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"Those Loud Black Girls": (Black) Women, Silence, and Gender "Passing" in the Academy

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This article explores the impact of gender diversity on school achievement. Using data obtained from an ethnographic study of academic success in an urban high school, this analysis examines how the normalized definition of femaleness—white middle-class womanhood—juxtaposed with a two-tiered dominating patriarchy, propels African-American females to resist consuming images that assert their "nothingness." "Loudness,"[1] thus becomes a metaphor for African-American women's contrariness, embodying their resistance to this proclaimed "nothingness." How "loudness" reflects their efforts to subvert the repercussions of these prevailing images is examined along with an assessment of its impact on academic achievement. GENDER DIVERSITY, BLACK FEMALES, RESISTANCE, ACADEMIC SUCCESS, GENDER "PASSING"

I. Introduction

In the academy[2] women are compelled to "pass"[3] as the male dominant "Other" if they desire to achieve a modicum of academic success (Pagano 1990:13; K. Scott 1991:150; White 1985:36). "Passing" implies impersonation, acting as if one is someone or something one is not. Hence, gender "passing," or impersonation—the coexistence of a prescription and proscription to imitate white American males and females—suggests masquerading or presenting a persona or some personae that contradict the literal image of the marginalized or doubly refracted "Other." For example, Patricia Williams (1988), an African-American who is also a Harvard Law School graduate, describes the seemingly contradictory strategies her mother encouraged her to use to succeed in the academy. These strategies were intended to negate her identification with her mother—a dubious role model for success in the academy and the larger society. These same strategies were also supposed to motivate her to reclaim the disinherited white components of her identity.[4]

> My Mother was [constantly] asking me not to look to her as a role model. She was devaluing that part of herself that was not Harvard and refocusing my vision to that part of herself that was hard-edged, proficient, and Western. She hid the lonely, black, defiled-female part of herself and pushed me

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> forward as the projection of a competent self, a cool rather than despairing self, *a masculine rather than a feminine self.* [P. Williams 1988:20, emphasis added]

Likewise, Pagano describes how the academy compels female teachers to hide their femaleness to obtain the desired academic approval of their male peers and superiors. She notes that female teachers often

> present [themselves] as the genderless "author," "artist," or "scientist" . . . [in order] to quell any doubts [they] may have about [their] right to so present [themselves], to speak in the voice of authority—the tradition—and to compete with [their] male colleagues for scarce academic resources . . . hunch [their] bodies in shameful secrecy as [they] walked the corridors of [their] departments for fear that someone would notice [they] were in drag. [Pagano 1990:13]

Gender "passing" is thus a reality for both African-American women and white women. Indeed, it could be debated that the first—and some would argue the only—commandment for women in the academy is "Thou must be taken seriously." "Thou must be taken seriously" is a euphemism for "thou must not appear as woman." Therefore, for women to be taken seriously in the academy, they must not only receive a form of schooling the contents of which prepares them to survive and prosper in a world organized by and for men (not women) (Rich 1979:238), but in addition they must transform their identity in such a way that the resulting persona makes the female appear not to be female. This evolving persona reflects and highlights socially defined maleness. "Being taken seriously," then, implies discarding or at least minimizing a female identity in a self-conscious effort to consume, or at least present the appearance of being, the male dominant "Other." It also suggests avoiding the traditional dichotomous definition of womanhood: good girl–bad girl, virgin–seductress, angel–whore. The problem, however, is much larger than a common or universal definition of womanhood; it is also the larger society's "acceptance of and complicity in a hierarchy of female goodness that imputes moral superiority to some women's lives and immorality to others" (Palmer 1989:151).

In America, white womanhood is often defined as a cultural universal.[5] Yet, the moral superiority of white womanhood is rarely explicitly verbalized in the academy. Indeed, it is most often labeled "femaleness" minus the white referent. Nonetheless, *white* and middle class are the "hidden transcript[s]" (J. Scott 1990) of femaleness, the womanhood invariably and historically celebrated in academe. In striking contrast, black womanhood is often presented as the antithesis of white women's lives, the slur or "the nothingness" (see Christian 1990; Walker 1982) that men and other women use to perpetuate and control the image of the "good girl" and by extension the good woman. Hence, the academy's penchant for universalizing and

normalizing white middle-class women's lives compels black women and other women of color to seek to appropriate the image and attempt to consume the lives of the female "Other."

Ironically, gender "passing" is rarely identified as a factor in the differentiated academic performance of African-American and white American students. It is also seldom identified as a factor producing asymmetrical outcomes in African-American males' and African-American females' school performance. This response persists despite widespread acknowledgment that (1) African-American students' school performance is gender-differentiated at all levels of the academy (Fleming 1978, 1982, 1983, 1984; Fordham 1988, 1990; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Garret-Vital 1989; Gurin and Epps 1975; Lewis 1988; Meisenheimer 1990; Sexton 1969; Smith 1982); (2) America's patriarchal system is stratified, with some males having more power and privileges than other males in the patriarchy; and (3) African-American females are doubly victimized by the existence of a two-tiered patriarchy.

A central goal of the analysis presented in this article is to identify and describe how the existence of a subversive, diverse womanhood among African-American women, juxtaposed with a two-tiered dominating patriarchy, influences and often adversely affects academic achievement. An ancillary goal is to document how the absence of "official" recognition of gender diversity in a predominantly African-American high school in Washington, D.C., mutilates the academic achievement of large numbers of female African-American students. I begin the analysis by briefly describing the research site: Capital High and Capital Community. In the next section of the analysis I present the conceptual context, offering both a narrative of how gender is repeatedly constructed and negated in culturally and racially stratified social systems and a discussion of the repetitious construction of an egalitarian ideal within the African-American community. My goal here is to delineate a culturally distinct route to womanhood among African-American women. Specifically, I discuss issues involving the symbolic transformation of African-American women's gendered "Self."[7] Included in this section is a somewhat detailed discussion of the theoretical frame, highlighting anthropological discussions of egalitarianism and how the existence of this process within the African-American community creates pockets of "safe cultural space" for the promotion of African-American women's self-definition (see Collins 1991). I end this section by fusing these arguments to claims regarding the black fictive kinship system,[8] highlighting improvisation or the ad hoc[9] construction of the African-American gendered "Self." In the fourth section of the article I present a somewhat general discussion of how the desire for academic success combined with the negation or suppression of gender diversity among African-American females at Capital High compels them to silence and/or emulate the male

dominant "Other." I also include in this section documentation of African-American females' resistance to this silence and imitation mandate. Although acknowledging the common features of the high-achieving female students—they work hard, they are silent; when they vocalize, they speak "in a different voice" (Gilligan 1982)—I focus my analysis on Rita, a high-achieving female who symbolizes this composite image. Rita, I argue, epitomizes black women's struggle to commingle or fuse two divergent lives concurrently. I postulate that she is both unwilling and unable to be silent. She is also irrevocably committed to the retention of her female, African-American gendered "Self." Moreover, I argue, her speech is masked and disguised in ways that nullify and negate the perception of her femaleness. I try to show how her speech, thinking, voice, and writing styles emulate the dominant male "Other" while embracing her largely unconscious perceptions of African-American womanhood. I also cite several examples of how the child-rearing practices of the parents and teachers of the high-achieving females unwittingly cremate these young African-American women's efforts to flee the African-American community and, in the process, paradoxically enhance their affiliation with the larger American society. The concluding section of the article focuses on some of the possible implications of constructing an African-American female for success in the academy and the excessive price she pays for transforming her gendered "Self."

