Race and Cultural Flexibility among Students in Different Multiracial Schools

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Background/Context: *One of the most critical functions of a well-integrated school is the development of "culturally flexible" students who, over the course of their social development, effectively navigate diverse social environs such as the workplace, communities, and neighborhoods. Most studies, albeit with some exceptions, have investigated the impact of desegregation on short- and long-term gains in achievement and attainment, as opposed to its impact on intergroup relations. Mixed-race schools are vital not only for bolstering achievement outcomes of previously disadvantaged students but also for promoting social cohesion in a diverse society.*

Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: *Specifically, this article examines the difference in cultural flexibility between black and white students enrolled in schools with different racial and ethnic compositions. Cultural flexibility is defined as the propensity to value and move across different cultural and social peer groups and environments. Furthermore, this article provides some insight into how students in different mixed-race and desegregated educational contexts experience their school's social organization and cultural environments, which influence their interactions and academic behaviors.*

Setting: *The study was conducted over a 6-month period in four high schools: a majority-minority school and a majority-white school located in a northeastern city, and a majority-minority school and a majority-white school located in a southern city.*

Research Design: *Survey data were gathered from a randomly stratified sample of 471 Black and White students attending. In addition, ethnographic notes from weeks of school observations and transcribed interview data from 57 group interviews conducted in the four schools with students in Grades 9–12 complemented the survey research.*

Data Collection and Analysis: *Findings reveal significant associations among self-esteem, academic and extracurricular placement, and cultural flexibility for black students. Also, black students in majority-minority schools scored significantly higher on the cultural flexibility scale than those in majority-white schools. Among white students, regional location*

and academic placement showed statistically significant associations with cultural flexibility. The ethnographic and interview data further explicate why these patterns occurred and illuminate how certain school contextual factors are likely linked to students' cultural flexibility. Overall, this study's findings highlight some connections between student and school behaviors as they pertain to both students' and educators' willingness and ability to realize the visions of racial and ethnic integration wholly.

For more than a century, the United States has grappled with the complexities of social differences and the existence of intergroup conflict fomenting bias, intolerance, and discrimination. In 1954, lawmakers viewed the American school as a principal facilitator of bridging racial and economic chasms, and one "intangible" goal of the *Brown vs. the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education* legal precedent was to facilitate cross-cultural communication among racial groups previously isolated and alienated from one another (Wells 2000). While neighborhoods and schools are more segregated today than ever (Massey and Denton 1993; Orfield 2001), the tides of social, economic, and political change in the 21st century still compel us to engage with the diversity of perspectives, identities, and cultures in U.S. society. Forces of immigration and globalization now necessitate that American youth acquire not only requisite technical skills but also sociocultural skills to participate in a broader society where permeable national boundaries open up doors to myriad cultural possibilities and economic opportunities. Thus, a realization of the social goals of mixed-race schooling—of integration, equity, fairness, and status equality, and not merely desegregation or physical proximity for racial and ethnic groups—remains critical. Moreover, schools continue to be major sites of socialization and promising conduits of cross-cultural participation and engagement.

Most studies, with some exceptions (e.g., Hallinan and Williams 1989; Schofield 1993), have investigated the impact of desegregation on short- and long-term gains in achievement and attainment, as opposed to its impact on intergroup relations (Granovetter 1985; Schofield 1991). Mixed-race schools are vital not only for bolstering achievement outcomes of previously disadvantaged students but also for promoting social cohesion in a diverse society. That is, in addition to the value-added from an achievement and attainment perspective (i.e., increased test scores and graduation and college-going rates for racial and ethnic minority and poor students), well-integrated schools are also instrumental in facilitating interactions among students from different ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds (Linn and Welner 2007). In short, as we all know, schools serve both academic *and* social functions.

One of the most critical functions of a well-integrated school is the development of "culturally flexible" students who, over the course of their social development, effectively navigate diverse social environs such as the workplace, communities, and neighborhoods. Studies of "bicultural" students show consistent results of positive academic, psychological, and social attainment, compared with their relatively monocultural peers (Carter 2005; Darder 1991; Gibson 1988; Kyong-Dong 2005; Mehan, Hubbard, and Villanueva 1994; Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997; Trueba 2002). These studies, therefore, suggest that ultimately, culturally flexible students possess the ability to interact in, participate in, and navigate different social and cultural settings, to embrace multiple forms of cultural knowledge and expand their own understanding of self, and to hold inclusive perspectives about others who differ in myriad social aspects or identities.

Cultural flexibility encompasses the individual's ability to cross different social and symbolic boundaries. Social boundaries emerge from the grouping of individuals into social categories and may be national, racial, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and/or gendered in nature, to name a few. Symbolic boundaries, in comparison, comprise conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space; they are the cultural tools that individuals and groups "struggle over and come to agree upon [as] definitions of reality" (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). Although the study of how individuals create and reproduce social and symbolic boundaries in everyday life is a critical topic in sociological research (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnár 2002), we have very limited knowledge of how students understand and participate in social and cultural boundary crossing within different school contexts. Specifically, we need to ask how various practices within the school's social and cultural settings influence students' ability to attain cultural flexibility. Furthermore, we should inquire about the connections between the social compositions of schools and students' inclinations for cultural flexibility. That is, do students in schools that vary by social composition (i.e., majority-minority and majority-white) show significantly different degrees of cultural flexibility? If so, what are some factors that appear to be associated with these differences?

Though previous studies show that mixed-race, predominantly white schools generally benefit racial and ethnic minority students, offering better academic resources (Crain 1970; Crain and Mahard 1983; McIntire, Hughes, and Say 1982; Orfield 2001; Wells and Crain 1994), the question remains regarding whether they necessarily provide the cultural and social environments to enable all students—whether African American, Asian American, Latino/a, or white—to avail themselves fully

of critical information gathering and academic resources *and* to cross social boundaries and form relationships that would extend well into adulthood and influence their residential, social network, and friendship choices. While racial proximity is a necessary condition for long-term engagement across racial and ethnic boundaries (Hallinan and Williams 1989), studies show that social forces such as discrimination, racism, and inequality permeate the school's social context and countervail students' racial boundary crossing (Wells et al., 2009).

We can possibly attribute the mixed results that early studies yielded about the limited social and cultural benefits of desegregated schooling to the forces of continued prejudice, unequal status, and the persistence of thick social and spatial boundaries (Allport 1954). For example, some researchers found that students fared better sociopsychologically and culturally in "minority" schools than in desegregated ones (Bates 1990; St. John 1975), though reviews of these works mention that such research failed to explain exactly what mechanisms or processes in desegregated schools failed to facilitate interaction across racial lines (Schofield 1991). Meanwhile, newer research shows that African Americans and Latinos feel more attached to school when they attend with greater proportions of their own race or ethnicity (Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder 2001). Furthermore, higher education research studies reveal that black students in white-dominant schools report problems of cultural alienation, social adjustment, racial discrimination, and strained interpersonal relations with other students, faculty, and staff (Allen 1988, 1992; Bennett 1984; Chavous et al. 2002; Cureton 2003; Hurtado 1998; Kraft 1991; Willie 2003). The conclusion from these studies is that racial proximity with other groups in schools may be a necessary but insufficient condition for the attainment of holistic social integration for most, if not all, of its students.

The promotion of cultural flexibility among students and educators is very likely crucial to the realization of a wholly integrated school. Students' cultural flexibility may be determined by a host of factors ranging from individual or psychological, including self-concept, attitudes, and values (LaFramboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993; Sussman 2000), to social or contextual factors, such as their social organization among peers and friends (Hallinan and Teixeira 1987; Moody 2002). As social agents, students can either consciously or unconsciously choose to be culturally flexible in their identities, which are bolstered by their own views of self-esteem (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997). Their opportunities to mix across various social and cultural boundaries in and outside of the classroom in schools can matter, too. We know that schools can maintain an ethos that reinforces social boundaries, whereby minority students, for

example, are poorly incorporated into either desegregated or majority-white schools (Mickelson 2001; Oakes 1985; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005; Wells et al., 2009). In the end, we must ascertain what those individual and school-level practices are that either encourage or impede students' movement across social and symbolic boundaries.

Why are some students more culturally flexible, or inclined to move beyond their own social, cultural, and even academic comfort zones than others? What is it about a social and academic context that encourages students to be culturally flexible? Taking both a deductive and inductive approach guided by prior research, this article examines two lines of inquiry: (1) some individual and social factors associated with the cultural flexibility of black and white students in both majority-minority schools and majority-white schools, and (2) different facets of school and society that students discuss as associated with their tendencies (or not) to move across social and cultural boundaries. Using the results of data analyses from a combination of mixed methods—survey, ethnography, and interviews—I address these issues from a research study of four large urban and suburban schools in the Northeast and South.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

CULTURAL (IN)FLEXIBILITY

The concept of "cultural flexibility" used in this study follows the idea of a "flexible mind," a social-psychological construct introduced by sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel. According to Zerubavel (1993), the progress of social organizations (schools) is stunted when individuals (e.g., students and educators) maintain either a cognitively unyielding commitment to the mutual exclusivity of outsiders ("rigid-minded") or an inattention to structure, appropriate resources, and boundaries ("fuzzy-minded"). The flexible mind, in contrast, represents a cognitive state that allows individuals to celebrate and participate in a variety of *different* local, national, and group-oriented cultural ways, as opposed to acceptance of either separatist or nationalist ideology (rigid), or humanist desires for global homogeneity (fuzzy), which supplant cultural diversity.

