Academic Disidentification, Race, and High School Dropouts
Author(s): Bryan W. Griffin
Published by: University of North Carolina Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40364355
Accessed: 26/06/2013 18:57

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

University of North Carolina Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The High School Journal.
Academic Disidentification, Race, and High School Dropouts

Bryan W. Griffin
Georgia Southern University

An important predictor of whether students remain in school or withdraw is their ability to identify with academics. Consistent with Ogbu’s (1992) cultural inversion and Steele’s (1992) stereotype threat hypotheses, research has shown that Black and Hispanic students tend to demonstrate higher levels of academic disidentification relative to Asian and White students. The present study was conducted to learn whether Black and Hispanic students, when compared to Asian and White students, show further evidence of disidentification from academics when deciding to withdraw from school. Data were collected from 132,903 high school students in Florida, USA. Results from the data analysis are consistent with the disidentification hypothesis. Specifically, both Black and Hispanic students appear to place less importance on academic achievement than do either Asian or White students when considering school withdrawal. Potential limitations of this research and methods for addressing disidentification are discussed.

Finn (1989), in a review of research on school dropouts, identified two models of student behavior that may result in early withdrawal from school. The frustration-self-esteem model holds that students who experience unsuccessful school outcomes over time, such as poor grades, may suffer an impaired perception of self (e.g., self-esteem, self-concept). A devalued self-perception could lead to frustration with school. Some students may choose to vent this frustration by adopting oppositional behavior, such as truancy, absenteeism, or complete withdrawal (Elliott & Voss, 1974). A second model, which Finn labeled participation-identification, posits that students who participate more in school activities (e.g., asking questions in class, participating in extracurricular activities) are likely to experience greater performance outcomes (e.g., academic success). The more success a student experiences, the more identified with school the student becomes. Identification in this context can be understood to mean that students have internalized important aspects of schooling to the point that their perception of self is shaped, to some extent, by their per-

An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the 1999 Youth At-Risk Conference in Savannah, Georgia. I thank Drs. Marlynn M. Griffin, Namok Choi, and Kent A. Rittschof for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

© 2002 The University of North Carolina Press
performance in school (Steele, 1992, 1997). A negative view of the participation-identification model shows that, for example, students who experience poor academic outcomes are more likely to disidentify from school. For many students this means that academic performance could influence their assessments of both domain-level perceptions of self (e.g., academic self-efficacy) and global self-perceptions, such as self-concept and self-worth (Harter, 1987).

A common component to both the frustration-self-esteem and participation-identification models is the role that academic performance plays in shaping self-perceptions. Poor performances in school either directly harm a student's self-perceptions, or lead the student to disidentify from academics in order to protect or maintain the student's perception of self-worth and value. Theoretically, both academic identification and self-perceptions are important factors in preventing students from leaving school prematurely. As noted above, the more one identifies with academics, the more salient academic outcomes become in shaping perceptions of self. This linkage suggests a positive relationship between academic identification and self-perception, and research provides evidence for this relationship (e.g., Cohen, 1974; Gold & Mann, 1984; Hansford & Hattie, 1982), although exceptions do exist. Curiously, research has shown that the hypothesized association between academic identification and self-perception does not appear to hold for some minority students. For example, Black and Hispanic students consistently demonstrate levels of academic achievement below White students (Demo & Parker, 1987; Miller, 1995; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978; Steele, 1992, 1997), yet Black and Hispanic students have levels of global self-esteem and self-concept that are equal to or exceed those of Whites (Cooper & Dorr, 1995; Crocker & Major, 1989; Dukes & Martinez, 1994; Graham, 1994; Jensen, White, & Galliher, 1982; Porter & Washington, 1979; Rosenberg, 1979; Wylie, 1979).

**Academic Disidentification among Minority Students**

In a review of social stigma and self-esteem research, Crocker and Major (1989) identified protective mechanisms individuals employ when faced with psychologically threatening situations. One of these is to selectively devalue, or to psychologically disengage from (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998), potentially harmful domains. In the context of the academic and schooling domain, Steele (1992, 1997) has labeled this devaluing/disengaging behavior academic disidentification. Academic disidentification occurs when students attempt to devalue the perceived importance of academic performance in an effort to protect their perceptions of self. In essence, this means that once academics is discounted as a relevant domain, then performance in academic endeavors will have little bearing on formation and maintenance of self-perceptions.

