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Being All of Me: Black Students Negotiating Multiple Identities

Introduction

At the turn of the last century, W. E. B. DuBois wrote, "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious [personhood], to merge his double self into a better and truer self. . . . In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American" (1903/1994, pp. 2–3). The college journey mirrors this same strife for many students. Howard Bowen (1968) commented that one of the goals of college should be the development of individuals. Relatedly, Alexander Astin (1993) pointed out that students enter college with a commitment and expectation that they will develop "a meaningful philosophy of life," which includes reflection on the meaning of life, the construction of a meaningful existence, and existential ponderings about the self and identity. Inasmuch as this is a stated outcome, as reflected in DuBois's comments above, the path toward it is often fraught with the tensions and pulls of identity struggles (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For students from underrepre-

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sented populations, those identity struggles take on a particular intensity when the "longing to attain self-conscious [personhood]" means negotiating the multiple dimensions of their identities in an environmental context that may be neither inclusive nor welcoming (McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa, 1990; Sedlacek, 1987). For these students, neither the old self formed prior to entering college nor the self who is becoming during their college experience should be discarded. Yet merging the two into a "better and truer self" (DuBois 1903/1994, p. 2) to be both who they were and who they are becoming is a difficult process.

As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have observed, "The axes of the subject's [i.e., individual's] identifications and experiences are multiple, because locations in gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality complicate one another, and not merely additively. . . . Nor do different vectors of identification and experiences overlap neatly and entirely" (1992, p. xiv). As Smith and Watson noted, identity integration is a level of cross-cultural, psychosocial development that reflects an understanding of the self as inherently composed of multiple facets, which come together and influence each other in transformative ways. Living and articulating identity as an integration of these multiple facets instead of as merely additive facets entails moving self-definitions as raced, gendered, and educated from externally imposed limitations to internalized, interlocking components through which self-actualization, or what DuBois termed self-conscious personhood, may be more fully realized (Myers et al., 1991). This symbiotic relationship means that each different social or cultural identity facet is identifiable and salient in all areas of the individual's life.

Developing toward identity integration may be a way to transcend the societal tendency to compartmentalize everything including the self (Palmer, 1983), to smooth out the supposed contradictions between these multiple facets of self, and to provide a sense of coherence about who one is and how one lives in social context (Luttrell, 1996). The development of multiple aspects of identity in an environment that may be hostile to certain resolutions of one or all of these sociocultural identities presents psychosocial identity challenges for Black students, particularly for those in predominantly White educational contexts (Brown-Collins & Sussewell, 1986; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; McEwen et al., 1990).

This article reports findings from a study that investigated the awareness and integration of multiple sociocultural identities among junior and senior Black students on a predominantly White campus in 2001. Five research questions guided this study: What are the self-perceptions

of multiple sociocultural identities by Black students at a predominantly White college? How do these students negotiate embracing or abandoning those identities? What is the role of race, gender, and class in these students' lived experiences? How do these students articulate an integrated sense of identity? What are the ways in which spirituality may have impacted these students' self-perceptions and development? This last question was the subject of a previous article (Stewart, 2002). The present article discusses the findings related to negotiating multiple identities and the influence of college matriculation processes on identity development.

Literature Review

At the time the data for this study were collected and analyzed, the literature concerning multiple identities and the integration of identities or identity intersectionality within higher education and student affairs was very thin. Therefore, the theoretical framework that informed this study was multidisciplinary, incorporating educational anthropology, cultural psychology, womanist theology, and higher education. On the basis of this literature, this study was situated in a constructivist and Afrocentric framework that acknowledged the role of educational institutions in shaping identity (Gibbs, 1974; Hughes, 1987; Levinson & Holland, 1996; Luttrell, 1996; Parham, 1989); the complexity of identity development when multiple identity facets are considered (Brown-Collins & Sussewell, 1986; Goodman, 1990; Heath, 1968; Myers et al., 1991; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991; Sedlacek, 1987; Wolcott, 1994); the need to move from external to internal and transcendent definitions (Baker-Fletcher, 1998; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Cole, 1995; James, 1993; Townes, 1995); and the important role of spirituality in development and particularly for African American college students (McEwen et al., 1990; Parks, 2000). Through smaller-scale qualitative studies using grounded theory methodology and phenomenology, researchers have also provided empirical evidence that students perceived divergent pulls on their social identities and that bridging those multiple identities was a complex process involving the interaction of external definitions and environmental contexts (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). These studies demonstrated not only that identity development was more of a cyclical process but also that the multiple facets of identity impinged upon each other and facilitated the continuing development and articulation of other facets of identity.