Cultural flexibility, like its twin concept "cosmopolitanism" (see, for example, Appiah 1997, 619–620), constitutes the behavioral or human practices embraced by an individual with a flexible mind—his or her cross-cultural participation. While cosmopolitanism focuses intently on international experiences in terms of cross-cultural participation, cultural flexibility, as used in this work, concentrates more on *local* social and cultural practices of high school adolescents. Cultural flexibility and

cosmopolitanism are not mutually exclusive concepts. In a broader global societal context, the two would be quite similar. In particular, this article provides an empirical investigation about cultural flexibility within four different high school contexts in two regions of the United States among youth of dissimilar social backgrounds.[1] Specifically, I use age-appropriate indictors to signify high school students' cultural flexibility as it pertains to their preferences for participation in cross-racial, cross-ethnic, cross-gender, and popular cultural activities centering on music, dress, and teenage speech and interactional styles. Studies of adolescents have shown these factors to be more salient in the cultural considerations of high school-age youth (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Bucholtz 2002; Carter 2005; Danesi 1994; Dolby 2001; Yon 2000).

Not only does this investigation of cultural flexibility capture traits that characterize students' social and cultural preferences, but it also suggests how students' social organization *within* schools can either facilitate or inhibit their ability to behave flexibly. For example, students' academic placements and extracurricular participation in school could engender boundaries that reinforce social divides among students of varying identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and/or taste cultures. In response, students could eventually come to view certain academic or extracurricular domains in their school as the spheres belonging to a particular social group. Consequently, they may choose not to participate. In this case, the school's sociocultural context encompasses specific school practices that correspond to disparate levels of student engagement and participation. Researchers have shown, nevertheless, that students who share similar social identities vary in how they respond to these different academic and extracurricular domains depending on the school, its social composition, and the nature of its sociocultural context (Conchas 2006; Lewis 2003; Metz 2000; Wells and Crain 1999).

Empirically, the concept of cultural flexibility has occupied the attention of researchers who study specific economic sectors and immigration and who focus on the inclusion and adaptation of new residents and workers in a host society (e.g., Kyong-Dong 2005). Few scholars, if any, however, have written explicitly about cultural flexibility, particularly as it pertains to students' social behaviors in school. Yet, we know that students negotiate their own social identities and peer networks in ways that compel them to make choices about whether to interact across social categories ascribed to them, or to remain within their circumscribed limits. Heeding Schofield's (1991) call, this article introduces results from a study of students' social and cultural experiences and highlights some associations between their schools' contexts and intergroup relations.

Following a brief review of literature that highlights other factors related to cultural flexibility, I present the findings.

IDENTITY, SELF-ESTEEM, AND CULTURAL FLEXIBILITY

In various subfields of educational research, scholars inquire about the associations between students' cultural identities and their school participation (Carter 2005; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Gibson 1988; O'Connor 2001; Ogbu 1978). Researchers also investigate the dynamic nature of cultural identity and discuss how there exist multiple forms of cultural identity transitions—from the subtractive, where students lose touch with their native/home culture identity (Valenzuela 1999); to the additive, or feeling closer to the host/dominant cultural identity, although with some maintenance of one's cultural heritage (Gibson 1988); to the affirmative (or sometimes perceived as oppositional), where students reject the mainstream cultural identity and maintain their own cultural centrality (Deyhle 1995). Sussman (2000) discusses a fourth category, too: the intercultural identity, which she defines as "neither integration of home and host culture values (hybridization) nor the bicultural strategy that results from the acculturation experience, but rather an identity in which individuals define themselves as world citizens and are able to interact appropriately and effectively in many countries or regions" (368).

To be culturally flexible, students most likely will have to maintain "intercultural" identities (Sussman 2000). Interculturalism characterizes students and educators who define themselves as world citizens and who are able to interact effectively in multiple cultural settings. Intercultural identities enable students and educators to be willing and inclined to participate in various cultural environments and to personally maintain different cultural schemas (for a discussion of "cultural schema," see Sewell 1992). Not only does the intercultural individual possess multiple cultural competences, but he or she also does not denigrate one culture in favor of another; he or she conceives himself or herself as a multifaceted cultural being (see also LaFramboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). Interculturalism's aim is to facilitate the student's ability to hold multiple cultural schemas or toolkits.[2] While social and organizational psychologists use the term "interculturalism," sociologists utilize the idea of "omnivorousness"—capturing the individual's capacity to be eclectic and multicultural in his or her tastes, knowledge, or cultural appreciation, especially in music (e.g. Bryson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996).

Finally, culturally flexible individuals may maintain strong levels of individualism or self-views, since they participate in and move across

diverse social and cultural environments. At the individual level, self-esteem could be a major determinant of cultural flexibility. A strong sense of self might imbue individuals with the confidence to move comfortably across different identity contexts. In other words, the culturally flexible individual, enabled by a high self-concept and self-esteem—which social psychologists show to be positively related to individualism (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier 2002)[3]—may not necessarily feel great pressure to conform to delineated, group-based identity markers, self-segregation, or thick and salient in-group/out-group boundaries. Rather, he or she could make more expansive choices about his or her social interactions and participation in myriad cultural activities.

CULTURALLY FLEXIBLE STUDENTS AND THE SCHOOL'S SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Not only do students reproduce social boundaries and meanings about various social groups in their daily scholastic activities, but their social organization in school can influence flexibility in their engagement with and understanding of various sectors within school. For example, studies show that conventional practices such ability grouping and tracking affect students' cross-racial friendship patterns (Hallinan and Williams 1989; Moody 2002). Students are also known to attach meanings to, and associate specific groups with, different classes in tracked systems depending on the representation of identities in those classrooms (Mickelson and Velasco 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). Specifically, research shows that when black students are disproportionately underrepresented in high-track classes, peers outside of these classes are more likely to accuse their coethnic peers of "acting white." However, when black students are proportionately represented across the tracks in schools, evidence of accusations of "acting white" directed toward high-achieving students is not found (Mickelson 2001; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). Consequently, tracked classes, especially when status equality does not exist among different groups (e.g., race and gender), could likely influence the boundaries of who is "in" or "out" in terms of status, intelligence, and participation (Goldsmith 2004; Schofield 1991).

Yet, studies also show that students can be flexible, depending on the context, with the meanings that they attach to school practices and to each other. That is, the social and symbolic boundaries that students create among themselves should vary depending on the school's explicit social, cultural, and ideological setting. One example pertains to the "acting white" phenomenon mentioned earlier. Using the nationally repre-

sentative Adolescent Health data, economists have shown that high-achieving black students with a grade point average of 3.5 or higher (on a 4.0 scale) in predominantly black high schools do not lose out in popularity or get accused of "acting white," as do their same-race high-achieving peers in predominantly white schools (Fryer and Torrelli 2005). The findings suggest that adequate representation and status equality defuse students' interpretations of different spheres of schooling as the turf of one social group or another (see also Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005).

Along a different line of research, Gurin et al. (1999), in evaluating a program to facilitate multicultural relations in a university setting, found that students who actively participated in a program promoting diversity and inter-racial relations were more likely to participate in cross-cultural campus events, to take specific courses on inequality, and to maintain intergroup dialogues and discussions. In sum, studies suggest that status equality and proactive cross-cultural practices in schools can enable students' propensity for cultural flexibility. In addition, these studies suggest that while students' self-views are likely one factor in influencing their cultural flexibility, their organization and participation in school are also connected to their willingness to move across social and cultural boundaries. That is, in the context of multi-racial and -cultural schools, students' status and location within school likely have as much determination regarding how students interact with other groups as their global attitudes toward these groups do.

RESEARCH SITES AND METHODS

The data used here were gathered from case studies of four U.S. high schools (Grades 9–12): two located in the metropolitan area of a southern capital city, and two in a northeastern capital city. One school in each city is minority-dominant (predominantly black in "South Capital City" and predominantly black and Latino in "North Capital City"), and one is multiracial and predominantly white. A team of seven researchers (including six assistants and me, the principal investigator) visited the four schools weekly for 6 months from January though June 2007. The research team comprised three African Americans, one Egyptian American, and three European Americans. Except at South City Honors, which was visited mainly by two African American researchers, a mixed-race pair of researchers attended an array of classes and extracurricular and lunchroom activities 4–5 days a week, spending anywhere from 3 to 7 hours at the schools.

The four schools in the study share two main criteria. First, they are all mixed race in terms of student composition, though the racial majority

varies in each. Second, to hold constant the average academic orienta-
tion of the schools, the four schools chosen are similar in their state's
accountability ratings as they pertain to the No Child Left Behind law; all
four schools are relatively high performing in their respective districts
(refer to Table 1). In addition, the schools in the two selected cities rep-
resent areas where desegregation struggles were fraught with racial and
ethnic strife (Dalbey and Harris 2001; Eaton 2001), yet their regional his-
tories vary in terms of interracial and interethnic contact and the perme-
ability of group boundaries (Farley and Frey 1994). While the four
schools are not representative of all schools in their respective districts,
they are typical of schools that can be classified as "mixed race" (nomi-
nally, at least) in their respective districts and metropolitan areas.

The data collection began in South Capital City (SCC) in January 2007
at South County Prep High School (a pseudonym).[4] This school com-
prises 1,389 students in Grades 9–12 and is located at the fringe of a
medium-sized urban southern city (2000 pop. 184,256). According to the
2000 census, there were 497,197 people residing within SCC's metropol-
itan statistical area (MSA). The racial makeup of the MSA is 53% white,
45% African American, 0.7% Asian, and 1% Hispanic or Latino of any
race. At South County Prep High School, about 77% of the students are
racially classified as white, 21% are racially classified as black, 1% are
racially classified as Asian, and 1% are racially classified as Hispanic.[5]
South County Prep's student-teacher ratio is 17:3, and, with the excep-
tion of three, all the teachers and staff are white. Ten miles west of South
County Prep sits South City Honors High School, an urban comprehen-
sive high school of Grades 9–12 with a notable Advanced Placement pro-
gram. South City Honors has 1,333 students; 93% of the students are
racially classified as black, and 6% are racially classified as white. With a
student-teacher ratio of 19:6, it is led by a multiracial staff of 68 teachers.