As noted above, research indicates that within the United States, Black and Hispanic students appear to place less importance upon academics than do either Asian or White students when considered within the framework of the relationship between academic accomplishments and various global measures of self. To better understand what produces this discrepancy, it is important to determine which factors are associated with differential academic identification among these groups. Two possible explanations for this discrepancy, cultural inversion and stereotype threat, are discussed below.

**Cultural Inversion**

Ogbu (1991a, 1992) explains that cultural inversion, or cultural opposition (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998), occurs when members of a minority group adopt behaviors that directly contradict a specific, prominent aspect of the dominant culture. While cultural inversion may arise for various reasons for some members of a given minority group, Ogbu argues that its genesis can be understood by considering the voluntary and involuntary status of that group. Voluntary minorities are often represented by immigrants who hold positive expectations regarding their future well-being in their new location. For example, these individuals may anticipate economic, educational, social, or religious benefits from the immigration. Involuntary minorities may be typified by individuals who were conquered.
or relocated against their will, and who often do not hold the same positive expectations for their future as voluntary minorities.

One result of this distinction is manifested in how these two groups confront and cope with cultural differences in relation to the dominant culture. Voluntary minorities may maintain differences in culture that existed prior to immigration, which are labeled primary cultural differences, and involuntary minorities may develop secondary cultural differences, or differences that develop after confronting the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1992). The key here is that secondary cultural differences develop and evolve as a response to the dominant culture, and often these differences serve as a device for involuntary minorities ‘to cope with their subordination (Ogbu, 1992, p. 8). Secondary cultural differences may at times take a form of cultural inversion (Ogbu, 1992, 1987). In terms of how cultural inversion functions in the United States, Ogbu (1992) explains:

Cultural inversion is the tendency for involuntary minorities to regard certain forms of behavior, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because these are characteristic of White Americans. At the same time the minorities value other forms of behavior, events, symbols and meanings. often the opposite, as more appropriate for themselves. (p. 8)

The validity of Ogbu’s (1992) theory concerning the dynamics of voluntary and involuntary minority status, and the effects it may have on culture formation and cultural inversion, has been challenged, in some cases sharply, by sociologists, anthropologists, and educational researchers (e.g., Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Dietrich, 1998; KronThout & Vedder, 1996; Thorkildsen & Schmahl, 1997; Trueba, 1993).

In the case of education, however, there exists evidence to document that both Black and Hispanic students do appear to have oppositional subcultures that devalue academic accomplishments (e.g., Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 1998; Majors & Billson, 1992). Indeed, many researchers report that Black and Hispanic school children often face peer-pressure to resist schooling and academic success, otherwise these students risk being identified as acting white,” or labeled as a “schoolboy” or “schoolgirl,” or some other pejorative term (Dietrich, 1998; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fries-Britt, 1998; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Ogbu, 1992). Given this subcultural tendency to resist schooling and academics, it seems likely that academics will not serve as an important domain for defining views of self for members of the subculture.

**Stereotype Threat**

Steele (1992, 1997) has argued that when one faces a situation that represents a domain with which one is identified, the threat exists of performing poorly and possibly harming one’s perception of self. For example, if a student is identified with academics then poor performance on an important test could influence the student’s perception of worth, esteem, etc. Further, if this individual belongs to a group for which a negative stereotype for the domain exists (e.g., the academic performance of Black students tends to be lower than that of White students), then this individual confronts an additional threat of confirming the negative stereotype (Steele, 1997). Thus, stereotype threat exists when one faces a situation in which one’s performance could confirm the negative stereotype about one’s group, and this threat may impair performance in the domain of interest. Steele (1997) has noted that certain stereotypes regarding academic performance appear to influence actual performance, and as a result, some minorities may have difficulty identifying with school.

Several experiments have provided supportive evidence for the stereotype threat hypothesis. Steele and Aronson (1995) found that Black students, when placed in a diagnostic-testing situation that could confirm a racial stereotype about intellectual ability, performed at a lower level than White students. However, when placed in a nondiagnostic testing situation, there was parallel performance between Black and White students. In addition, Steele and Aronson found that even when faced with nondiagnostic testing conditions, Blacks had lower scores than Whites when all students were asked to identify their race immediately before taking the test, but Black and White students showed similar levels of performance when racial identity was
not requested. In sum, Steele and Aronson found that when race was primed in some way, either indicating the test was diagnostic of one’s ability or simply asking test takers to identify their race, then scores obtained by Black participants were depressed relative to Whites. Aronson and Salinas (1998) and Salinas and Aronson (1998) obtained similar results for Hispanic students.