II. The Social Context of the School

Capital High School (a pseudonym) is located in a predominantly African-American section of the city of Washington, D.C. Essentially, it is a school within a school. As a school within a school, Capital attracts students from all socioeconomic segments of the city of Washington. Indeed, its recruitment efforts are very successful. More than a fourth of the students are noncommunity residents who travel from various parts of the city to participate in the school's advanced placement and humanities programs.[10] Hence, Capital High is not a school that can be accurately labeled low-income or inner-city, euphemisms for slums and the "underclass." The school's complex student body and diverse, rudimentary class structure[11] do not lend themselves readily to such uncomplicated labeling. It is far more accurate to label Capital a "magnet school," because through its multilevel, multirigorous curriculum it accurately reflects the diverse population of the entire city.

The first two years of the study were the most intense. During the first year, 33 11th grade students whose parents had consented to their participation in the study served as key informants. As key informants, these students' were self-consciously interrogated. They were interviewed, observed, and analyzed for more than a year. These students formed a varied group, representing both high-achieving and

underachieving students—male and female—and the diverse population described above. My interactions with these students included classroom observations, home visitations, observations of before- and after-school activities, and formal and informal interviews. I also observed and interviewed their parents, teachers, and other school officials. Following a year of interrogating the key informants, the second year of the study included administering an in situ survey to 600 students in grades nine through twelve. For the analysis presented here, data from twelve of the high-achieving students—six males and six females—and twelve of the underachieving students—six males and six females—were examined and interpreted.

In the tradition of sociocultural anthropology, I spent virtually every school day from September to June—and most weekends—in the field, collecting data and trying to understand why, how, and at what cost African-American adolescents achieve school success. To protect the identity of the community and its residents, I gave the school the fictitious name Capital High; the community in which it is located was labeled Capital Community. A large number of the students come from one-parent homes; some of them live in public or low-income housing. Of the nearly 2000 students, almost 500, about one-fourth of the student body, are eligible for the reduced lunch program.

The school's population (students and teachers) is predominantly black. However, virtually every department has at least one white teacher, with the English Department having the largest number—four females. In addition, the teachers who teach the more advanced or "difficult" classes (i.e., Advanced Placement English, Advanced Placement Physics, Chemistry, Advanced Placement Mathematics, Government, et cetera) are white. They are also the teachers who serve as sponsors for the JETS Club, It's Academic, the Chess Club, and so on. Hence, there is virtually no relationship between the white teachers' power and influence in the academic learning, achievement, and emerging perceptions of the students and their numbers at the school. Further, there is in place at the school a four-tier curriculum: two special programs (Advanced Placement and Humanities); the regular curriculum, where most of the nearly 2000 students are centered; and a program for those students in need of special education. In addition, where there are areas of overlap in the regular curriculum and the two special academic programs, students are grouped according to their performance on standardized examination. And, based on test results, they are permitted and/or required to take the appropriate courses for their skill levels.

III. The Conceptual Context

Constructing and Nullifying Cultural-Specific Femaleness

In a socially, culturally, and racially stratified society like the United States, cultural-specific routes to womanhood are inevitable. Indeed,

the stratified nature of state systems suggests the following: (1) gender construction is not universal and (2) status inequity vis-à-vis gender is a sine qua non in such contexts. Hence, femaleness in such contexts is not the same for all women, just as maleness is not the same for all men. Gender diversity (i.e., what it means to be male or female in different social classes and social groups) is rarely officially acknowledged in the academies of contemporary nation-states. Therefore, like most other women of color, African-American women are compelled to consume the universalized images of white American women, including body image, linguistic patterns, styles of interacting, and so forth. Because womanhood or femaleness is norm referenced to one group—white middle-class Americans—women from social groups who do not share this racial, ethnic, or cultural legacy are compelled to silence or gender "passing." Although all women born and reared in America are "educated in romance," in Holland and Eisenhart's (1990) term, and victimized by sexism, not all American women take the same train to a common sexist station. Therefore, as Evans suggests:

> [Anthropologists] need to examine the ways by which the Women's Movement has perpetrated a type of cultural imperialism that takes the oppression of white women as its norm and develops its theory from the experience of a small minority of women in global terms. [1988:189]

"Those loud Black girls"[12] is an example of both the diversity of gender construction in Euro-American contexts and the efforts to suppress that diversity. It is also a quintessential example of African-American women's commitment to being visible as culturally specific women. Curiously, these young women appear to be motivated to highlight the practices of gender-specific constructions in contexts that compel male impersonation or, at the very least, the adoption of a male voice.[13] "Those loud Black girls" is also an example of how a people's history is reflected in their daily lives. As Davis (1971) argues so convincingly, African-American women bring to the academy—broadly defined—a history of womanhood that differs from that of white or any other American women. African-American women's history stands in striking contrast to that generally associated with white womanhood and includes (1) more than 200 years in which their status as women was annulled, compelling them to function in ways that were virtually indistinguishable from their male slave counterparts; (2) systemic absence of protection by African-American and all other American men; (3) construction of a new definition of what it means to be female out of the stigma associated with the black experience and the virtue and purity affiliated with white womanhood; and (4) hard work[14] (including slave and domestic labor), perseverance, assertiveness, and self-reliance. In other words, the history of African-American males and females includes an extended period when gender dif-

ferences were minimized, resulting in a kind of "deformed equality" (Davis 1971) or, as Cary (1991) describes it, a period when African-American females were "officially" classified as the "neutered 'Other.' "

These images flooded my psyche the day I discovered Grace Evans's (1980) article entitled "Those Loud Black Girls." At long last, I thought, someone has accurately captured what I learned about black womanhood at Capital High and what I personally experienced growing up African and American. Since the word *anecdotal* is almost always preceded by the word *merely*, prior to reading Evans's essay, I never quite trusted the validity of my personal experiences. Growing up female and African-American in American society, I learned early on to discount the validity of my experiences. Evans, an African-American social studies teacher in the public school system in several inner-city schools in London, locates "those loud Black girls" in the following setting":

> In staffrooms [of the schools] a common cry to be heard from white teachers—usually women, for male teachers seldom revealed that everything for them was not firmly under control—was, "Oh, those loud Black girls!" This exclamation was usually followed by the slamming of a pile of folders on to a table and the speaker collapsing into a chair or storming off to get a cup of coffee. The words were usually uttered in response to a confrontation in which the teacher's sense of authority had been threatened by an attitude of defiance on the part of a group of Black girls in a classroom or corridor. The girls' use of patois and their stubborn refusal to conform to standards of "good behavior," without actually entering the realm of "bad behavior" by breaking any school rules, was exasperating for many teachers. The behavior of the girls could be located in the outer limits of tolerable behavior, and they patrolled this territory with much skill, sending a distinct message of being in and for themselves. [Evans 1988:183]