Similar school types were selected for observational, interview, and sur-
vey data collection in North Capital City (NCC). NCC, a significantly
larger urban center with a population (2000 pop. 589,141) that is 54%
white, 25% black, 14% Hispanic, and 8% Asian, serves a public school
student population of 57,279. According to the 2000 census, about 4.4
million people reside within NCC's MSA. The student racial demograph-
ics in NCC's public schools do not reflect the residential demographics,
however. With the exception of three exam schools—an organizational
structure that attracts a critical percentage of white students—NCC's
public schools are highly segregated. Forty-two percent of students are
black, 14% are white, 9% are Asian, and 35% are Hispanic.

North City Tech School is one of the three exam schools, although
more than 80% of its 1,190 students can be categorized as "minority" or

students of color. Although many of these students performed better than the majority of NCC students on their elementary state tests, most North City Tech students did not score high enough to be accepted to the two other exam schools, which are considered more elite and ranked higher. Out of the four schools in this study, North City Tech is the most balanced in terms of race and ethnicity: about 45% of the students are black, 23% are Asian, 20% are Hispanic, and 11% are white.[6] North City Tech's student-teacher ratio is 18:3, and, like South City Honors in SCC, it maintains a multiracial teaching staff and administration of about 65.

To find a comparative majority-white school with a critical mass of black and Latino students, I had to engage a suburban upper-middle-class school district that participates in North Capital City's metropolitan "Voluntary Desegregation Program" (VDP).[7] North Village Prep High School is located 23 miles northwest of North City Tech High School.

Table 1. Demographic Traits of Schools in Study

	North Capital City (NCC)— 2000 pop. 589,141		South Capital City (SCC)— 2000 pop. 184,256	
	North City Tech (majority minority)	North Village Prep (majority white)	South City Honors (majority minority)	South County Prep (majority white)
Total # of students	1190	1242	1333	1389
Percent black students	45	6	93	21
Percent white students	11	86	6	77
Student-teacher ratio	18.3	14.1	19.6	17.3
Percentage scoring proficient or above on 2007 Grade 10 state English accountability test:				
Black students	93	71	74	59
White students	100	97	92	82
Percentage scoring proficient or above on 2007 Grade 10 state math accountability test:				
Black students	96	72	92[a]	64
White students	100	90	96	84
School NCLB accountability performance rating	Very High**	Very High**	Exemplary (4)	Superior (5)**
Number of students in survey sample*	98	91	98	184

*Black and white students only.
** Denotes highest performance ranking for the state.
[a] For South City Honors, the science scores are reported instead; math scores were unavailable for white students in 2007 because of low numbers of students who took the test.

Since 1967, it has participated in the VDP to attract African American or black and Hispanic students, most of whom entered a lottery to attend affluent suburban schools like North Village Prep High School. Of North Village Prep's student population of 1,242, 84% are white, 6% are black, 5% are Asian, and 3% are Latino. With the exception of one African American and one Asian American teacher, all of North Village Prep High School's 88 teachers are white, and its student-teacher ratio is 14:1.

USING MIXED METHODS

One of the best ways for researchers to become familiar with the school culture is to immerse themselves in the context. A pair of researchers visited South County Prep weekly, and South City Honors, North City Tech, and North Village Prep High Schools at least four times a week. They sat in on classes, talked to students during lunch periods and breaks, attended assemblies and sporting events, and talked to teachers and staff during their break periods. I expected that understandings about the school's sociocultural context and its ability to promote cultural flexibility would be implicit in interactions between and among students and teachers; in the language that they used to describe themselves and other identity-based groups; in how students were physically organized and distributed across different environments of learning and extracurricular activities; in the schools' written mission statements, rules, norms, and policies; and in how principals, teachers, and students discussed sanctions against students.

Group interviews have emerged as a popular technique for gathering qualitative data among social scientists (Morgan 1996), and they are especially effective among youth in ascertaining specific consensus beliefs, in obtaining greater depth and breadth in responses than what occurs in individual interviews (whether formal or informal), and in verifying claims made about the school or groups of individuals by a particular person (Lewis 1992). Thus, my research assistants and I conducted 57 in-depth 1–2-hour group interviews with students—a combination of multiracial, mono-racial, coed, and single-sex groups across Grades 9–12 in the four schools—about their intergroup experiences regarding racial, ethnic, gender, and class dynamics. These tape-recorded group interviews were transcribed and, along with hundreds of pages of field notes, systematically coded by another team of research assistants using Atlas.ti. Research assistants and I generated analytic memos highlighting emergent codes and themes pertaining to the research foci, which were then discussed, compared, and reconciled for intercoder reliability purposes.

SURVEY MEASURES

I also used survey methods to enable us to examine wider between-school differences in cultural flexibility. I drew a random stratified sample of a range of 25–35% of each school's student populations and yielded a total survey sample size of 652 students across the four schools.[8] The main outcome of interest in this analysis—cultural flexibility— comprises nine items. In the abstract, "cultural flexibility" is defined as the ability to interact with members of other social groups and to embrace activities generally considered outside one's own ascribed social and cultural identity, family, community, or social groups. Here I operationalize this concept with a nine-item scale that is based on findings from previous adolescent interviews (see Carter 2005) and that was tested on this student sample.[9] Both factor and scale analyses reveal that these items constitute a highly reliable construct of one unique factor (with an eigenvalue greater than 5.0). In addition, analyses yielded a separate reliability coefficient of .91 for both black and white groups. Moreover, the high scale reliability coefficients maintained across the four multiracial high schools, ranging from .88 to .92.

Cultural flexibility, as introduced here, is not just a student's inclination toward racial bridging. Students were asked about their propensity to engage with other persons of varying social and cultural backgrounds. Specifically, students were asked nine questions: "On a scale of 1 to 5, in which 1 means *makes a very large difference* and 5 means *does not make a difference at all*, would the following characteristics make a difference in whether you would become friends with another student?" These characteristics covered differences in gender, race, language styles, musical tastes (e.g., classical, hip hop, and rock), clothing styles (i.e., not wearing "cool clothing"), nerdiness, and a dislike for television. The Cronbach's alpha for the cultural flexibility scale equals .91, and this reliability coefficient remained consistently high, at greater than .90 for both racial subgroups in the analyses. Higher scores represent more cultural flexibility.

Controls: I used mother/female guardian's and father/male guardian's highest level of education to control for certain family background effects and included a categorical variable for gender (male = 1). Students were asked to self-report their grade point average (GPA) using categorical variables ranging from 0 (less than 1.0) to 4 (4.0 or higher).

Main Predictors: To ascertain individual and group-level differences, I used categorical or dummy variables for school compositional type (henceforth referred to as "majority-minority" and "majority-white"). Students hold multiple intersecting identities shaped by their varied degrees of school engagement and academic experiences (Carter 2005;

Flores- González 2002; Yon 2000). Following Hallinan and Williams' work (1989), which shows the social organization of students in schools to have an impact on their friendship choices, I used a dummy variable to indicate whether the student was enrolled in either an AP or honors course in English, math, history, science, or foreign language, and a continuous variable for the number of extracurricular activities in which the student participated (which in many multiracial schools increases the opportunity to meet across race, ethnicity, and other categories of social difference).

Students also have their own personal preferences and prejudices, which they may garner from their home communities and wider society. Therefore, I chose to include predictors of students' personal preferences for living in neighborhoods and attending school with only members of their own racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their academic, gender, and class identities. Students were asked to respond whether the following statements were true or false: "I prefer to attend a school where most of the students come from the same racial or ethnic background as mine"; "I prefer to attend a school where most of the students come from the same economic background as mine"; "I prefer to live in a neighborhood where most of the people come from the same racial or ethnic background as mine"; and "I prefer to live in a neighborhood where most of the people come from the same economic background as mine."

As prior research has shown, social psychological factors vary between students of color attending majority-white schools and those attending majority -minority schools (St. John 1975; Simmons et al. 1978).[10]

By including self-esteem in our models, I can examine the variability of students' responses to self-esteem questions. That is, this study of both *intra*racial and *inter*racial differences provides some illustration of the range of views about themselves among the black and white students, in the four different schools in this study. First, I examined whether there might be differences in self-esteem among students and then explored how self-esteem might influence students' levels of cultural flexibility. I added a continuous variable measuring self-esteem to the models, using Rosenberg's (1985) widely used and reliable scale. The alpha for the 10 items of the Rosenberg scale is .80.

Since history and prior research inform us that regional differences in terms of race relations might influence intergroup dynamics (Firebaugh and Davis 1988; Quillian 1996), I also included a dummy variable for region (North = 1). To ascertain significant differences among students by race and ethnicity, I include dummy variables for black (with whites as

Table 2. Descriptions, Means, and Standard Deviations for Selected Variables: By Schools