Besides academic performance, stereotype threat may also have other negative effects—or positive effects if the stereotype is positive—on facets related to the academic arena, such as student identification with academics and schooling. Steele (1992, 1997) argues that since negative stereotypes may threaten how individuals perceive themselves, it is possible that members of groups subject to negative stereotypes may be vulnerable to the stigma of performing poorly. This could cause these individuals to activate the defensive mechanism of academic disidentification to protect their self-perceptions. It is important to note that for disidentified students, according to the disidentification hypothesis, self-esteem and other self-perceptions are not constructed from educational or academic behaviors, so performing poorly in school has little to no bearing on students perceptions of self. As Steele (1997) states: “Disidentification offers the retreat of not caring about the domain in relation to the self” (p. 614).

Results from Hansford and Hattie’s (1982) meta-analysis of the relationship between self and academic achievement provide supportive evidence for the disidentification hypothesis. Although Hansford and Hattie were not specifically addressing this hypothesis, the correlation coefficients between various measures of self and academic performance provided for Black, White, and Hispanic students suggest greater academic disidentification for Blacks and Hispanics than for Whites. The correlations reported were .19 for Blacks, .23 for Hispanics, and .33 for Whites. Similarly, experimental studies by Major et al. (1998) showed that when given a diagnostic test of intelligence, reports of either positive or negative results had stronger effects on the self-esteem of White participants than on Black participants. Salinas and Aronson (1998) showed similar results for Hispanic students. This finding suggests that Black and Hispanic students disengage, to a further extent than White students, from the academic domain.

Recent research by Osborne (1995, 1997) also demonstrates support, at least partially, for the academic disidentification hypothesis. Osborne (1995) found that correlations among a measure of self-esteem and measures of academic achievement declined from 8th to 10th grade for Blacks, and were much weaker for Black boys than for Whites or Black girls. In a second study, Osborne (1997) again examined correlations among measures of self-esteem and academic performance across a variety of content areas. As with the first study, Blacks showed a trend of disidentifying over time (specifically from 8th to 12th grade), but this was especially pronounced for boys. The correlations for neither Hispanics nor Whites demonstrated any identifiable pattern over time.

The Current Study: Disidentification, Grades, and Dropping Out

If either cultural inversion or the threat of a negative stereotype (or both) does lead to disidentification from academics, then adverse behaviors from the disidentified student can be expected. Based upon the evidence from Osborne’s (1995, 1997) correlational studies; Major et al. (1998), Salinas and Aronson’s (1998), Aronson and Salinas’ (1998), and Steele and Aronson’s (1995) experimental studies; and Hansford and Hattie’s (1982) meta-analysis, Black and Hispanic students appear to be less identified with academics than White students. Similarly, the findings of Dietrich (1998), Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Fries-Britt (1998), Graham, Taylor, and Hudley (1998), Majors (1994), Matute-Bianchi (1991), and Ogbu (1991b) indicate that both Blacks and Hispanics have developed subcultures that illustrate cultural opposition toward academics, which further suggests detachment from the academic domain. As a result of this detachment, the participation-identification model would predict that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to drop out of school. Research confirms this; dropout rates are highest for Black and Hispanic students, with His-
panics demonstrating the highest rates of withdrawal (Gibson, 1991; Rumberger, 1987; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). Recent figures from the National Center for Educational Statistics show that Hispanics have, on average, an event dropout rate of 10.46% for the years 1994 through 1996, and this compares with 6.56% for Blacks and 4.26% for Whites (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Data were not reported for students of Asian descent.