Evans goes on to admit that, as an African-American student in a predominantly white high school in the northeastern United States, she was *not* one of "those loud Black girls." Indeed, she acknowledges that it was her invisibility, her silence, as well as her link to a successful male, her brother, that enabled her to become the "successful" student she was in high school. She asserts:

> I was not a loud Black girl myself; I was one of the quiet, almost to the point of silent, Black or "coloured" girls who did her homework, worked hard, seldom spoke unless spoken to and was usually to be found standing on the margin of activities. I demanded no attention and got none. In the early years of my schooling I was considered by most of my teachers to be at best an average or just above average student, certainly not a particularly promising one. If it had not been for an elder brother whose academic excellence was noted at an early age, I probably would have remained ignored by teachers, but word got around in the schools I attended that I was his sister, and teachers began to expect more from me. Looking back, I believe that my silence stemmed from two things: a perception on my part of minority

> status and a very deliberate priming for the professions that my parents began when I was very young. [Evans 1988:184]

Elsewhere I described the black girls who were academically successful at Capital High as "phantoms in the opera" (Fordham 1990). I made this assertion because the academically successful black girls achieved academic success in the following ways: (1) becoming and remaining voiceless or silent or, alternatively, (2) impersonating a male image—symbolically—in self-presentation, including voice, thinking, speech pattern, and writing style, in the formal school context when formally interacting with their teachers in classrooms, assemblies, club meetings, and so forth. At the same time, however, I noted that silence for the African-American female is not to be interpreted as acquiescence. Rather, I argued that silence among the high-achieving females at the school is an act of defiance, a refusal on the part of the high-achieving females to consume the image of "nothingness" (see Christian 1990) so essential to the conception of African-American women. This intentional silence is also critical to the rejection and deflection of the attendant downward expectations so pervasive among school officials.

Pagano acknowledges and describes women's forced emigration toward silence and maleness in the academy. She declares:

> The more successful [women] have been as students, scholars, and teachers, the greater has been [their] active participation in [their] own exclusion. [Pagano 1990:12]

She goes on to document how women pawn their collective voice in exchange for success in the existing patriarchic structure. By engaging in such practices, she argues, women ensure the continued existence of authority in the male image and their (women's) complicity in the lie that asserts that they are naturally silent. She concludes by asserting that women who either remain or become silent are instrumental in maintaining female dependency and invisibility in the academy. Hence, "those loud Black girls" are doomed not necessarily because they cannot handle the academy's subject matter, but because they resist "active participation in [their] own exclusion" (Pagano 1990:12).

In analyzing a small portion of the Capital High ethnographic data, Pagano's claim is verified in a predominantly African-American context. The following general patterns emerge among the high-achieving females: (1) resistance as a tenuous, ghostlike existence and status at the school; (2) the coexistence of excellent grades and the appearance of an erasable persona; (3) parenting, teaching, and child-rearing practices that reward their silence and obedience with good grades, as well as the assertive suppression and denial of physicality and sexuality; (4) alienation and isolation from the black fictive kinship system's ad hoc orientation; and (5) the assiduous commingling and maintaining of an academically successful persona *and* a "nice girl" persona with

very little external reward or remuneration from parents or guardians, especially mothers. Such parental child-rearing practices suggest that nurturing a black female for success—as defined by the larger society—is far more disruptive of indigenous cultural conventions and practices than previously thought. Evans acknowledges some of the costs involved:

> The prize of a good education [is often] attained at the cost of great sacrifice on the part of one's parents, sometimes the entire family. Aside from this cost, another price is paid by the recipient of an education, and this is the personal cost of the process of deculturalisation, or de-Africanisation, whereby all personal expressions of one's original African culture are eliminated and [Euro-American] codes established instead. The mastery of standard English to replace West Indian patois is only one aspect of this transformation. It includes training the body to adopt European body language and gesture, and the voice to adopt European tones of speech and non-verbal expression. . . . The price of a good education, a [Euro-American] education, in short, was, and still is, the denial of one's Black cultural identity. This is the price of entry to the middle-class. It is this legacy of education as a double-edged sword that creates a similar suspicion towards Black teachers on the part of Black students as exists on the part of the Black community towards Black members of the police force. The presence of Black faces does not change the essential nature of an institution, nor does it alter its ethos. [Evans 1988:185]

In stark contrast, the following salient patterns are common among the underachieving females in the study: (1) striking visibility and presence—(these young women were known by everyone at the school and did not try to minimize the disruption that their visibility implied); (2) lack of congruency between grades and standardized test scores, with standardized test scores frequently dwarfing Grade Point Average (GPA); (3) parenting and child-rearing practices that suggest unconditional support for their daughters' self-defined academic plans and other espoused goals; (4) encapsulation and immersion in the black egalitarian (i.e., fictive kinship) system (see Fordham 1987, 1988, 1991a, 1991b; Fordham and Ogbu 1986); and (5) obtaining and maintaining support and nurturing from peers and the significant adults in their lives. In the next section I discuss how anthropologists have traditionally framed egalitarianism and how it appears to operate in the contemporary African-American community. I end this discussion by fusing these arguments to the black fictive kinship system, including its improvisation or ad hoc orientation.

Ad-Hocing and Evoking an Egalitarian Ideal

The existence of an egalitarian ideal within the African-American community does not imply the absence of hierarchy. Hierarchy and hierarchies exist in contemporary African-American communities. Individuals are categorized and ranked. Age, sex, and individual char-

acteristics are the usual distinguishing elements. However, as Flanagan (1989:248) points out, anthropologists' historical claims regarding the existence of egalitarian societies do not eliminate the hierarchy between individuals. Like all anthropologically described egalitarian societies, universally employed criteria are visible: "age, sex, and personal characteristics." Like other groups that anthropologists have identified as practicing an egalitarian ideology, members of the African-American community negotiate areas of dominance and status and the contexts in which they will mark these characteristics.

Anthropologists have consistently attributed to societies labeled egalitarian principles of reciprocity—including the sharing of food and power—an undifferentiated economy, and, in some instances, the control of productive as well as reproductive resources (Flanagan 1989:247). Egalitarianism in the African-American community embraces all of these elements. In fact, this approach to life appears to have emerged in response to their American enslavement. To survive, enslaved Africans learned to "live with" the lack of differentiation externally imposed upon them as slaves and, ironically, to make use of the lack of differentiation in ways that not only assured their survival (as individuals), but also promoted the growth and well-being of the entire group.

The idealization of an egalitarian ethos within the African-American community also does not imply the absence of "historical tensions . . . and the interpersonal power struggles that form a part of daily existence" (Flanagan 1989:247). There are tensions and power struggles within African-American communities. Indeed, some people would argue that these features are everywhere, even more rampant than they are in the dominant society. The presence of these tensions and power struggles does not, however, negate the centrality of the claim I am making in this analysis: In African-American communities, an egalitarian ideal or ethos influences the behaviors and responses of African-American peoples. Self-actualization is thus fully realized only in so far as the individual becomes validated through other people. Achieving human status means perceiving oneself as being intimately connected to other people. Consequently, the most highly valued group strategies are those that enable the individual to be seen as embodying those qualities and characteristics that will enhance the status of the group. In this way, he or she is seen as personifying the egalitarian ideal.