Variable	Description	Metric	M	SD
Cultural flexibility	"Would the following characteristics of a person make a large or small difference in whether of not you will become friends with another student? The person: (1) is of a gender different from you; (2) is of a race or ethnicity different from you; (3) speaks proper Standard English all the time; (4) does not wear cool clothes; (5) prefers to listen to classical music; (6) does not like rap or hip hop music; (7) prefers to listen to rock music; (8) does not watch TV; (9) is nerdy.	1 = Makes a very large difference 2 = Makes a large difference 3 = Makes neither a large nor small difference 4 = Makes a small difference 5 = Does not make a difference	3.96	.88
Preference for same-race peers in school	Is the following statement true or false? "I prefer to attend a school where most of the students come from the same racial or ethnic background as mine."	0 = False 1 = True	.34	.47
Preference for same-race in neighborhood	Is the following statement true or false? "I prefer to live in a neighborhood where most of the people come from the same racial or ethnic background as mine."	0 = False 1 = True	.34	.47
Preference for same-SES peers in school	Is the following statement true or false? "I prefer to attend a school where most of the students come from the same economic background as mine."	0 = False 1 = True	.28	.45
Preference for same-SES in neighborhood	Is the following statement true or false? "I prefer to live in a neighborhood where most of the people come from the same economic background as mine."	0 = False 1 = True	.41	.49
Student's grade point average	Student report of grade point averages	0 = < 1.0 1 = 1.9–1.9 2 = 2.0–2.9 3 = 3.0–3.9 4 = 4.0 or higher	2.65	.72
In AP or honors courses	Students' report of whether they are enrolled in any advanced placement and/or honors courses	0 = No 1 = Yes	.55	.50
Number of extracurricular activities	Count of the number of extracurricular activities mentioned by the student	0 = Min 6 = Max	1.39	1.35
Family background/ parent's education	Composite of single or two parents'/guardians' educational background	1 = Less than high school 2 = High school diploma/GED 3 = Post-HS vocational/trade school 4 = Some college 5 = College degree 6 = Graduate degree	3.96	1.33
Variable	**Description**	**Metric**	**M**	**SD**
Self-esteem	Composite scale of nine items: (1) Good luck is more important than hard work for success; (2) Every time I try to get ahead, something stops me; (3) When I make plans, I can usually carry them out; (4) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself; (5) I am able to do things as well as most other people; (6) I certainly feel useless at times; (7) I take a positive attitude toward myself; (8) I wish I could have more respect for myself; (9) At times, I think I am no good at all; (10) Planning only makes a person unhappy because plans hardly ever work out anyway.	1 = Disagree strongly 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Agree strongly	3.0	.48

the reference group). Table 2 reports the descriptions, means, and standard deviations for the student-level variables tested in the regression models.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY AND FINDINGS

During the analyses phase of this research, I focused first on the survey data and used the observational and interview data to help provide some clues as to why certain patterns occurred. First, I examined the mean cultural flexibility scores of students at each school. I then looked for significant differences between students who attended the majority-white versus majority-minority schools. Subsequently, I added the controls to each model for both outcome variables of interest. Next, I chose to conduct separate analyses using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for within-race analyses for both black and white students in the sample. These regression models employed the same analytic steps as the overall analyses for all students.

The first model introduces the school-type variable and captures the average group difference in cultural flexibility between students in majority-minority and majority-white schools. This first set of analyses examines all the students in the sample ($N = 652$). We would expect that exogenous factors such as family background, gender, and self-esteem would account for some of students' cultural flexibility. If these predictors do not substantially reduce the coefficient for the school-type variable and it remains significant, we might infer that the social psychological factors and student's school-related traits might influence his or her cultural flexibility. A second model adds various control variables, including parent's education; students' self-reported grade point average, gender, and region; and dummy variables for race and ethnicity (with white students as the reference category).

The final model examines the influence of students' preferences for school and neighborhood composition; the impact of self-esteem; advanced course-taking participation; the number of extracurricular activities; and the demographic control variables. Significant reductions in the school-type coefficient, once the other predictors are added, illustrate whether these factors have some association with students' cultural flexibility as compared with other student traits connected to their educational experiences entered into the model prior. In the next set of analyses, I explore separate models for predicting the cultural flexibility of African American and white students in the study, first ascertaining differences by school type.[11] I repeated the same models for these subgroups to ascertain if different predictors of cultural flexibility operate for them.

Table 3 reports the mean cultural flexibility and self-esteem scores of students at each school. The schools rank in order from North City Tech (majority minority) with a mean of 4.10, North Village Prep (majority white) with a mean of 4.07, South City Honors (majority minority) with a mean student score of 4.06, and South County Prep (majority white) with a mean of 3.74. Overall, the students at South County Prep (the white school located in SCC) reported significantly lower levels of cultural flexibility than those students at the other three schools. No significant differences existed in terms of students' self-esteem among the four schools. However, when I looked more closely at the scores of African American, or black, students within the schools, the results changed.

Table 3 also shows that black students attending North City Tech and South City Honors, the two majority-minority schools in Northeast and South, respectively, report significantly *higher* levels of cultural flexibility—4.10 and 4.09, respectively—than black students attending the white schools in both regions. These students also appear to have significantly

Table 3. Mean Scores of Students' Cultural Flexibility and Self-Esteem: By School

	Cultural Flexibility	Self-Esteem
North Capital City		
North City Tech HS (majority minority)	4.10	2.97
North Village Prep HS (majority white)	4.07	2.98
South Capital City		
South City Honors HS (majority minority)	4.06	3.04
South County Prep (majority white)	3.74[a]	2.94
Black Students Only		
NCC: North City Tech HS (majority minority)	4.10[b]	3.13[b]
North Village Prep HS (majority white)	3.84	3.00
SCC: South City Honors HS (majority minority)	4.10[b]	3.10[b]
South County Prep (majority white)	3.66	2.94
White Students Only		
NCC: North City Tech HS (majority minority)	4.25[c]	2.91
North Village Prep HS (majority white)	4.15	3.04
SCC: South City Honors HS (majority minority)	4.05[c]	2.92
South County Prep (majority white)	3.88	2.97

[a] South County Prep's students, on average, have significantly lower cultural flexibility than those at the other schools; the difference is significant at the .001 level.
[b] Differences by school type are significant at the .001 level.
[c] Differences by region are significant at the .05 level.

greater self-esteem than their black peers in the two majority-white schools. As for white students in the study, significant differences do not exist by school type, but rather by region: White students in the two northeastern schools report more culturally flexibility than their counter-parts in the southern schools. No significant differences in self-esteem exist for white students by school type and region. Notably, it appears that when Whites are the minority (at both North City Tech and South City Honors), they report lower self-esteem than blacks.

STUDENT TRAITS AND ACADEMIC PARTICIPATION

Table 4 reports the results of analyses of *all students* and regressions of our measures of school type and other predictors, including students' prefer-ential attitudes about same-race schools and neighborhoods; parents'

Table 4. Regression Coefficients of School Type, Region, Self-Esteem, and Other Selected Variables on Cultural Flexibility: All Students

	Model		
	1	2	3
School Type (majority minority = 1)	.21 (.07)***	.17** (.08)	.09 (.07)
Student Attitudes			
Preference for same-race school			-.23** (.09)
Preference for same-race neighborhood			-.14 (.08)
Preference for same-SES school			-.18 (.09)**
Preference for same-SES neighborhood			-.11 (.08)
Self-esteem			.22*** (.07)
In AP or honors courses			.25*** (.08)
No. of extracurricular activities			.02 (.02)
Controls			
Parent educational background		.00 (.03)	-.02 (.03)
Student GPA		.07 (.05)	-.03 (.06)
Asian		-.07 (.12)	-.09 (.12)
Black		-.09 (.08)	-.12 (.08)
Hispanic		-.07 (.11)	-.09 (.11)
Gender (male = 1)		-.10 (.07)	-.07 (.07)
Region (Northeast = 1)		.24*** (.08)	.24*** (.08)
Intercept	3.88***	3.67***	3.46***
R^2	.01	.04	.14
N	648	612	608

Note. Metric coefficients (standard errors).

***$p < .00$. **$p < .05$.

educational background; student GPA; self-esteem; AP/honors course participation and number of extracurricular activities; gender; and region. Model 1 reveals that there exist some significant differences in students' cultural flexibility based on where they are in school, in either a majority-minority or majority-white school. Students attending majority racial and ethnic minority schools are more likely to have higher cultural flexibility (b = .21; $p < .00$). Model 2 shows a reduction in the regression coefficient for school type and suggests that region location accounts for about 20% of the difference between students in majority-white versus of majority-minority schools, however. Students attending the Northern

Table 5. Regression Coefficients of School Type, Region, Self-Esteem, and Other Selected Variables on Cultural Flexibility: Black Students Only

	Model		
	1	2	3
School Type (of color = 1)	.39 (.11) ***	.34 (.11)***	.19 (.12)
Student Attitudes			
Preference for same-race school			-.14 (.13)
Preference for same-race neighborhood			-.16 (.14)
Preference for same-SES school			-.16 (.14)
Preference for same-SES neighborhood			-.15 (.14)
Self-esteem			.24 (.11)*
In AP or honors courses			.22 (.13)#
No. of extracurricular activities			.05 (.04)
Controls			
		.00 (.05)	
Parent educational background		.11 (.09)	.00 (.04)
		-.14 (.12)	
Student GPA		.17 (.13)	.01 (.09)
Gender (male = 1)			-.13 (.12)
Region (Northeast = 1)			
			.19 (.13)
Intercept	3.71***	3.43***	3.03***
R^2	.04	.06	.15
N	263	259	257

Note. Metric coefficients (standard errors).

*** $p < .00$. ** $p < .05$.

schools report higher cultural flexibility than those in the South.

The effect of school type disappears as other significant predictors such as racial attitudes, self-esteem, and course-taking patterns are entered into the model. Preferences for same-race (b = -.23; $p < .05$) and same-SES peers (b=-.18; $p < .05$) in school are negatively associated with cultural flexibility. In contrast, participation in AP and honors courses is a positive and significant predictor of cultural flexibility for the students (b = .25; $p < =.00$), as well as self-esteem (b = .22; $p < =.00$). These results suggest that different student organization, practices, and viewpoints are likely in operation at the different schools (see more discussion following).

These patterns change somewhat when I disaggregate and examine the effects of the predictors on black students' cultural flexibility only. Initially, the main story of Table 5 is that those students in the majority-minority schools report significantly higher cultural flexibility scores than their counterparts in majority-white schools. Differences between students in these two school contexts appear to be fully accounted for by the differential in self-esteem (b = .24; $p < .05$), a significant predictor of cultural flexibility in Model 3. Black students at South City Honors (SCC) and North City Tech (NCC) have higher self-esteem, as mentioned. Further, those black students enrolled in either AP or honors courses show a modest though greater level of cultural flexibility than those enrolled in non-AP and nonhonors classes. Black students' preferential attitudes about the racial and ethnic composition of their schools and neighborhoods have no influence on their cultural flexibility.