From the above data it is clear that Black and Hispanic students suffer from disproportionate rates of withdrawal relative to White students, yet some of the processes that influence dropout decisions remain undetermined. Is it possible, for example, that Black and Hispanic students take different cues than White students when faced with the decision to leave school? To understand better how academic achievement influences the withdrawal decision-making process of students, the academic disidentification hypothesis was tested in this current study by examining the relationship between high school grades and dropping out for Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White students. Situated within the context of Steele’s (1997) disidentification hypothesis, it seems likely that the role academic achievement plays in shaping a student’s decision to withdraw may differ for these four groups. If either cultural inversion or stereotype threat does lead to disidentification from academics, then students from any group that face negative cultural forces regarding academics, or a threat from negative stereotypes about academics, should place less emphasis on school performance when dropping out is a consideration. Moreover, Black and Hispanic student disidentification is likely, even if not faced with stereotype threat or cultural opposition to academics, because these students are often marginalized in schools and society (Ogbu, 1992; Walsh, 1987). To compound this, research has shown that Black and Hispanic students demonstrate greater levels of alienation from school compared to White students (e.g., Calabrese & Poe, 1990), and alienation is closely tied to disidentification (Finn, 1989). For Asian students, a positive academic stereotype exists (Kao, 1995), and research shows that Asians have levels of academic achievement that is higher than Whites (Kao, 1995; Peng & Wright, 1994). As a result of this, Asian students should typically be more identified with academics, so they should place more importance on academic performance when deciding whether to drop out of school.

In summary, if either cultural inversion or stereotype threat plays a role in academic disidentification, then Black and Hispanic students, who often face both negative academic stereotypes and peer pressure to adopt anti-academic behaviors, should place less emphasis on academic performance when deciding to leave school than either Asian or White students. Stated differently, the relationship between school grades and persistence in school should be stronger, more predictive, for Asians and Whites than for either Blacks or Hispanics. In addition, since Osborne (1995, 1997) found evidence that disidentification is manifested differently for males and females, and since Graham, Taylor, and Hudley (1998) have shown that both Black and Hispanic males tend to hold in higher regard students who adopt anti-academic behavior in school, the relationship between school grades and school persistence was also explored by sex to learn whether grades are less predictive of dropping out for males than for females.

Method

Sample

The Florida Department of Education provided the data for this study, a cross-sectional, random sample of high school students (grades 9 through 12) from 14 school districts in Florida, USA. The data reflect the standing of the students as of the 1990-1991 school year. The sample consisted of 132,903 students, 1.8% Asian, 22.1% Black, 15.9% Hispanic, 60.3% White, and 49.3% female, enrolled in 75 high schools.

Variables of Interest

The three variables of central importance in this study were stay-in/dropout status (stay-in, students who stayed in school were coded 1, and those who dropped out were coded 0), academic performance (measured by high school grade point average, GPA, which ranged from 0 to 4 with 4 indicating the highest level of
achievement), and race (Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White). Overall, 4.4% of the female and 5.3% of the male students sampled dropped out of school for the 1990–1991 school year. These percentages are within the range of rates reported by the Florida Department of Education (2000) which varied between 4.8% and 5.6% for the years 1993 to 1999. For a complete explanation of how a dropout is defined, see Florida Department of Education (1992). The mean GPA for the sample was 2.25 (SD = 0.80).

Covariates
Previous research on high school dropouts has identified several factors that either contribute to the decision to leave school or are strong predictors of dropping out. To better model the relationship between academic performance and dropping out, two of the strongest correlates of dropping out were included in the analysis as control variables. These include an indicator of the student’s age relative to his or her classmates (overage; Frase, 1989; Kreitzer, Madaus, & Haney, 1989; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995), and an indicator of behavioral problems (behave; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1987; Hammack, 1986; Pallas, 1986). The dummy variable (Pedhazur, 1997) for overage status, overage, was given the value 1 for students who were two or more years older than their classmates (e.g., 16 or older and in grade 9), otherwise the value 0 was used. Approximately 7.85% of the students in the sample were overage for their grade. The dummy variable for behavior, behave, was assigned the value 1 for students with behavioral problems (6.56% of the sample), and 0 for students not experiencing behavioral problems. Problematic behavior was defined as any incidence of an out-of-school suspension, a court appearance, or expulsion from school. Also included as control variables were several dummy variables to model limited English proficiency (LEP; 1 if student has limited English proficiency, otherwise 0), migrant status (migrant: 1 for migrants, otherwise 0), attendance in a dropout prevention program (DOP; 1 if in DOP, otherwise 0), and sex (male: 1 for males, 0 for females). About 3.14% of the sampled students were classified as limited in English proficiency, 1.02% held migrant status, and 6.27% were in a dropout prevention program.

Results
The percentage of students dropping out, by both race and sex, is presented in Table 1. Consistent with reported research (e.g., Gibson, 1991; Rumberger, 1987; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1997), the dropout rate was highest for Blacks, closely followed by Hispanics, then Whites, and then Asians, who showed the lowest rate. Males had a slightly higher dropout rate across each racial group except for Asian students. The pattern of dropout rates found in these data provide support for the disidentification hypothesis; it appears that for racial groups for which a negative stereotype or oppositional subculture applies, the dropout rate was higher.