In the African-American community, ad hocing or improvising one's life is what comes to mind when I attempt to capture the torturous relationship between the individual and the group.[15] Ad hocing or improvising one's life suggests constructing an identity that, on the one hand, does not violate one's sense of "Self," while, on the other hand, enhancing one's sense of fit within a given context. *Improvisation* is the term used most frequently in describing African-Americans'

constructions of music, especially jazz (see Keil 1966) and, more recently, rap (see Powell 1991; Rose 1991). It also captures the patterns found in other aspects of the material and nonmaterial culture of African-Americans, including dance, quilting (Wahlman and Scully 1983), speech practices (Baugh 1983), and so forth. In each of these very different areas, symmetry is obtained not through uniformity, but through diversity.

At Capital High, the effects of the idealization of the egalitarian ethos are manifestly obvious. They are most visible in the kind of orientation that makes it unnecessary for everyone to possess the same level of expertise in the same subject areas. They are also evident in the various ways the students respond to this process. Leveling behaviors are not difficult to detect. They are manifested in many aspects of the actors' interactions. This egalitarian approach to life coexists with a static, individually competitive, non-leveling curriculum and course of study in the high school context. Further, because the curriculum is what really matters, it is juxtaposed with the widespread lack of individual competition and individual improvisations among the students at the school. The egalitarian ethos is also evident in Capital High students' tendency to seek unity in race and group solidarity rather than individualism and socioeconomic class.

Coexisting with this egalitarian ethos, however, is a not too subtle African-American gender hierarchy embedded in both the African origins of the group and the dominant Euro-American patriarchy. This gender hierarchy is less conspicuous and in some ways barely visible to the unskilled observer. Nevertheless, it exerts an extremely powerful influence on the behavior and expectations of the students—male and female—at the school.

Because African-Americans' gender hierarchy both parallels and diverges from the organizational structure in place in the dominant segment of American society—that is, because it is a synthesis of that which is both African and American—black males are in the power (or is it more accurate to say, the most visible?) positions at Capital High. It is they who manipulate the formal school rules. For example, class schedules at the school are planned and prepared by these men with the tacit support of the women. Also, although rules regarding when school will begin and end, what holidays will be celebrated, when football games and other athletic events will be scheduled, are made by several bureaucrats downtown in the administrative offices, Capital's principal often takes it upon himself to modify these official rules to meet the academic needs of Capital students, as he perceives them.

The gender hierarchy at Capital is also pregnant with tensions, conflicts, traditions, and subtle internal meanings. Black females are conversant with black patriarchy, with its refracted African-American origin as well as its subordinate status vis-à-vis the dominant society's patriarchy. They also are familiar with how that authority is expressed

and how they are expected to respond to it. It is, however, the splicing and grafting of the dominant Euro-American patriarchal system onto the preexisting black patriarchy, with its vastly different authority base, that is implicated in how black females learn to seek and, in some instances, achieve school success. Regrettably, space limitations do not permit a discussion here of how men of African ancestry in America fuse and seek to replicate the dominant male role.

As I have already indicated, the distinctively constructed gender roles of African peoples in American society are frequently ignored, disparaged, or ridiculed in the larger American society. For example, Elsa Barkley Brown insists that, more than virtually any other people, "African-American women have indeed created their own lives, shaped their own meanings, and are the voices of authority on their own experience" (1988:15). This is their reality, she argues, because, as noted above, for more than 200 years women of African ancestry were not allowed to construct their identity as they had done in the various African countries from which they had come. Nor were they permitted to impersonate womanhood as constructed and practiced by Euro-American women. Hence, womanhood as remembered, and femaleness as observed, were not available to them; they had no choice but to improvise a new definition of femaleness that would be a synthesis of the bicultural worlds they remembered and inherited.

Against this background, African-American women are not seen as the archetypal symbol of womanhood, as is the case for white American women. Indeed, role ambiguity has always haunted the life of the African-American woman. Sojourner Truth is said to have lamented "Ar'n't I a Woman?" (White 1985); Zora Neale Hurston (1969) described black women as "mules," suggesting the existence of strength and endurance. Hurston's image conflicts with that of the white American female for whom idleness—until the feminist movement of the '70s—was the quintessential symbol (Sacks 1976). Indeed, according to Palmer, for the white American woman to transform the unconscious link of women with "sex, dirt, housework, and badness," she [the white woman] "needed another woman to do the hard and dirty physical labor. She needed a woman different from herself, one whose work and very identity confirmed [her] daintiness and perfection" (1989:138). In other words, she needed a black woman.

IV. Learning Silence and Gender "Passing"

Gender "Passing": The Female High Achievers

As Rich (1979) and Pagano (1990) suggest, gender "passing" in the academy is unavoidable. Also, as I have already indicated, during the schooling process women receive a form of schooling the contents of which prepare them to survive and prosper in a world organized by and for men, not women (Rich 1979:238). Consequently, "being taken

seriously," that is, becoming a good student, implies certifying male knowledge, conferring the names of the father and contradicting (women's) own biology (Pagano 1990:37–38).

The high-achieving female students at Capital High are living by the first academic commandment for women: "thou must be taken seriously." At the same time, each of them is guilty of seeking a "safe cultural space"[16] to retain their varied perceptions of the gendered African-American "Self." Virtually all of them—Alice, Sia, Lisa, Katrina, and Maggie—are thought of as serious young women, headed for the fast track and a life away from the ghetto. Each of these women is somehow able to walk the tightrope that living two divergent lives mandates. In striking contrast, Rita presents a less balanced persona. Like the other high-achieving female members of the sample, she is compelled to commingle two divergent lives. The important distinction, however, is that she is far less willing than her high-achieving female counterparts to camouflage, in the school context, her perceptions of the gendered African-American female "Self."

Rita is acknowledged to be a brilliant student, but all her teachers and many of her peers worry about her because she presents a "polyrhythmic, nonsymmetrical, nonlinear" persona. She is bold and sassy, creative, complex, and indeflatable. She frequently challenges the values and rules of the school with conviction, vacillating between demanding total adherence to the dominant ideology of the larger society on the part of her teachers and other school administrators and discounting and disparaging these same values and rules in her personal life. Her actions suggest a "contradictory unity"—an attempt to suture that which is socially defined as incompatible, both in terms of her perceptions of what it means to be black and female and in masking the mastering aspects of the school curriculum. For example, Rita identifies math as her weakest subject in the core curriculum. At the same time, however, she is quite knowledgeable of how computers function and is able to decipher and manipulate computer hardware and a bevy of software quite well.