Table 6 tells yet another story. For white students, the school type does not matter. Rather, those white students in both majority-minority and majority- white schools have similar degrees of cultural flexibility, all other factors held constant. Their preferential attitudes about their schools' and neighborhoods' racial, ethnic, and class composition do not matter, either. The statistically significant predictors of cultural flexibility found among this group were participation in AP or honors courses (b = .30; $p < .05$) and regional location (b = .25; $p < .05$).

UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL FLEXIBILITY THROUGH INTERVIEWS AND ETHNOGRAPHY

The findings from the survey data may be further understood once contextualized by the ethnographic data collected in field notes and gathered over hundreds of hours in the schools weekly by the team of researchers. Any visitor walking into all four schools that our research team observed over a semester would find some evidence of racial and ethnic separation within peer groups; this appeared to operate as a

Table 6. Regression Coefficients of School Type, Region, Self-Esteem, and Other Selected Variables on Cultural Flexibility: White Students Only

	Model		
	1	2	3
School Type (of color = 1)	.17 (.12)	.13 (.13)	.06 (.13)
Student Attitudes			
Preference for same-race school			-.19 (.14)
Preference for same-race neighborhood			-.18 (.15)
Preference for same-SES school			-.19 (.16)
Preference for same-SES neighborhood			.09 (.13)
Self-esteem			.04 (13)
In AP or honors courses			.30 (.05)**
No. of extracurricular activities			.06 (.05)
Controls			
Parent educational background		-.01 (.05)	-.06 (.05)
		.01 (.09)	
Student GPA		.02 (.12)	-.14 (.10)
		.25** (.11)	
Gender (male = 1)			.10 (.12)
Region (Northeast = 1)			
			.25 (.11)**
Intercept	3.99***	3.87***	4.15***
R^2	.01	.03	.06
N	206	203	202

Note. Metric coefficients (standard errors).
*** $p < .00$. ** $p < .05$.

"natural" social condition, the result of shared histories and cultural narratives, and social and economic locations. At each school, students move through the hallways en masse, and in some schools, they even share some classrooms. Still, when it comes to their friendships and whom they hang with during the lunch breaks, students organize themselves often in same-race or same-ethnicity groups (see also Tatum 1997).

When we asked students about why their peers tend to gravitate to their own racial or ethnic group, we generally heard a matter-of-fact response that it is not about "race" but that students separate into groups based on their shared interests. The following excerpt from a group interview in which Henry, an Asian American boy, and David, an African American

boy, participated at North City Tech High School (a majority minority school in NCC) reveals this sentiment:

> Henry: Yeah, like if you ever like all come to our cafeteria, like you realize that like a lot of it is by subdivisions, like different races.
>
> Interviewer: Really?
>
> Henry: It' not like . . .it's not like that we're separated. It's just…
>
> David: It's just like you can see like different divisions. That's the group that people hang out with.
>
> Interviewer: But what do you think leads to that? Like how does that happen?
>
> Henry: Well things like for when they first come to the school, they really don't open up much so they just stay with their own group. You're used to people you already are accustomed 'cause people who share the same belief and whatever, stuff like, it's easier to get along with people.

Henry and David attribute ethnic segmentation at lunch in the cafeteria to shared beliefs, identities, and tastes. They also confirm what we already know from prior research about racial and ethnic segregation in terms of friendship (Moody 2002). But how can we come to understand why the students at the majority-minority schools demonstrate more cultural flexibility than those in white schools? What were some of the differences among the schools that could be associated with this difference? I suggest that some explanation for these differences in cultural flexibility may owe to the actual organization of students *within these schools.*

Both observations and interviews revealed that cultural flexibility is a function of individual student choice and qualities. Unflappably, students remarked that they get along and are friends with students from different social and cultural backgrounds. "Granted, it's hard to . . . I mean, the cultural difference causes a language barrier. I'll be perfectly honest. I can't speak Ebonics worth crap," said Nick (a white male senior at South County Prep) with a laugh. "I don't understand what they're saying sometimes. That doesn't mean I like them any more or less as a person. If they're belligerent and stupid and they're white, I'm going to hate them just as much if they're belligerent and stupid and they're black." Making

his own personal decision, Nick claimed to be a racial equal opportunist in his choices for friends and associates.

   Still, the kind of student who would traverse social and cultural boundaries required certain traits. Nick's schoolmates, three African American females—all graduating seniors at the time—exposed a particular factor that facilitates cultural flexibility:

   Interviewer: Okay. Would you say that it's easy or difficult to become friends with someone from another background?

   Angela: It depends on the type of person.

   Tasha: Like if you, like, *easy going and can really decide to really get into anything*, stuff like that, it's not gonna be hard, but if you like have like totally different, you come from like totally different background, then it's going to probably be a little different . . . little hard to get into.

   Interviewer: So what group are you all...?

   Sherry: The Black people. Yeah.

   Tasha: So we all just hang out together. That's how it is. We just all hang out together.

   These young women collectively refer to the culturally flexible person as one who is "easy-going" and who "can really get into anything"—namely, move across social and cultural boundaries. Tasha, Angela, and Sherry hint at the strength of a person with a strong sense of self and ease in moving across myriad social and cultural lines. However, they admit that they hang together and find it difficult to interact across racial lines. And they are not alone, which the survey data confirmed. On average, the African American students at South County Prep scored lowest in both self-reported cultural flexibility and self-esteem (see Table 3). Later on in the conversation, this same group of girls contrasted themselves to "Josh," an African American male who had effectively moved across social lines and accomplished a rare feat in this southern majority-white school. Josh had been elected "Mr. South County Prep," and the girls in the group made sense of Josh's success because he was able to participate and excel in an extracurricular activity that was symbolically associated with white students.

Tasha: I mean, he was athletic but he really went like, no, no . . .

Angela: Soccer?

Tasha: Yeah.

Sherry: He played soccer?

Tasha: Yes.

Interviewer: Soccer gave him a lot of. . .

Angela: Yes, well, especially with the white people.

Tasha: Yeah. That's what I'm saying.

Sherry: Oh, wow.

Tasha: With the white people, you know, they hang out and, you know, he got to know people so they got the majority vote over what we did.

Josh had expanded his extracurricular and social tastes beyond the repertoire of tastes and interests that Tasha, Sherry, and Angela said were demarcated as "black" by many of his black peers at South County Prep. These young women attribute Josh's ability to participate and excel in soccer—which was explicitly considered a "white"-dominant sport in their high school—as the reason for his popularity among his mostly white schoolmates.

In direct contrast to students at South County Prep, many more students at North City Tech and South City Honors (the majority-minority schools) asserted their cultural flexibility. Beyond simply mentioning their willingness to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, both black and white students proudly described the bases of their cultural flexibility. For instance, Cherise, an African American ninth grader at North City Tech, spoke frankly about why she had decided to enroll in a Chinese language class at school: most of her friends, since seventh grade, were Asian American—Chinese, to be specific—and she wanted to converse with them in their language.

Cherise's was not an exceptional case. Two of her schoolmates, both white high seniors at North City Tech (one an Italian-Irish American girl and the other an Irish Catholic) who perceived themselves as "minorities"

in this predominantly black, Asian, and Latino school, discussed their own cultural flexibility.

> Natalia: I was the only Italian-Irish girl and everybody thought I was some type of Latina so they were like, "Oh, what are you" and they thought I was Cuban and white. Like, "No. I'm Italian." So then everyone thought that I was in the Mafia because they saw my father. [laughter] . . . . I hang out with a lot more Latino people just because, I don't know, so I like learn how to speak Spanish and stuff. . .

Later in this same group conversation with white seniors, Anthony provided a further example of why adaptation to being a "minority" at North City Tech entailed some cultural flexibility:

> Anthony: It was kind of hard being the only White kid around for a little while but you got used to it so . . .

> Interviewer: Can you say more about that? Like was it . . . was it socially that it was hard? Was it like trying to kinda feel like you belong here? Like what parts about it do you feel like made it difficult in the beginning?

> Anthony: Well, personally, I came from a really, really small all-Italian Catholic school. Hard core, northern . . . think everything about Italian people and it's there, and that was all and then I went to Cuomo [pseudonym] for a year and it was all Italian or Latino people and then I came here and it was totally different. Like everything was just different and you have to get used to different characteristics in cultures and I didn't know what a Guyanese person was. I didn't know . . . I had no . . . I went to a Catholic school and they still use the word "Oriental." Like, I didn't know of anything else. So you just have to get used to things like that.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like, though . . . like having to get used to that affects how people do in school?

> Anthony: I think it makes them better because it broadens their horizons.

Anthony discussed the values he felt that North City Tech offered him

in terms of its racial and ethnic diversity—even if it meant being one of the few white students attending the school. For him, experiences at North City Tech were making him a "better" person because he broadened his "horizons," and his interactions with diverse peers made him more culturally flexible. Anthony's, Natalia's, and Cherise's admissions about their pursuits of interculturalism converge with what the survey results tell us: North City Tech High students, on average, scored highest on the cultural flexibility scale. More specifically, white students at North City Tech were the highest-scoring racial subgroup. All in all, these three youth explicitly mentioned something about their school's social climate that encouraged them not only to embrace its racial and ethnic diversity but also to actively participate in other ethnocultural practices—a requisite of cultural flexibility.

Like Natalia and Anthony at North City Tech in NCC, whites at South City Honors either often characterized themselves or were characterized as getting along with black students. "The white people here get along with everyone else because most of them 'act black,'" said Maya, one of South City Honors' African American students. While Maya's perception of "acting black" did not correspond necessarily to shared dress styles, her perception was not too far from the reality that some white students described for themselves. Meredith, a white junior, explained, "Well, being white here is not a big deal . . . no one really pays attention to me being white . . . they do tease me about being preppy." I asked her what she means about being preppy. She said, "You know what I mean, polo shirts with loafers and jeans, the Abercrombie and Fitch look . . . They are just joking." When Meredith was asked who her friends were, she said, "All of my friends here are black and so is my boyfriend." Proximity was not the principal cause for getting along; rather, Meredith was actively crossing racial and cultural boundaries through friendships and an interracial romance.