The key hypothesis for this study was that the relationship between GPA and school persistence would vary across racial groups. Specifically, GPA would be a stronger predictor of staying in school for Asian and White students than for Black and Hispanic students. A secondary hypothesis was that this relationship, in addition to varying across racial groups, would also vary by sex. To test this latter hypothesis, a logistic regression model (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1989) with interactions among

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>2,378</td>
<td>29,340</td>
<td>21,081</td>
<td>80,104</td>
<td>132,903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Percentage of Dropouts by Race and Sex

76
race, sex, and GPA was developed. Given the large sample size used, an alpha level of .001 was used for all statistical tests. The interaction among race, sex, and GPA was not statistically significant (LR $\chi^2 = 3.06, df = 3, p = .382$). To simplify the logistic regression model, the interactions among (a) GPA, sex, and race; (b) sex and race; and (c) GPA and sex were jointly tested for their combined contribution to the model. Together, they did not provide a statistically significant enhancement to model fit ($LR \chi^2 = 8.26, df = 7, p = .310$), so they were removed from the model. The most parsimonious and best fitting logistic regression model examined for these data is presented in Table 2.

The hypothesis that the relationship between GPA and staying in school (or dropping out) differs by race was supported. The interaction between GPA and race was statistically significant ($LR \chi^2 = 95.46, df = 3, p < .001$). The regression slopes for GPA were weaker for both Black and Hispanic students when compared to Asian and White students, and the slope for Hispanics was statistically weaker than the slope for Blacks. There was not a statistically significant difference between estimated regression slopes for Asians and Whites ($LR \chi^2 = 0.49, df = 1, p = .484$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>s.e.</th>
<th>exp(b)</th>
<th>Wald $\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3482.18*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>12.59*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>12.64*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race x GPA Interaction</td>
<td>95.46*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black x GPA</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>33.02*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic x GPA</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>78.89*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian x GPA</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>58.81*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>2073.44*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behave</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>11.87*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOP</td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>194.23*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Deviance = 41,281.70; Model $\chi^2 = 10,305.73; N = 132,903; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.23$. *p ≤ .001.
To better illustrate the nature of the relationship between GPA and staying in school, Table 3 presents the regression slopes, the corresponding change in the odds of staying in, and the percentage change in the odds of staying in for each racial group. The results presented in Table 3 show that for a one point increase in GPA, the largest increase in the odds of staying in school were found for Asian and White students, with about a 317% and a 274% increase in the odds of remaining in school, respectively, for each group. The percentage change in the odds of staying in school for Black and Hispanic students was not as great, with 194% and 136% increases, respectively.

**Discussion**

Research indicates that both Black and Hispanic students tend to show detachment from academics, or academic disidentification, at levels that exceed that of Asian and White students (e.g., Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Major et al., 1998; Osborne, 1995, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). One important implication of differential academic disidentification across these groups is that academic performance in school may play a less important role in shaping school-related behaviors and decisions for Black and Hispanic students. The results of the current study support this conjecture. Specifically, it was hypothesized that for both Black and Hispanic students, when compared to Asian and White students, grades in school would be less predictive of school withdrawal or persistence. This finding is consistent with the literature documenting academic disidentification among Blacks and Hispanics, and is also consistent with Steele's (1992, 1997) conceptualization of academic disidentification and its linkage with stereotype threat.

Another finding of this study, that Hispanics had the weakest relationship between academic achievement and dropping out, suggests that Hispanic students are more disidentified from academics than Black students when considering whether to drop out of school. This finding partially contradicts Osborne's (1995, 1997) studies of disidentification. Osborne (1997) found that Black students were most disidentified, and that Hispanic and White students showed similar levels of identification. Although initially expecting Blacks and Hispanics to have similar levels of identification with school, Osborne concluded that perhaps Hispanics do not face stereotypes as negative as those faced by Blacks, or that maybe Hispanic students manage negative issues in a manner that differs from other students. Calabrese and Poe (1990) showed that both Blacks and Hispanics demonstrated similar levels of isolation and powerlessness, both of which are components of alienation from school. Finn (1989) explained that disidentification is similar to alienation from school in the sense that both indicate detachment or noninvolvement in school related phenomena. The results of the current study—that Black and Hispanic students attach similar levels of importance on academic achievement when deciding whether to withdraw from school—support Calabrese and Poe's findings. Perhaps for important decisions, like