It was the possession of these computer skills that inspired her math teacher, Ms. Costen, to pay her $40.00 to develop a program for one of her friends who was failing a computer course. Partly as a sick joke, and partly because Rita is convinced that Ms. Costen was acting inappropriately when she asked her to perform what she perceived to be an intellectually dishonest task, she deliberately sabotaged the computer program. She also did not return the $40.00. Her reasoning was that Ms. Costen is a teacher and teachers are supposed to be paragons of virtue, modeling behaviors and attitudes sanctioned by the larger society. In general, although Rita expects teachers to rigorously adhere to the norms, values, and rules of the educational establishment, she feels that it is acceptable and even admirable for her and her peers to blatantly flaunt these same ideals by resisting and outsmart-

ing the teachers at their own game. As she perceives it, her efforts and those of her peers are to be labeled subtle, ongoing resistance to the celebration of the dominant "Other" endemic at Capital High. As students, she and her peers are free to subvert the existing dominating system. On the other hand, as a teacher, Ms. Costen—despite her blackness—does not have the same options available to her. As Rita perceives it, Ms. Costen's role as teacher takes precedence over her connectedness to the black community. Also, according to Rita's perception, her teacher's desire to create a "safe cultural space" is a contested concept.

Hence, like those "loud Black girls" discussed in Evans's essay (1988), Rita refuses to "conform to standards of 'good behavior' . . . without actually entering the realm of 'bad behavior' by breaking any school rules." Rather, she lives on the edge, self-consciously stretching legitimate school rules to help her retrieve a safe cultural space. She is a master craftsperson, baffling her teachers, decertifying the sanity of her mother and most other family members, and ultimately assuring officials at St. Elizabeth's[17] that their beds will be occupied. The following description of Rita's behavior resonates in this analysis.

As I have already indicated, all 33 key informants were 11th graders. During the spring of the academic year, those students who had performed well on the PSAT were strongly encouraged by their teachers and other school officials to apply for admission to the colleges that they were interested in or that had indicated an interest in them. Since Rita had the highest score on the verbal component of the exam, she had received letters from numerous colleges inviting her to apply. Responding to these letters was no problem. Her dilemma emerged when her English teacher, Ms. Apropos, asked all the students in her English class to share their essays so that she could help them make a good impression on the various admissions committees. She advised them to write strong, upbeat essays that reflected a positive outlook on life. The other students followed her advice unequivocally. They created positive, upbeat essays.

Rita was the only exception. She decided not to write an essay in this genre. She chose, instead, to write about the value of death and dying. Ms. Apropos was speechless. She could not believe that a teenager whose life is on the uptake would even be capable of thinking such morbid, melancholy thoughts. Ms. Apropos had secretly harbored doubts about Rita's sanity for a long time.[18] These fears grew by leaps and bounds when she assigned the class *The Crucible* and Rita refused to read it, claiming that it violated her religious beliefs.[19] When she later asserted that she was going to write about death and dying in her college admission essay, all doubts regarding her mental stability were removed. Ms. Apropos was absolutely sure that "girlfriend" was crazy. This initial impression was reinforced when she tried and failed to get Rita to change her mind.

Rita's willingness to display these dialectic characteristics at school appear to make her an unfeeling and thoughtless person. She is not. Admittedly, she has learned the ideology of the society well. And, at some level, she believes that American society is truly democratic and that the individual makes it or fails based solely on ability. In the school context she is committed to the meritocratic ideals promulgated there and does not want to have any information around her that might suggest that what she has learned, and perhaps is learning, in school is misleading or even untrue. She is definitely a child of the post–civil rights era, in that, like many nonblack persons, she wants to believe that African-Americans have achieved socioeconomic parity with the dominating group: white Americans.

> Some—a lot of times I have people ask me "Do you think you are a white person?" But I don't know, maybe it's me. Maybe I don't carry myself like a black person. I don't know. But I'm black. And I can't go painting myself white or some other color, it's something that I have to live with. So it's the way it is, and it's not like having herpes or something—it's not bad. It's—I think it's just the same as being white, as far as I'm concerned—everybody's equal. [Interview with author, 4 May 1983]

At the same time, Rita's consistent practice of breaching the cultural assumptions so valued in the school context often leads her teachers to erase their perception of her as a bright, intelligent person. Also, the "slam dunking" part of her persona that propels her to the margins of good behavior, without actually forcing her into the realm of "bad behavior," makes "shrinking lilies" out of most adults who interact with her or, alternatively, motivates them to avoid contact with her, if that is an option. Needless to say, Rita submitted her essay on the value of death and dying. She was also accepted at her chosen institution.

As noted above, the most salient characteristic of the academically successful females at Capital High is a deliberate silence, a controlled response to their evolving, ambiguous status as academically successful students. Consequently, silence as a strategy for academic success at Capital is largely unconscious. Developing and using this strategy at the high school level enables high-achieving African-American females to deflect the latent and not too latent hostility and anger that might be directed at them were they to be both highly visible and academically successful. Invisibility is a highly valued prerequisite for academic success. This is particularly true for these young teenage girls whose evolving sexuality and reproductive capabilities actually undermine their chances of success in the public domain. Learning silence, then, is an obligatory component of Capital's high-achieving females' academic success. They are taught to be silent by their parents, teachers and other school officials, and male peers—both explicitly and implicitly—in order to allay the perception that they are just women, that is, that they will behave in ways typically associated with

women and femaleness. Gilligan (1982) has described women as being preoccupied with "relationships." Further, she asserts that this "way of knowing" (relating) is not loudly applauded in the academy. With only a couple of exceptions, the high-achieving females at Capital High are invisible in the highly visible arenas at the school (e.g., classrooms, assemblies in the auditorium, and so forth). Females are encouraged to be "seen rather than heard," to be passive rather than assertive.

Like Evans (1988), prior to her teachers' realization that she was genetically connected to an academically successful male, the high-achieving females at Capital High are not central; they are more liminal and marginal than their high-achieving male cohorts. These women's voices are heard primarily through what they write and their pithy responses to questions asked in the classroom and other formal school contexts. They rarely speak extemporaneously in the classroom context. When called upon by their teachers, they are able to answer correctly and politely, but they generally do not announce or celebrate their presence by speaking or in some way making themselves visible. Curiously, the female exceptions—principally Rita—use the voice of a comedian or clown to convey their visibility, a persona used almost exclusively by the high-achieving male students. Rita's high-achieving female cohorts refuse to join her in her impersonation of the "Other." The high-achieving females appear to be afraid to speak because speech will bring attention to their female "Selves." It also may be that, intuitively, as Lewis and Simon point out, these "women know that being allowed to speak can be a form of tyranny" (Lewis and Simon 1986:461). As young African-American women, the high-achieving females at Capital High are intimately conversant with feelings surrounding dissonance and place.

Most of the academically successful girls acknowledge that this newfound silence represents a change from the way they once behaved in school. Each of them can recall when her female voice was not a deterrent to academic success. Some of them attribute their growing, evolving silence to parental controls that are increasingly directed toward limiting both their extrafamilial activities and the fulfillment of their female sexuality. Others are unable to articulate why they have come to be silent. They only know that, for some reason, they are learning or have learned not to speak, not to be visible.

At Capital High, most parentally supported limitations are intended to minimize their daughters' femaleness, especially their emerging sexuality. Paradoxically, the female high achievers interpret their parents' seeming lack of support as having the unintended consequence of unmasking their evolving invisibility. For example, Rita's mother made her quit the track team because she feared that Rita would get involved in some undesired activities, including a sexual relationship with some "little boy." Rita indicated that her mother's demand had

the unintended consequence of putting a spotlight on her, making her more visible and subjecting her to ridicule.