WIDER REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS MATTER, TOO

Statistically, South City Honors students overall reported levels of cultural flexibility similar to those of North City Tech's students. Moreover, South City Honors' black students, like those at North City Tech, reported significantly higher self-esteem than their racial counterparts at North Village Prep and South County Prep. Still, while both black and white students at predominantly African American South City Honors High admitted that racial boundaries were permeable within school, they could not escape the historical, divisive racial climate that has characterized their school's and communities' regional location. South City Honors,

formerly all-white until the late 1970s, had not been immune to "white flight" into private and surrounding county district schools. Yet, some Whites remained at South City Honors—noteworthy for decades because of its strong academic programs, even in its incarnation as a predominantly African American high school. Administrators, teachers, and students knew that South City Honors' historic reputation and consistent production of strong test results kept some white families (even those of some faculty at a nearby prestigious liberal arts college) invested in this SCC school.

   Still, students perceived that sanctions could ensue for too much racial mixing in SCC. Adam, a white senior and classmate of Meredith's at South City Honors, discussed at length his interpretation of a situation in which he was penalized for socializing intimately across racial lines:

> I was talking to [the coach at the local college] and everything was going good . . . we were e-mailing back and forth. He's just like, "I'm going to have you come by Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday to sign for your scholarship." And that Monday I was out with my girlfriend who happens to be black, and it just so happened we was [sic] at the mall, and he happened to be there. He didn't . . . I guess he didn't . . . we were at this little booth or whatever and he was like, "Hey, you!" You know, he called me over and I came over, and I talked to him and he introduced me to his . . . I don't know if it was his wife or girlfriend at the time. I was like, "Hold on just a second. I want to introduce you to my girlfriend," and she walked over . . . he just . . . there was this look on his face like "I can't believe what you're" . . . you know, that I was dating a black girl, you know? And he never called me . . . for that Tuesday or Wednesday, he never called me back. He hasn't said word to me since then, and he ended up signing my friend, and not that I'm not glad my friend got a scholarship and that. It's just that I know that I was better than my friend in that aspect and I really do believe that that is the reason that he didn't. . .

Adam described himself as the better player compared with his friend:

> [My friend is] another white guy from [another city] and he . . . and we were playing soccer pretty much the same amount of years but I just naturally was a little . . . you know, a little better than him . . . I was just a little faster. I had a little bit better touch. You know, I just read the game a little bit more.

Thus, Adam could only reason that the coach failed to follow up on a promise to recruit him because he introduced the coach to a girlfriend "who happens to be black." Along with schoolmates Fred (white male) and Jeremy (black male), Adam described how racial dynamics of the region, families, and communities countervailed what flexibility in social boundary crossing that South City Honors' school environment enabled:

> Fred: At South City Honors for . . . [pause] you know, people tend to disperse to who they're more related to and I guess being white and the minority [laughs] . . . is, I don't know . . . I guess you can relate maybe a little . . . easier to white people and it's kind of easier to get along with them but . . . uh . . . and it's kind of how it is but . . . uh . . . I mean, everyone is cool. Everyone is generous, you know, they're good people and it's…it's kind of like a school friendship but away from school you don't really keep the same friendships and I don't know.

> Jeremy: It's harder for some people to accept you outside of school. I can say, "What's up?" and hang out with you in the lunchroom but, you know, I can't go out on the weekends with you or something like that.

> Adam: Yeah. Their parents might not be comfortable with you coming over their house or whatever. It's just . . . it's just there. I mean, and that's still the way it is here because there's still a little bit of racism.

> Fred: Really. I don't know. South City Honors doesn't have too much . . .

> Adam (interjects): Yeah. South City Honors doesn't but, you know, outside is what I'm saying.

According to a report by Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lei (2004) of the Civil Rights Project, most white students, except in the South and Southwest, have little contact with minority students. Adam, Fred, and Meredith—white southern youth—are some exceptions. And they informed us how they negotiated their relationships with their African American peers. At least for them, racial intergroup relations appeared to achieve some of the social goals of the *Brown* decision. However, these youth also understood how macro-social relations could negate what advancement in interracial relations they made in school. Southern

white (and black) students had a more difficult time maintaining differ-
ent racial and ethnic ties *outside* of school. These revelations lend insight
to the finding that region explained a significant percent of the variation
between northeastern and southern white students' cultural flexibility in
this study.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN SCHOOLS AND CULTURAL FLEXIBILITY

All four schools in this study were selected for their relative overall high
performance in their respective districts. In theory, each provided a bet-
ter academic "opportunities context" for its students than surrounding
schools in the districts. Yet, access to academic opportunities varied, and
the differential levels of access in the schools with different racial and
ethnic compositions appear to have some association with students'
propensity to cross social boundaries. That is, the social organization and
climate of the schools differed significantly for African American and
white students in the majority-white and majority-minority schools. Our
data suggest unequivocally that African American students in the major-
ity-minority schools (North City Tech and South City Honors) had signif-
icantly different educational experiences than their counterparts in the
majority-white schools (South County Prep and North Village Prep).

    First, one survey question—using Likert response categories (1 =
strongly agree, 4 = *strongly disagree*)—asked students to respond to the fol-
lowing statement: "I feel like I am a part of this school." Thirty-eight per-
cent of North Village Prep's and 60% of South County Prep's black
students agreed with this statement, averaging 49%, compared with 83%
at North City Tech and 72% at South City Honors, for an average of 77%.
In short, the black students at North Village Prep and South County Prep
felt less incorporated into their schools than their peers who were
enrolled at majority-minority schools.

    In the majority-white schools, students appeared to have more physical
and academic distance among themselves than those in the two majority-
minority schools. In an explicit discussion of racial and ethnic bound-
aries, Ashley, a white female participating in a coed, all-white 11th-grade
group interview at South County Prep, pointed out that the social orga-
nization of the students in academic and extracurricular influenced her
relationships with schoolmates:

    Interviewer: So what do your individual groups look like?

    Ashley: We have like kind of blurry *lines* a lot of the times . . . but
    like, you know, you have that group and you can't really like

relate to that group. You can individually, but like not as a whole group, but a lot of the other groups just like they've learned their lines a lot. Like we have a lot of people that are in the AP classes and they hang out together a lot and there's like theater groups and stuff like that and they hang out and just like random small groups from like different . . . just from being in high school together for so long and stuff like that.

Again, Ashley's views and those of others with whom we spoke confirmed what we know from the research on multiracial schools and sociability (Hallinan and Williams 1989; Hallinan and Teixeira 1987; Moody 2002; Schofield 1991). Differential levels of participation by groups can concretize the "lines," boundaries, or perceived differences to the point that they can endure throughout high school. At South County Prep, white students dominated not only the most academically rigorous courses but also the most visible, high-status extracurricular activities, including cheerleading, the Young Republicans Club, and baseball. In an informal poll I took, teachers designated only about 5 (out of 292) African American students considered bright enough to be enrolled in advanced classes. Meanwhile, survey data show that white students were more than 1 1/2 times as likely to be enrolled in either an AP or honors courses as their black schoolmates—62% and 38%, respectively.

Similarly, at majority-white North Village Prep High School hundreds of miles to the north, students commented similarly on how their schools might influence their ability to move across social boundaries more easily and frequently. Will, a graduating white senior, lamented what he found to be one of the most negative aspects of his high school, which had participated in a voluntary desegregated school for decades:

Interviewer: If you were able to change one thing about your school, what would that be?

Will: I think one thing I would change is I would try to make this school more welcoming for . . . all people. I kind of, I mean, as with any high school, probably, you tend to form . . . . ..tend to break down into groups I mean, I hang out with people who do a lot of the same activities as me and, you know, get the same grades and are in the same classes, and I think that's one disadvantage of having kind of tracked classes. I'm glad that we don't have them in English or history. I think that helps a little bit but, yeah, I'm certainly glad that we have the . . . via the [Be the]

> Change program this year, I think . . . I really think that will make a difference in the school.
>
> Interviewer: You do?
>
> Will: Yeah. I really do. I mean, I participated in one of the days and I thought it was an amazing experience but I think people . . . I think it's . . . if not already, then in the future it will help people to kind of recognize others and not just judge them. It will probably take a while for it to make a really big difference in the school.

Will informed the interviewer that the lack of diversity of the students participating in certain extracurricular activities and select classes impeded student interaction across racial lines in school. At North Village Prep, 71% of white students were enrolled in at least either one honors or AP course, compared with 30% of their black peers. In Will's case, the opportunity for social contact across racial lines was limited because of his course placement (and, no doubt, the small percentage of students of color at North Village Prep). Nonetheless, Will and some of his fellow students (of various races) and some school administrators demonstrated their willingness to build relations across racial and ethnic lines through other conduits that, as Will said, could potentially "make a really big difference." When I arrived at the school one late winter morning, an administrator informed me that there was a special assembly to introduce a program shown on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. The four grades were divided and assigned spaces in the auditorium (seniors and sophomores) and the gym (freshmen and juniors). Students milled into the auditorium, and at the door they were handed small pieces of colored paper and asked to sit according to their color. Despite these explicit instructions, I observed that students sat exactly as they had come in—with their friends, and generally by race.

  Two student facilitators were standing on the stage: Byron, a medium-height white male senior wearing a backwards baseball cap, and April, a petite African American female senior. They explained how North Village Prep High School had agreed to take the challenge to discuss difference and teens' teasing one another for various traits, and then they showed a short film. The poignant Oprah-esque film was shot at Monroe High School in Detroit, a multiracial/ethnic high school. The "Be the Change" program consisted of an all-day retreat centered on small-group open discussions in which participants told something about themselves

that others did not know. Participants discussed numerous issues ranging from gender differences, to parental issues, to income and illness, to race/ethnicity, to sexuality. For Will, participation in this new program was an "amazing experience."

