of acculturation (they either make a
cultural shift or they culturally incorporate the school culture
while retaining their own culture); and (3) there will be a
correlation between type of acculturation and ethnic identity. It is
recommended that future research examine those variables which
account for high academic achievement among African American
adolescents. (Author/NB)

Coping Strategies of Resilient African American

Adolescents

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Running Head: Coping Strategies

Abstract

This paper provides a critical analysis of African
American adolescents who achieve academically and
explores the coping strategies these individuals employ
to achieve academic success. The presenter
hypothesizes that African American adolescents achieve
because they possess intrinsic values such as
persistence and patience, or perhaps they are
socialized to believe that academic achievement is
paramount. It would seem that their coping strategies
enable them to achieve academically. This presenter
believes that most of these strategies are culture
specific. Type of acculturation is the culture
specific variable that this presenter will be looking
at in this paper. The presenter hypothesizes that high
achievers are academically successful because they
acculturate to the school culture. It is believed that
they exhibit two typological patterns of acculturation;
that is, they either make a cultural shift or they
culturally incorporate the school culture while
retaining their own culture. In addition, it is
hypothesized there will be a correlation between type
of acculturation and ethnic identity. It is

recommended that future research examine those
variables which account for high academic achievement
among African American adolescents.   If these variables
are discerned, then they can be instituted into the
educational system to assist educators, teachers, and
researchers in developing programs that will help
individuals, who fail to achieve academically.

# Introduction

This paper presentation will provide a critical analysis of the research on academic achievement in African Americans, expand on the cultural difference model, and identify the coping strategies academically successful African Americans employ to achieve academic success.

## Statement of the Problem

Academic underachievement or failure among African American adolescents has reached crisis proportions (Banks, 1988). African American adolescents are more likely than their White counterparts to underachieve in school (Banks, 1988), become at-risk, and drop-out (Paulu, 1987). In 1989, the average drop-out rate[1] was 23.2% for African American adolescents between the ages of 15 and 24 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1989). Yet, despite these statistics, many African American adolescents remain in school and are high academic achievers (Lee, 1985).

Although the educational problems of African American youth have been investigated extensively (e.g., Banks, 1988), few studies have examined

academically successful African Americans (e.g., Lee, 1985; Pollard, 1989). Most research has focused solely on African American adolescents who fail to achieve academically. This research provided inadequate explanations for African Americans poor scholastic achievement, such as theories of biological inferiority or cultural deprivation (Banks, 1988; Comer, 1988; Lewis, 1970).

### The Cultural Difference Model

Critics of these theories argued that they promoted assimilation and violated the cultural integrity of African Americans (Banks, 1988). These critics or theorists have endorsed a cultural difference model (e.g., Banks, 1988; Henderson & Washington, 1975; Shade, 1982). According to this model, African Americans have cognitive, learning, and motivational styles which are different from those fostered in the schools (Banks, 1988; Shade, 1982).

Ramirez & Price-Williams's (1974) research provided support for the cultural difference model in that African Americans were found to have a cognitive style that's different from the one advocated in the

schools. Most educational environments and achievement

and intelligence tests used in educational settings are

biased in the direction of field-independence

(Cohen, 1969). Ramirez & Price-Williams (1974) found

that African American children have a field-dependent

or relational cognitive style. This style is

incompatible with the analytical style required in the

school system (Hale, 1982). In addition, the school

system denigrates Black culture (Comer, 1988; Lewis,

1970). For example, positive African American role

models and contributions made by African Americans are

excluded from the textbooks, and less experienced

teachers are typically assigned to predominantly Black

schools (Comer, 1988; Lewis, 1970).

However, many African American adolescents achieve

in school even though they are culturally different

from the school culture and experience subtle and overt

rejection by the school system (Ogbu, 1981, 1983, 1985,

1991). The cultural difference model fails to explain

why they do. Moreover, it doesn't account for other

minorities who do well in school even though their

cultures and languages aren't similar to White American

culture (Ogbu, 1991). Thus, the cultural difference
model, like the other theories, doesn't adequately
address the problem of academic underachievement in
African American adolescents (Ogbu, 1981, 1983, 1985,
1991).

Hence, it would appear that researchers need to
investigate those variables which account for high
academic achievement among African Americans to help
those who fail to achieve academically. Moreover,
identifying success variables for African Americans can
lead to the development of theories and models of
academic success for this group.

Ethnic Identity, Acculturation, and School Achievement

Research that has identified academically
successful African Americans (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986;
Lee, 1985; Ogbu, 1991; Pollard, 1989) found that ethnic
identity and type of acculturation are related to
school achievement. Findings from these studies
suggest that academic achievement may require having a
limited Black consciousness (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Lee,
1985) or crossing cultural boundaries (Fordham, 1988;
Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1991;

Pollard, 1989). However, these studies either haven't
attempted to empirically assess ethnic identity and
acculturation in relation to academic achievement
(e.g., Lee, 1985; Pollard, 1989), or they used the case
study methodology (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) whose
validity as a measure of ethnic identity and
acculturation is questionable. This makes it difficult
to draw conclusions concerning the influence of ethnic
identity and acculturation on academic achievement.