It is important to acknowledge that a common, relentless theme in the child-rearing practices of virtually all of the mothers of the high-achieving females is an absolute insistence that their daughters be "taken seriously." In addition, these mothers demand control of their daughters' lives and even the options they seriously consider for their futures. The mothers' conditional support for their daughters' voiced academic aspirations confuses them, making their enormous efforts in school appear less valuable. For example, Rita's mother was ambivalent about her daughter's desire to go to college. Indeed, it is probably more accurate to say that she was fearful of Rita's school achievement and what it meant in terms of options for her.

> I'm going to tell you like this, Ms. Fordham: I am really happy that Rita's doing what she's doing [in school], and I'm not going to be hypocritical about it. But if Rita didn't go to college, it would not make me a bit of difference. . . . No, it would not. Because, like I said, you know, education is good. And I think that Rita—she says that she wants to go into neurology, or something to that effect. And from studying the Bible and looking at the events the way that they are today, the Bible shows that this system is not going to be here that long. Whenever it is that it's going to come to an end—well, not the system, it is not going to end, but the end of wickedness, we don't know. See, the Bible says there's going to be people that's going to survive the destruction of the system of things. But from looking at the way that things are going on the world scene, and looking at your colleges and things today, I mean, they have—the individual, when they're going to college and things, they go there for the right purpose—because there's a lot of kids that go there and—for the right purpose, but a lot of things happen in college. See? And . . . I mean kids that get hung up with drugs, and these sororities and things now, the things that they—r [I] was reading some article in the paper about these sororities [fraternities] initiating these young guys, and they died from drinking all this—over-drinking and stuff like that, the things they make them do. And, basically, I just—you know, I'm just not that enthused. [Interview with author, 5 May 1983]

The intensity of this mother's ambivalence about her daughter's desire to go to college, as well as Rita's prior assertions regarding her mother's lack of support for her academic efforts, led me to ask her if she would be happier if Rita did not go to college.

> I think I would. . . . Yeah. Because I'm not looking forward to a future, you see, because the system is crumbling, basically. I know education and every—I'm not against learning, now, don't misunderstand me, I'm not against learning. I'm happy that Rita has the qualifications and things to go to college. I mean, were things different, and we were living at a different period of time, I mean, it would be all right. Now her father's all for it, you know, and I'm not totally against it, but I'm saying—looking at—for people now to plan a career—and I mean, I've seen people with college degrees

> and everything, they [black people] cannot even get a job. [Interview with author, 5 May 1983]

The sources of this mother's ambivalence were quite varied. There was the religious principle mandating that unmarried women remain in their parents' home until marriage. There was also the verbalized fear of crime and drugs and other unacceptable social problems. Still further, there was the nonverbalized fear of her daughter's emerging sexuality and femaleness. There was also a fear of how success would change and perhaps further alienate her daughter from the family and the African-American community.

> I believe that if Rita put her mind to it—I mean, if she wasn't into the specific field that she wanted to, she could learn about—you know, just taking, maybe taking some courses or something. But I'm not pushing the college [idea]. Truthfully, I'm not pushing it. But like I said, it's up to her father. [Interview with author, 5 May 1983]

At this point in their young lives, the high-achieving females read their parents' insistence on silence and invisibility in the school context and strict extrafamilial limitations—no dating, no after-school activities, and so forth—as well as uncertainty and/or ambivalence about their academic goals, as a lack of support for what they dream of doing: going to college immediately after high school and living their lives in ways that parallel their white American peers.

The silence attendant to female academic excellence is exacerbated in the school context where, again, the high-achieving females are given episodic, rather than continuous, unlimited support for their academic achievement and their voiced future dreams. This is the reality, despite the fact that the teaching staff and other adult members of the school are primarily African-American and female.[20] The following example of a counselor's response to Katrina's—another high achiever—excellent performance on a required District of Columbia public school system exam is illuminating.

Ms. Yanmon is Katrina's counselor. In fact, she is the counselor of all the students who participate in the advanced placement program at the school. They are virtually her only counselees, even though they make up less than a fourth of the school's student population.

Like every other student at the school, Katrina took the LSE (Life Skills Examination). This is a District of Columbia Public School requirement. Every student must pass it before he or she is eligible for graduation. When I went to Ms. Yanmon's office to ask her if I might look at the scores of her other counselees who were participating in my study, she readily agreed. As I sat in her office looking at the test results, I mentioned that I had an extremely interesting interview with Katrina the day before. This is how I recorded our interaction in my field notes (4–8 February 1983):

> [Ms. Yanmon] does not talk about Katrina unless I [allude to] her [first]. When I mentioned . . . that Katrina made a perfect score on the LSE, her response startled me. She [lamented the fact] that although Paul want[s] to be the valedictorian [of their class], her guess is that Katrina will be the valedictorian . . . , and Paul will be the salutatorian. . . . "Capital has not had a male [valedictorian] in about 10 years," [she mourned]. . . . "The girls do better." . . . She then asked to see the copy of [Katrina's] performance on the Life Skills Examination. I told her that [Katrina's] perfect score was the only one I had seen so far. . . . I was flabbergasted! This counselor had not talked with [Katrina] about her outstanding performance. [Ms. Yanmon acknowledged that she had not talked with Katrina about her exam results] and said, after looking at her performance sheet, . . . "I must talk with her about [this]."

Silence around female achievement was not unusual. In some ways, this silence suggested that school officials took their ability and willingness to do the work for granted; in other ways, the silence could be—and was—perceived by the students as discounting and/or disparaging their academic effort and achievement. At the same time, however, these girls were learning an important lesson for survival in the academy: the most efficient way to intersect the patriarchic system at the school is to perform all assigned tasks while remaining silent, to respond as if absent rather than present. In my field notes I recorded my response to Ms. Yanmon's seeming lack of interest in Katrina's LSE scores (4–8 February 1983):

> I could not help but wonder if [Ms. Yanmon] would have been so nonchalant about [Katrina's] perfect [exam] score if it had been made by either Paul or Norris.[21] I don't think so. All of the minute details began to return, [including] her reluctance to allow me to talk with Katrina as I was contemplating whom to include in the study.

Katrina admits that her higher grades in school have had all kinds of undesired, and sometimes unexpected, consequences in her life. For example, she has never had a lot of friends, so it would be a mistake to label her popular. She was quick to point out, however, that she did not mean to suggest that she is without friends. That was and still is not the case. It simply means that she has always been able to count on one hand the number of persons she could label "friend." She attributes some of this to her ability to perform well in school. Ironically, her higher academic performance has cost her a sense of voice.

Lisa, another high-achieving member of the sample, has a similar tale to tell. When her classmates teased her or pulled her hair, for example, she managed always to ignore them. As did Katrina, she refused to let them bait her into physical or verbal confrontations. Both Katrina and Lisa ignored their detractors, remaining silent when they were expected to (1) cry, (2) report their detractors to the principal or their classroom teachers, or (3) take some action that suggested a vio-

lation of their person or space. Regardless of the nature or source of the abuse they received, these high-achieving females' general reaction was to not respond; they refused to retaliate or show pain. Curiously, their silence promoted, and is implicated in, their subsequent academic success.