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>exp(b)</th>
<th>100(exp(b) - 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>317%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>194%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>136%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>274%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The odds of remaining in school is equal to $g/(1-g)$ where $g$ is the probability of staying in (e.g., if $g = .80$, then the odds of staying in is $.80/(1-.80) = 4.00$, or 4 to 1). The regression coefficient, $b$, is the estimated change in the log of the odds of staying in school for a 1 point increase in GPA. The exponent of $b$, $exp(b)$, is the change in the odds of staying in for a 1 point increase in GPA (e.g., if GPA increases from 2.0 to 3.0, the odds of staying in school increase by a factor of 4.17 for Asian students). The percentage change in the odds of staying in, $100(exp(b) - 1)$, indicates the amount of change that is expected in the odds of staying in school for a 1 point increase in GPA (e.g., a 1 point increase in GPA changes the odds of staying in school by 317% for Asian students).

Table 3. Association between Academic Performance (GPA) and Staying In School by Race

78
withdrawing from school, Black and Hispanic students place similar levels of emphasis on academic accomplishments, but when faced with other less important decisions, Hispanics identify more with academics. In short, the decision-making process for withdrawing may elicit similar responses from Black and Hispanic students, but the function academic performance plays in other decisions for these two groups may differ.

**Potential Limitations and Future Studies**

The results of this study are consistent with Steele's (1992, 1997) academic disidentification hypothesis. This does not mean, however, that stereotype threat, cultural inversion (Ogbu, 1992), or academic disidentification caused the differences in the grades-dropout relationships observed in the current study. First, this study was non-experimental, so no causal conclusions can be drawn. Second, although the sample size for this study was large, the data were, nevertheless, area specific and may not generalize well to other states within the USA, or to other countries with similar racial compositions. Third, due to limitations with the data, important sociological (e.g., peer pressure, socioeconomic level) and psychological (e.g., self-concept, locus of control) variables were not controlled, therefore this study should be considered exploratory and the results tentative. Similar research with data from other states, or other countries with dropout problems, is needed to determine whether the findings obtained here replicate and generalize. In addition, future studies with richer data are needed to assess how other important predictors (e.g., self-concept, socioeconomic level) of dropping out moderate or mediate the association between academic achievement and students decisions to withdraw from school.

Finally, Steele argues that academic disidentification is the result of a developmental process spanning years of schooling. This argument is consistent with Finns (1989) review which shows that dropping out of school is a process that begins early in school life. The connection between disidentification and dropping out as a developmental process needs further investigation to learn how the two are linked and at which points in the process Black and Hispanic children are most prone to become disidentified with academics.

**Addressing Academic Disidentification**

If the results of this current study are replicated with other data and prove to be generalizable, then it is important to determine appropriate options for addressing academic disidentification. One possible method for reversing, or preventing, the disidentification process could be to alter teaching practices in a way that eliminates stereotype threat. Steele (1992, 1994, 1997) referred to this type of teaching as “wise” schooling. Steele (1997) offered several strategies for creating learning environments that reduce the impact of threatening stereotypes. For example, Steele argued for more optimistic relationships between teachers and students that focus not on academic problems and failures that may belittle students, but on challenging students with realistic goals to achieve and on creating for these students a sense of belonging within an academic setting. Such a practice may also prove helpful for students who face a subculture that marginalizes academic accomplishments. Similarly, Ladson-Billings’ (1995, 1998) research on culturally relevant pedagogy may prove beneficial for students subject to negative stereotypes, cultural inversion, and academic disidentification. Her research focused on ways to enable Black students to achieve academically and to accept academics (identify with academics) without fear of cultural isolation for doing so. Like Steele, Ladson-Billings noted the importance of avoiding the reinforcement of negatives; rather, she argued, teachers should seek methods that help students to strive for academic success. Ladson-Billings observed that teachers who used culturally relevant teaching were able to build a sense of identification with academic success for their students. The suggestions offered by Steele and Ladson-Billings are important and warrant further consideration and empirical study. Research is needed to learn whether culturally relevant teaching helps minority students value academic achievement and success and thereby identify more with school.
References
Disidentification and Dropouts