Moreover, few studies have examined ethnic
identity in adolescents. Those which have used widely
discrepant definitions and measures of ethnic identity,
which makes generalizations and comparisons across
studies difficult and ambiguous (Phinney, 1990). It
seems acculturation has been used as a framework for
studying ethnic identity in African Americans. This
framework suggests that for understanding ethnic
identity, it's necessary to consider the individual's
relationship to the dominant group (Phinney, 1990). It
appears most ethnic identity studies with African
Americans assessed their attitudes toward their own
group and toward the dominant group (e.g., Parham &

Helms, 1981). Also, it seems most ethnic identity
studies used a linear, bipolar model in assessing
ethnic identity. In the linear model, ethnic identity
is conceptualized along a continum from strong ties at
one extreme to strong ties at the other. The
assumption underlying this model is that a
strengthening of one requires a weakening of the other
(Phinney, 1990). The problem with this assumption is
whether ethnic identity is directly related to
acculturation, or whether it's independent. ~~It is
believed that the two are independent~~.

Ethnic identity refers to how individuals relate
to their own group as a subgroup of the larger society
(Phinney, 1990). Acculturation refers to the process
of acquiring the cultural attitudes, values, and
behaviors of an alternate society while retaining
native cultural customs. It results from contact
between two distinct cultures (Mendoza & Martinez,
1981). Mendoza & Martinez (1981) described four
typological patterns of acculturation: 1) cultural
resistance, either actively or passively resisting
acquiring alternate cultural norms while maintaining

native customs; 2) cultural shift, substituting

alternate cultural norms for native customs; 3)

cultural incorporation, adapting customs from both

native and alternate cultures; and 4) cultural

transmutation, altering native and alternate cultural

practices to create a unique subcultural entity.

Acculturation is multidimensional and contextual; that

is, individuals may display cultural resistance in one

setting, cultural shift in another setting, etc..

## Hypotheses

It could be hypothesized that African American

adolescents, who underachieve in school, exhibit a

culturally resistant typological pattern of

acculturation. Ogbu (1981, 1983, 1985, 1991), an

anthropologist who has examined academic achievement in

African American adolescents, believes that African

American youths, who underachieve in school, perceive

school success as rejecting their Black culture;

therefore, they are resistant to achieving in school

because they associate school success with the White

culture. This explanation is inadequate because it

only partially explains academic underachievement in

African Americans, and it seems to place the blame of

academic underachievement solely on African American

youths. African American adolescents maybe culturally

resistant to acquiring alternate values and belief

systems or the school system's norms because they don't

value an educational system that defines their culture

as deviant. In addition, though, it's possible they

find it difficult to master a system that doesn't

support or encourage their achievement. As African

American children proceed from one grade to another,

they become increasingly aware that their academic

capabilities have already been prejudged (Gray, 1982).

In Shade & Edwards's (1987) literature review on the

educative style of African American children, they

found in many studies that in urban areas teachers of

African American children spend a great deal of time on

classroom management and behavioral conformity and

respond best to children who are personable, regardless

of their academic skills. However, those same teachers

reinforce Euro-American children for academic

performance.

Although low achieving African American

adolescents maybe culturally resistant to the school culture, it could be hypothesized that academically successful African American youth cope with cultural discontinuities in school by conforming to the school system's cultural norms. Fine (1983) found that students who remained in school were hesitant to challenge inequity and presented socially desirable selves.

It is hypothesized that academically successful African Americans exhibit two typological patterns of acculturation. They either substitute alternate cultural norms for native customs (i.e., cultural shift) or adapt customs from both native and alternate cultures (i.e., cultural incorporation). Some African American high achievers adopt a racelessness stance to succeed; that is, they alienate themselves from Black culture within as well as outside of the school setting and totally assimilate White culture (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Other high achievers accomodate to the school culture, but simultaneously maintain strong ties to their Black culture (Pollard, 1989). It would appear those African Americans, who

adopt a racelessness stance, exhibit a cultural shift typological pattern of acculturation, while those who accomodate display a cultural incorporation pattern of acculturation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Hence, future research should examine academically successful African American adolescents to find out what variables account for high academic achievement among these individuals. If those variables are discerned, then they can be instituted into the educational system to assist educators, teachers, and researchers in developing programs that will help those individuals, who fail to achieve academically.

It appears African American adolescents, who academically succeed or fail, experience some kind of cultural conflict with the school system as the cultural difference model advocates, but academically successful African Americans cope with these cultural discontinuities differently from those who underachieve (Ogbu, 1991).

It is hypothesized that academically successful African American adolescents cope by acculturating to

the school culture at least while they are in that
environment.  It is believed that they exhibit two
typological patterns of acculturation, either cultural
shift or cultural incorporation.  It is also
hypothesized that there is a correlation between type
of acculturation and ethnic identity; that is, African
American adolescents who culturally shift will have a
low ethnic identity, while those who are culturally
resistant or culturally incorporate will have a high
ethnic identity.

In conclusion, academically successful African
American adolescents appear to have the flexibility to
adapt to a different, and what some may call a
"culturally insensitive" environment to be academically
successful.  This presenter isn't advocating that
African American adolescents accomodate to the school
culture.  However, it is believed that unless they do,
they will not be academically successful.  What this
adaptation does to them psychologically is another
question!

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Footnote

[1]The dropout rate used was the event dropout rate.
Event dropout rates represent the share of students who
leave school without completing high school during a
single year.