There is also the problem of the male high achievers who acknowledge fear of female academic success. For example, Paul, who would ultimately graduate salutatorian of the class, was extremely concerned about Katrina's higher grade point average. He and Norris, the student who would graduate third in the class, constantly joked about how to get rid of Katrina prior to graduation, with throwing her from the subway train being the most frequently mentioned method. Most of their conversations about Katrina's higher GPA were ensconced in the "ritualized insult" pattern characteristic of "Black street speech" (see Baugh 1983), but the fear and anxiety they experienced, especially Paul, because of Katrina's higher grade point average were unmistakable. These responses are most often seen as problematic. Let me now turn to a brief discussion of the cultural meaning and some possible social implications of these findings.

V. Conclusions and Implications

I began this analysis by asserting that gender "passing" is a sine qua non for women in the academy if they desire to achieve a modicum of academic success (Pagano 1990:13). I followed this observation by emphasizing that the first commandment for women in the academy is "Thou must be taken seriously." Further, I argued, for women to be seen as being serious about the work of the academy, they must receive (as opposed to claim) a form of schooling the contents of which prepares them to survive and prosper in a world organized by and for men, not women (Rich 1979:238). I went on to point out that, for African-American women in the academy, being taken seriously also means dissociating oneself from the image of "those loud Black girls," whose "refusal to conform to standards of 'good behavior,' without actually entering the realm of 'bad behavior' by breaking . . . school rules," severely undermines their limited possibilities for academic success. Moreover, I documented, with data from the Capital High research site, how "those loud Black girls" are doomed, how their reluctance to engage in "active participation in [their] own exclusion" (Pagano 1990:12) from the academy strips them of a sense of power. J. Scott (1985) has described responses of this nature on the part of those who have been historically excluded as the "weapons of the weak." Audre Lorde asserts that responses in this genre on the part of African-Americans and other peoples of color indicate that they know they cannot use "the master's tools . . . to dismantle the master's house" (1990:287).

The distinctive history of people of African ancestry and their current social conditions, I argue, are implicated in the structure and con-

figuration of their gender roles. African-Americans' continuous, ongoing lack of dominance and power in the Euro-American patriarchic structure has had, and continues to have, severe implications for African-American women (and men). Still further, I indicate that, in the case of the academically successful females at Capital High, silence and invisibility are the strategies they feel compelled to use to gain entry into the dominating patriarchy.

The findings presented here certify that at Capital High black females are the more successful students. Ironically, they are also the least visible. They are the people "passing" for someone they are not: the white American female and, ultimately, the white American male. Silence is implicated in their greater school success because it conceals their female voice and the resulting gender expectations.

For African-American women, socialization to silence and invisibility is not without pain. It is painful because, as I documented in the above analysis, black females pay an inordinate price for academic success: it leads to an "ignorance of connections," an uncertain "fork in the road." Although I have talked about black girls' school achievement in one particular context (Capital High), it is important to acknowledge that parental ambivalence about the value of academic learning is not limited to the parents of the students at Capital High. The disheartening, unintended consequences associated with the uncertainty of academic excellence are frequently recorded in the research literature. For example, in her book *Talking Black* (1989), bell hooks describes how her parents' ambivalence about her preoccupation with school-related learning robbed her of her confidence, threatening her pursuit of academic excellence. At the same time, she acknowledges that it was her parents' ambivalence about the value of school and schooling that forever welded her to the African-American community.

> My parents' ambivalence about my love for reading led to intense conflict. They (especially my mother) would work to ensure that I had access to books, but would threaten to burn the books or throw them away if I did not conform to her other expectations. Or they would insist that reading too much would drive me insane. Their ambivalence nurtured in me a like certainty about the value and significance of intellectual endeavor which took years for me to unlearn. While this aspect of our [race] reality was one that wounded and diminished, their vigilant insistence that being smart did not make me a "better" or "superior" person (which often got on my nerves because I think I wanted to have that sense that it did indeed set me apart, make me better) made a profound impression. From them I learned to value and respect various skills and talents folk might have, not just to value people who read books and talk about ideas. They and my grandparents might say about somebody, "Now he don't read nor write a lick, but he can tell a story," or as my grandmother would say, [he can] "call out the hell in words." [hooks 1989:79]

Socialization to silence and invisibility is also distressing because it isolates and alienates black girls from their more communal and popular underachieving female cohorts. Still further, learning to be silent can be so distressful that it sometimes results in a decision to abandon the effort to succeed in school because, in part at least, it evokes "ignorance of connections." This occurs because many of the high-achieving girls do not understand why their parents—particularly their mothers—and many of their female teachers do not appear to be supportive of their academic achievements.

However, lack of adult female support is a misperception. As hooks's analysis suggests, the seeming lack of support solders the African-American female to the black community forever. It is also a misperception to see parental support as universally constructed. As this analysis suggests, parental support is not a universal construction. Indeed, this analysis documents that the existence of gender diversity and what it means to nurture are pervasive. Hence, for the African-American female to achieve school success, all of the usual symbols of nurturing are turned upside down and/or inside out. These data clearly suggest that what can be labeled nurturing is cultural-specific. The academically successful females at Capital High are using a Euro-American definition of power and nurture in concluding that the significant adults in their lives are not supportive of their academic goals. They come to this enormous conclusion because they view their underachieving friends' parents' drastically different interactional patterns as the more appropriate model. The academically successful girls also study the Euro-American model via television and other media sources, including their textbooks. These sources strongly influence what they come to value and define as nurturing and supportive.

Regrettably, the high-achieving females at Capital High do not discern that their mothers and their seemingly unsupportive teachers are often unconsciously preparing them for a life away from the black community, a life in which they are the "doubly-refracted 'Other.' "[22] As the "doubly-refracted 'Other,' " the African-American female's survival "out there" is largely dependent upon her ability to live a life saturated with conflict, confusion, estrangement, isolation, and a plethora of unmarked beginnings and endings, jump starts, and failures. It is also likely to be a life in which a family of procreation[23] and connections takes a back seat to "makin' it."

Therefore, the central questions haunting this entire analysis and smoldering in the lives of all African-American females are the following: Is gender diversity something to celebrate? Should we seek its fragmentation? If so, how? Should our goal be to transform "those loud Black girls"? Should success for African-American women be so expensive? Finally, should the African-American female seek to reconstruct her life to become successful, pawning her identity as a "loud Black girl" for an identity in which she is the "doubly-refracted [African-American] Other"?

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Notes

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1. Loudness, as I am using it here, is not meant to convey the usual meanings, including noisiness, shrillness, flashiness, ostentatiousness, and so on. Rather, it is meant as one of the ways by which African-American women seek to deny the society's efforts to assign them to a stigmatized status that Christian (1990) has described as "nothingness." Therefore, "those loud Black girls" is here used as a metaphor proclaiming African-American women's existence, their collective denial of, and resistance to, their socially proclaimed powerlessness, or "nothingness."

2. As I am using the term, the academy includes all levels of schooling, but especially that aspect of schooling that begins at the secondary level, that is, junior high or middle school and beyond. I am including precollegiate schooling in my definition of the academy because this is where notions of adult gender-differentiated behaviors—including possible mate selection—are initially nurtured and practiced.