Notably, white students at North Village Prep High reported significantly higher cultural flexibility than their black peers there. In addition to the significantly wider socioeconomic gap that existed among African American, Latino, and white students at North Village Prep, the cultural and educational opportunities gap loomed large as well. Black and Latino students at North Village Prep did not reap the advantages of attending a well-resourced school with strong parent support and fundraising. For example, in the spring of 2007, the air was abuzz with the eager anticipation of students and a few fortunate teachers who were preparing to head to Japan on a band and orchestra exchange trip for a two weeks. While one of the only two black teachers, Mr. Moman, was going on the trip as a chaperon, *none* of the African American and Latino students who participated in the Voluntary Desegregation Program (VDP) at North Village Prep were headed to Japan. Yearly, students took trips to Europe, Asia, and Latin and Central America after numerous car washes, bake sales, and parental financial support. However, North Village Prep's black and Latino students—the majority of whom are lower income and voluntarily bussed to the school via the VDP—either could not afford to go on these trips or were not financially subsidized by the school to participate.

Moreover, at various break times and during free periods, the VDP student participants socialized and took study breaks in two rooms where only they gathered. From completing paper assignments, to getting tutorial assistance, to playing chess and talking politics, to merely hanging out with one another, most VDP spent at least some time in the "VDP" room, away and separate from their white peers. Beyond their class time with white peers in their general comprehensive and college preparatory classes, nearly all the students of color at North Village Prep—namely, the VDP participants—had limited social contact with white students outside of class time.

As I mentioned earlier, almost all of North Village Prep High's students are bussed into the district from the urban center and surrounding areas of North Capital City. The lack of residential and community proximity very likely limited the narrowing of that social distance gap—the most frequent issue brought up by black students in our interviews at North Village Prep. Angela, a graduating senior, told one of the researchers, "It is hard to hang out with North Village Prep kids because I live so far away. Once, when I was playing basketball, I slept over at one of their houses. I

stopped playing basketball because the practice is from 6–8 at night, and there is no bus. I don't like staying there overnight." Residential segregation not only impeded Angela's ability to build relationships with her white peers outside of class, but also it limited her ability to participate in extracurricular sports.

In stark comparison, we found that at both North City Tech and South City Honors (both majority minority), black students' academic placement in the schools had a broader range, from the most accelerated and advanced placement courses to the most remedial courses. In addition, black and white students were enrolled in either AP or honors courses at the same rate: 75% and 76%, respectively, at South City Honors AP program, and 50 % and 42 %, respectively, at North City Tech—two schools known for their strong promotion of academic rigor. Our observations and notes provide much more vivid descriptions of students interacting across racial and ethnic lines. For example, at North City Tech, we spent some time observing Mr. Ponte's AP Physics class, an interactive and lively group of 30 students (from researcher's notes):

> The class is fairly racially mixed, and also fairly balanced in terms of gender. Kids sat at mixed tables, interacting across race and gender. A Black male, for example, upon entering the room, gave pounds and handshakes to a whole group of very diverse boys, and kids seemed to work across race and gender in supporting one another in solving the assigned problems.

Similarly, at South City Honors, we observed classroom make-ups in the advanced placement classes that differed greatly from those nearby at South County Prep and North City Tech (in NCC). The following description (from researcher's notes) was not atypical:

> I attend the AP English class of the 2007 ACT Star Teacher Cate Gilman. As I walk into her class at the end of the 1st block. This 2nd period class is one of 22 students: 14 Black females; 3 Black males; 2 White females; and 3 White males. I am familiar with some of the faces. In Gilman's class, today is AP practice test focus. We work for about 20 minutes on a difficult prose passage written about two ideals and how they are represented in the upper class during an earlier historical era. The students, Williams, and I then quietly answer the questions. As they work, Williams walks around and pass out cards marked with the number of a particular question and with remarks like "you got #1 correct; you're a genius!"

At both North City Tech and South City Honors, not only did many African American students share equal academic status with White students, but they also participated in diverse extracurricular activities. At South City Honors, black students also participated in Model UN, a program for high school students that teaches them about the organization and international policy-building of the United Nations, and the National Forensics League. Both of these programs allow students to meet other students from myriad places and to compete locally and nationally.

In sum, both North Village Prep (NCC) and South County Prep (SCC) had stronger material "opportunities contexts"—that is, they were wealthier and well-resourced schools. At the same time, the black students enrolled at these two schools were significantly less likely to have access to, to be encouraged to participate in, or to avail themselves of, such opportunities as compared with their peers at the two majority minority schools: North City Tech (NCC) and South City Honors (SCC). The latter schools, in comparison, showed breadth in terms of student participation across myriad social lines.

DISCUSSION

Few studies, if any, have explicitly examined the relationship between students' cultural flexibility, or their propensity to move across different social and cultural boundaries, and their individual and academic traits. I found significant differences in cultural flexibility between students attending the majority-minority schools and those attending majority-white schools in this study, with some of that variation owing to differences in students' participation in school, their classroom placement, and their self-esteem. Furthermore, white students in the Northeast were more culturally flexible than those from the South.

Self-esteem is a significant and positive predictor of cultural flexibility for black students, and those black students enrolled in the majority-minority schools in the study revealed higher self-esteem than their racial counterparts in the two majority-white schools. Meta-analyses of hundreds of studies reveal that blacks consistently report higher self-esteem than whites, which is attributable to cultural differences, higher levels of individualism, and protection against stigma (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000; Twenge and Crocker 2002).[11] Furthermore, research shows consistent differences among race, self-esteem, and regional location (i.e., population density) such that African Americans are found to show higher

levels of self-esteem in the South than in other regions of the country (Twenge and Crocker 2002). In this study, however, I found that southern African American students attending a majority-white school had significantly lower self-esteem than their African American peers attending a majority-minority school 15 miles down the road.

Prior studies found that black students in desegregated schools have higher self-esteem and confidence and do better in school than those in segregated contexts (Crain, Mahard, and Narot 1982; Wells and Crain 1994). In contrast, Rosenberg (1985) found that unlike in segregated schools, black children in majority-white schools perceive and experience more distance in their social comparisons with white classmates. The results from this study confirm that black students attending high-performing majority-minority schools in two urban areas both in the Northeast and South possess significantly higher self-esteem than their counterparts in nearby majority-white schools within these same regions.

In addition, these results highlight some of the processes within schools that appear to be associated with school composition and social organization via classes and extracurricular activities. Among all students, especially whites, placement in either AP or honors courses appeared to be positively related to cultural flexibility. This result signals something about the academic experiences in such classes. Scholars and researchers inform us about the differential levels of curricular content and exposure, creativity, analytical rigor, pedagogical techniques, and support of student curiosity in academically rigorous courses versus those in "regular" or standard classes (Anyon 1980; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Gamoran 1987; Oakes 1985). Studies have shown, for instance, that Advanced Placement and international baccalaureate programs in some high-poverty urban minority high schools provide the opportunity for students to learn and use various cultural codes (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, and Callahan 2007). Such classroom-level factors collectively may augment cultural flexibility. Paradoxically, while exposure to AP and honors classes—both proxies for a certain type of classroom experience—are positively associated with cultural flexibility, they constitute an organizational structure highly correlated with race and inequity in many schools (Oakes 1985; Wells and Serna 1996). And as students mentioned throughout their discussions with us, the underrepresentation of black (and other racial and ethnic minority) students in these classes, particularly at majority-white schools, foments social and cultural distance (see also Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005).

While most studies tend to focus on students of color—namely African, Latino/a, Asian, and Native American as the "minority" (Schofield 1991),

this study's findings highlight some of the social and cultural experiences of both black and white students in the "minority" at mixed-race schools. The minority experience works differently in minority-dominant and majority-white schools for black and white students, however. Based on the illustrative examples provided earlier, black students have significantly different access to particular resources and status groups in majority-white schools compared with majority-minority ones. In the former, certain academic or extracurricular practices may become racialized and deemed "white" or appear outside the cultural repertoires of black students (Mickelson and Velasco 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). In comparison, white students, as the minority in schools, benefit from their privilege and high racial status or "capital" (Lewis 2003) not only in wider society but also within schools. They too experience disproportionate representation in high-status classes; theirs, however, is a matter of overrepresentation, not underrepresentation.

Over the course of our field work, educators at both North City Tech and South City Honors described how school leaders made deliberate attempts to avoid "white flight" by maintaining academically rigorous programs and yielding strong educational results in order to appeal to white parents and maintain a significant white student presence in the schools. Furthermore, both of the majority-minority schools had white (male) principals; and some political tensions ensued among the staff around this fact. Disgruntled African American teachers at North City Tech, for instance, discussed their beliefs about how school officials actively recruited white students to the school and even accused the principal of giving token gifts, such as promising leadership positions in student organizations to white students, to keep the school appealing to them. Scholars argue that the power of whiteness as a privileged racial status (Doane 1999; Gallagher 1999), as "capital," in the United States often dictates that white students be accorded a higher level of respect and privilege that their black peers in the majority-white schools do not necessarily receive (Lewis 2003).

Finally, for white students, these data suggest another story about how the social climate in their regional locales is associated with cultural flexibility. More research is needed, however, to ascertain whether the pattern of greater cultural flexibility among students in northeastern schools compared with those in southern schools would hold. Nonetheless, this pattern parallels findings about significant differences in the prevalence of liberal and conservative viewpoints between northern and southern Whites, respectively (Schuman et al. 1998).

Although neither self-reported grade point averages nor test scores (analyses not provided here) proved to be significant predictors of

cultural flexibility in the regression models, one may not be able to fully dismiss some association between academic experiences and the differences in sociocultural experiences between black students at majority-minority and majority-white schools. As Table 1 shows, the black-white test score differentials in at North City Tech and South City Honors (two majority-minority high schools) were significantly lower than those in the two majority-white schools. Thus, African American students in the majority-white schools were more likely to hold significantly lower academic statuses than their peers in majority-minority schools. In this study, I had no way of knowing whether prior academic disparities existed among these students across the four schools before enrolling in high school, or whether their prior elementary and middle school experiences account for some of their high school cultural orientations. What is known is that many of the African American students at North Village Prep and South County Prep began their schooling in their respective high-performing school districts in elementary and middle school. Further research is warranted to ascertain the directionality and levels of influences among these factors: students' organization within their schools, placement, their cultural flexibility, and their academic performances.