3. Historically, in the African-American community, "passing" meant appropriating the body of the "Other" (i.e., the mulatto would pretend to be white and essentially assume a gender-appropriate white body) (see Brown 1972; C. Green 1967; Ione 1991; Montgomery 1907; Washington 1987; What It Means to Be Colored in the Capital of the United States 1907 [author and publisher not listed]). Today, while blackness or African-ness is still a stigma, it is no longer the stigma it was. Therefore, in post–civil rights America, not very many people of African ancestry feel the need to assume a white persona to escape a stigmatized identity. Nonetheless, despite the wholesale acceptance of blackness by contemporary African-Americans, blackness as a cultural symbol is still loaded with many social and cultural stigmata. Because it continues to be a stigma in many contexts, for example, "Dressed as Death in a black, hooded shroud" (Grove 1991:B1), some people of African ancestry resort to "passing" in a figurative rather than a literal sense. Hence, although the Af-

rican-American values his or her African ancestry and is secure with his or her identity as a person of African ancestry, he or she is compelled to this figurative "passing" because he or she cannot represent black and blackness and also appropriate the white [whiteness] of the "Other" while retaining an idealized perception of an uncontaminated, nonhybridized "Other." Against this backdrop, I am postulating that in the contemporary context some physically identifiable African-Americans often feel obliged to engage in a kind of identity plagiarism (see Fordham 1993a) in which the racially identifiable African-American body takes on the cognitive map of the racially and culturally dominant "Other." In their construction of an idealized "Otherness," these contemporary African-Americans unwittingly lose that which invokes and fuels their creativity, that which gives voice to their African-American human-ness. Unable to speak or even think in their native voice, these individuals become a "sort of surrogate and even [subversive] [S]elf" (Said 1989:3). Meanwhile, because they are compelled to assume the identity of the "Other"—in exchange for academic success—they cannot represent themselves; they are forced to masquerade as the authentic, idealized "Other."

4. P. Williams's (1988) maternal grandfather is racially identified as white.

5. I am sensitive to the possibility that I will be accused of making essentialist claims (Fuss 1989) regarding race as well as white and black womanhood. It is currently fashionable to argue that much of what is written related to these issues can be dismissed because the writer is likely to be accused of making claims regarding some "true essence—that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (Fuss 1989:2). This is not my intention. What I hope to show in this analysis is how African-American women are compelled to construct an ad hoc identity in a context where, for much of their history in this country, they have not only been barred from its "hallowed halls," but have also, at the same time, been defined and represented by those who repeatedly defined them as "nothingness." I am not positing that there is some "pure or original [race or] femininity, a [race or] female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted . . . by a [racist or] patriarchal order" (Fuss 1989:2). Indeed, I realize that there is more than one of each of these, including white womanhood within the dominant community. Nevertheless, I am positing that when the issue is black and white womanhood, white womanhood in all its various forms is usually elevated.

6. It is important to point out that both black and white women "are objectified, albeit in different ways, . . . [in order to] dehumanize and control both groups" (Collins 1991:106).

7. See Fordham (1993c) for a detailed discussion of some of the implications affiliated with the transformation of the gendered "Self."

8. See Fordham (1987, 1988) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) for a detailed discussion of the emergence and development of the fictive kinship system in the African-American community.

9. Elsewhere (Fordham 1993b) I offer a detailed discussion of how female students at Capital High create an African-American female identity in a context that does not sanction gender diversity.

10. This is the fictitious name I gave the flagship academic program at Capital High.

11. As many researchers have suggested (see, for example, Cox 1948; Dollard 1957; Frazier 1969; Landry 1987; Ogbu 1978), race undercuts class in the

African-American community. Hence, class phenomena do not have the same meaning in the black and white communities. For example, Obgu (1978) argues quite convincingly that there is a lack of congruency among the various classes in the African-American and white communities. As he describes it, middle class in the white community is not analogous to middle class in the black community. The same is true of the designations: working class, lower class, upper-middle class, and so forth. Furthermore, as I am beginning to analyze the quantitative data collected during the Capital High study, I am overwhelmed by the unanimity of the response to the following question: "Would you say that socially your family belongs to the upper class? middle class? the lower class?" Would you describe your neighborhood as mainly upper class? middle class? lower class? Almost invariably, the students chose "middle class" as the appropriate response.

12. I am indebted to Grace Evans (1988) for this characterization of African-American females.

13. Payne (1988) supports Evans's (1988) analysis of gender diversity by noting that the school context is impregnated with male norms and values. These features are so pervasive, she argues, that for some women existence is tantamount to "suffocat[ing] in comfort" (see Emerson, cited in Hendrickson 1991). Payne highlights resistance as a primary female response to this construction of the academic context, even postulating that for some young women in the academy pregnancy is an attempt to validate and affirm their female "Self" in this male-dominated institution.

14. Hard work is probably best described as work outside the home (i.e., paid labor). It is also accurate to describe hard work as laborious and intense. As enslaved females, African-American women received no, or virtually no, remuneration for their labor outside the home. Once manumission occurred, they were further victimized in that they were not adequately compensated for their labor.

15. It may appear that I am making some essentialist or timeless claims about the African-American community. That is not my intention. Indeed, I want to emphasize that I am not claiming that there exists out there some "true essence" (see Fuss 1989). Obviously, each African-American constructs the world differently. The point I am making here is that, in spite of their differential understanding and perception, African-Americans also share "socially acquired knowledge." In some contexts this is known as culture (see Bohannan 1992; Spradley and McCurdy 1989).

16. Following Collins (1991), I am defining a "safe cultural space" as a site where African-American women are able to celebrate and applaud their varied sense of "Self." Elsewhere (Fordham 1993b) I have indicated that the academy neither encourages nor promotes gender diversity. Further, I argue, because the African-American female "Self" is seen primarily as an illegitimate form, these women's quest for a safe cultural space is often pursued surreptitiously. Hence, finding a "safe cultural space" is a challenge for all African-American females at Capital, regardless of level of achievement or academic effort.

17. A federally funded hospital for the mentally ill in Washington, D.C.

18. I am able to make this assertion because I was at the school for more than two years. During that time, I had numerous conversations with Ms. Apropos about Rita (she was only one of several students in the sample that Ms. Apropos taught) and many other students. I was able to observe many of these students in Ms. Apropos's English classes. She was one of several teach-

ers who was willing to share with me information that went beyond the rudimentary, about the students, their parents, and the administrators. Ms. Apropos was frequently baffled and buoyed by Rita's contradictory behaviors, her concurrent acceptance and rejection of school norms and values.

19. For a more detailed discussion of Rita's ambivalent religious beliefs, see chapter 6 of my forthcoming book, tentatively titled: *Acting White and Book-Black Blacks: An Ethnography of the Dilemma of School Success at Capital High* (1993a).

20. I am not suggesting that this fact is unimportant. It is. However, as Lorde notes, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1990:287). Her argument indicates a need for an African-American education that is not at the same time a "miseducation" (Woodson 1933).

21. Paul and Norris would graduate numbers second and third, respectively, in the shadow of Katrina, who would graduate first.

22. See Fordham (1993b).

23. A family of procreation suggests the active involvement of ego in producing a family.

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