In addition, I did not find any patterns between family background and black students' cultural flexibility. While about 60% of the black students' parents at one of the majority-minority schools, South City Honors, had some college experience—ranging from community college to advanced degrees—only about 32% of the black students' parents at the other majority-minority school, North City Tech, had some college experience. Meanwhile, 54% and 47% of the black students' parents at the two majority-white schools, South County Prep and North Village Prep, respectively, had some college experience. On average, higher percentages of white students' parents had some college experience—88%, 73%, and 70% at North Village Prep, South City Honors, and South County Prep, respectively—except at North City Tech, where only 32% of the white students reported having parents with some college education.

This article began by recognizing the benefits of desegregation in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision 50 years ago. At the same time, the findings in this study raise some critical questions for desegregation researchers and its proponents to consider. Theory predicts that interracial and predominantly white schools increase the likelihood of disadvantaged and ethnic minority students being exposed to the "dominant" forms of social and cultural capital. At the same time, researchers and critics of desegregation's efforts since the *Brown* decision have questioned whether majority-minority and predominantly white schools sufficiently improve the academic well-being of minority students (Dempsey

and Noblit 1993; Leake and Faltz 1993). The consequences of intergroup experiences are very much dependent on the structure of the contact situation, however. Hence, I would caution anyone against essentializing and reading all schools with similar social compositions as the same. Research informs us that variation in experiences exists even within schools with similar social racial and ethnic compositions (Schofield 1991).

Critical identity issues may emerge for African American, or black, students educated in contexts in which their social and cultural realities are either muted or invisible. In a developmental period when identity markers mean much to them, many students of color find meanings in how classrooms and school activities are organized and the degrees to which they are encouraged to interact with one another both socially and academically. Thus, the social factors for minority students' high self-esteem and cultural flexibility in majority-minority schools may have less to do with whether these students sit in the classrooms with white students, and more to do with whether positive familial, economic, and social supports are in place, in addition to effective teachers and adequate educational resources (Darling-Hammond 2007; Irvine 1990; Ladson-Billings 1994). When students of color witness more evidence that their coethnic peers cross the spectrum of ability levels and smartness, athleticism, and leadership potential, their reference group for achievement expands and includes some representation of others who share similar social backgrounds to theirs.

While the relative academic gains of desegregated schools appear greater than segregated schools—namely, minority-dominant ones (Borman et al. 2004; Crain and Mahard 1983; Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 2002; Mickelson 2003; Simmons et al. 1978)—further investigation into the positive social and cultural functions of the latter would provide more direction for the former. Students from minority-dominant schools perceive that they can do well and achieve highly because affirming messages are deeply inculcated into them (Leake and Faltz 1993). For example, Massey et al. (2003) found that black first-year college students who graduated from urban minority-dominant high schools and later attended some of the nation's most elite universities maintained very strong senses of self and aspirations. Paradoxically, these students maintained very high confidence levels despite having significantly lower grades than their Asian and white peers in their first year of college. While the authors of the aforementioned study may have labeled this self-concept and achievement paradox as overconfidence, such findings still indicate how different school contexts influence students' identities and

self-concepts, and the boundaries they create within them.

Finally, a few caveats are in order about the limitations of this study. First, the reader should note that the findings associated with black and white students' cultural flexibility are, at best, suggestive given the small scale of the case studies (only four schools). Small-scale case studies—even hybrid ones that incorporate survey research—are not meant to be representative, however. Rather, they uncover social patterns and produce the bases for theoretical claims that can be further tested with large-scale survey studies of students in different school contexts (Yin 2003). Second, these analyses use only a categorical proxy for school type to differentiate among students. Further research on school contextual effects on students' cultural flexibility is warranted, and I hope that future quantitative studies can more systematically and better disentangle wider school-level effects on cultural flexibility from individual-level ones. Third, the mechanisms that operate for African American and white students may differ for Asian American, Latino\a, and Native American students. While the larger project included some these subgroups, the numbers were too small to facilitate between-group analyses across all four schools.

Overall, the main implication is that students' cultural flexibility—as a social and psychological process—may determine the extent to which individuals of diverse backgrounds are really willing to realize the visions of social integration. And further, from the students' perspectives, their own senses of self and organization in school have a great deal to do with their tastes for cross-cultural participation. Students' perspectives intimate that the latter factor (social organization among peers) has some influence on the former (especially self-esteem). Further longitudinal study is necessary to confirm this, however. Notwithstanding, these findings signal an area of critical research beyond the study of material and academic outcomes of schooling, suggesting that the cross-cultural development of society's youth has some relationship with their social experiences in school.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1.   In addition, sociologist Elijah Anderson (2004) refers to the "cosmopolitan canopy" (drawing from Robert Merton). His and philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's (1997) conceptualizations of "cosmopolitanism" have some apparent differences. The cosmopolitan canopy describes public places that diverse groups patronize and where they interact or exchange information while behaving as businesspersons and consumers. Anderson writes that the cosmopolitan canopy enables patrons to engage in "cultural tourism," a symbolic cross-cultural exchange and consumption of food, music, clothing, art, and so forth. The cosmopolitan canopy is a social space that may provide an opportunity for diverse individuals to engage, though it may not necessarily change their a priori stereotypes or viewpoints about other social groups. Appiah, in contrast, writes about a sensibility that runs deeper than symbolic multiculturalism and urges individuals to take pleasure not only in cultural tourism but also in the presence, communities, and homes of other, different peoples.

2.   In comparison, multiculturalism, as practiced, enables a philosophy of "cultural difference" that enables principals and educators to be aware of cultural diversity but not necessarily to promote the cross-fertilization of diverse cultural styles or ways of life (Chisholm 1999).

3.   Contrary to popular perceptions that Blacks are more collectivist in their orientations, multiple studies find that African Americans report significantly higher rates of individualism and similar rates of collectivism compared with European Americans, although the effects are small. For more discussion of these concepts and findings, see Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002)

4. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article to protect the identities of the schools, students, and staff and to mask their locations.

5.   Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core Public School Data 2005–2006 academic year.

6.   Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core Public School Data 2005–2006 academic year.

7.   VDP is a state-funded program designed to eliminate racial imbalance through the busing of children of color from NCC to public school systems in surrounding suburban communities.

8.   The response rate for the students participating in the survey ranged from 23% to 48% across the four schools, for an average response rate of 40%. Although within the larger scheme of survey research, this response rate may appear modest, I am confident that we gathered data from significantly wider and representative percentages of the student populations over the hundreds of hours of school observations and interviews.

9.   Two other items were added to the survey but are not included in this scale: choosing to interact with students of a different sexual orientation and religion. Although the results reported here do not change with these two items added, I have chosen to omit them for conceptual reasons in defining students' boundary crossing and multicultural participation.

10.   Some researchers suggest that blacks have a propensity for using the "extreme" answer categories in their responses to self-esteem questions and argue that insignificant racial differences would ensue if answer categories were collapsed (Bachman & O'Malley 1984). Such research, however, has provided little to no theoretical account for why black respondents have a tendency to be more "extreme" than other groups. Meanwhile, whites maintain higher self-esteem than other racial groups in the United States (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000; Twenge and Crocker 2002), although to our knowledge, no study has attrib-

uted whites' higher self-esteem—as compared with American Indians, Hispanics, and Asian Americans—to answering in the extreme. Meta-analyses of self-esteem studies show that such race difference patterns are consistently strong, and social psychologists attribute these differences to cultural differences, levels of individualism (as opposed to collectivism), and protective mechanisms to stigma, and location (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000; Twenge and Crocker 2002).

11. The overall sample size of the larger study is 652, which includes Latino/a and Asian students. For the purposes of these analyses, these two groups are excluded, since significant numbers of Asian and Latino/a students were not present in all four schools.

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PRUDENCE L. CARTER is associate professor of education and (by courtesy) sociology at Stanford University. Dr. Carter's areas of research and teaching focus on inequality and the sociology of education, with a particular focus on race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and identity. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Keepin' It Real: School Success beyond Black and White* (Oxford University Press 2005). Other publications have appeared in several journals, including *Ethnic and Racial Studies, Review of Educational Research, Sociology of Education,* and *Social Problems,* and a host of edited book collections. Her latest book project highlights a cross-

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national, comparative study of the interplay between mobility and culture for students in desegregated high schools in South Africa and the United States.

In order to examine how students' race, ethnicity, and culture might influence learning, however, one must first examine the assumptions that underlie these concepts. Race is not a biological category but a social construction that is given meaning and significance in specified historical, political, and social contexts. Â The geneticists consider the differences in academic achievement among various groups of students (often measured by test scores) as indicative of the innate intelligence of certain groups, rather than a product of socioeconomic, historical, and cultural factors. Race and Cultural Flexibility among Students in Different Multiracial Schools. Article. Jun 2010. Â Mixed-race schools are vital not only for bolstering achievement outcomes of previously disadvantaged students but also for promoting social cohesion in a diverse society. Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: Specifically, this article examines the difference in cultural flexibility between black and white students enrolled in schools with different racial and ethnic compositions. Cultural flexibility is defined as the propensity to value and move across different cultural and social peer groups and environments. Gained insight into their own cultural assumptions, the ability to interact effectively with people from another culture and empathy for different world views. Multicultural Education does not emphasize. Total assimilation of minorities into the mainstream culture. A primary assumption of Multicultural Education is that. Individuals who identify with different ethnic groups can retain and preserve some of their original culture and still function in society. The critics of Multicultural Education in the United States argue that it. Is a threat to our national unity. Advocates of Multicultural