This foundational research also led to the growth of higher education literature about multiple identities since this study's completion in 2001. This newer writing opened the possibility and need for new understandings within student development theory about the construct of identity itself, as well as about the process of identity development in college students. Many of these researchers posed questions about the relationship of various facets of personal development upon each other—for example, the relationship between moral development and identity development or religious orientation and racial identity development (Moreland & Leach, 2001; Sciarra & Gushue, 2003; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001), as well as the relationship between psychosocial development and racial identity (Pope, 2000). Other researchers sought to understand the intersecting nature of identity itself, in that issues of race, gender, sexuality, and so on affect each other and racial identity development, for instance, is not devoid of influence on other facets of social and cultural identity (see Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Chae, 2000; Denevi, 2004; Fischer & McWhirter, 2001; Fries-Britt, 2000; Hoffman, 2004; Kawaguchi, 2003; Kim, 2003; Lewis & Hamrick, 2000; Orbe, 2004; Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004; Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002; Scott & Robinson, 2001; Stevens, 2004; Stewart, 2002). The insufficiency of current identity development assessments and theoretical frameworks to attend to multiple identities has been addressed by Moran (2003) and Howard-Hamilton (2003). Additionally, Renn (2004) explored the ways that multiple and integrated racial identities were articulated by biracial and multiracial students. It is this more recent body of literature that helped to inform and support the interpretation and application of the findings in this study and that will be referenced at that point in the discussion.

Although the literature has significantly expanded since this study's completion, there remain unanswered questions in the literature about the role of spirituality in the identity-development process. Also, there is still a need for more empirical studies that document the experiences of students of color as they attempt to blend the multiple facets of their identities, similar to that conducted by Fries-Britt (2000) and Kawaguchi (2003) and theoretical frameworks that explicitly consider multiple identities when projecting the development of students of color (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Moreover, researchers and scholars in the area of identity development would benefit from a deeper understanding of how the structure and processes of education interact with identity development, as demonstrated by Kim (2003). Therefore, this study offers a unique contribution in that it explicitly addresses the interaction and

influence of multiple aspects of the participants' identities and attends to the influence of educational processes in the development of self and identity.

Methods

The methodology employed in this study combined portraiture and phenomenology and was grounded in Afrocentric philosophy (Myers, 1993) within a constructivist framework (Stewart, 2002). Afrocentrism understands the world as divinely ordered, inherently coherent, and reflecting the marriage of temporal and spiritual realities (Myers, 1993; Nobles, 1980). Both constructivism and Afrocentrism prioritize the interaction among individuals and with their environments to fundamentally shape meaning making about identities and social worlds. Therefore, I employed a subject-centered approach in the research questions, data collection, and data analysis. Central to the methodology of this study was the tenet that an in-depth, authentic understanding of the particular was key to understanding the general (Chase, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Myers, 1993; Stake, 1994).

Developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), portraiture is a data-rich methodology that uses interview data and ethnographic observations to construct a portrait of the respondents through which interpretation and analysis of the data is conducted. For this study, I composed interpretive poems for each respondent constructed from the interview transcripts with each of the five respondents that both described the students and provided an interpretive lens of their experience (see Stewart, 2001).

Phenomenology asks the question, "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Despite the multiple and differing forms of phenomenology, these approaches agree on the exploration of how people make meaning of their experiences and how they use those meanings and experiences to actively inform consciousness, behavior, and relationships (Patton, 2002). This study uses a phenomenological approach by structuring the interview protocols to focus on eliciting stories about the students' experiences and using patterns of relationship and behavior to guide the analysis of the data (see Stewart, 2002).

Through in-depth, individual interviews (Seidman, 1998), I sought to bring to the surface the meanings that these students made of their identities. The larger aim was to create a text that enabled the students to express their multiple identities and their intersections and interconnections (Denzin, 1994; Peterson, 1998).

Triangulation

Data triangulation is one way to protect the credibility and validity of qualitative data by reducing systematic bias that can result from using a single researcher, single method, or single theoretical perspective (Patton, 2002). Moreover, triangulation helps to provide thick description by providing multiple sources of data and perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, there is no standard form of triangulation that should be employed for all qualitative studies. There are four different types of triangulation: triangulation of sources, using different data sources with the same method; analyst triangulation, using multiple researchers or evaluators; theory triangulation, using multiple perspectives to interpret a data set; and methods triangulation, using multiple methods to study a problem (Patton, 2002). This study incorporated several different forms of analyst and theory triangulation.

Member checking and the use of internal auditors provided the analyst triangulation in this study. Two administrative members of the campus community and the student participants reviewed and critiqued the faithfulness of the campus portrayal, which is given briefly later but which is also available in greater detail (see Stewart, 2001). Elements of their different perspectives augmented my impressions of the campus. After the interviews were completed and transcribed, I developed narrative portraits of each participant. The portraits included my analysis of their life histories and how campus life impacted their understanding of identity integration. The students reviewed and commented on their portrait, and their feedback and critiques confirmed the data analysis and verified that the data was faithful and authentic. An inquiry auditor, who was a professional colleague and familiar with the topics under study, also reviewed and critiqued the content validity of the data analysis.

Theory triangulation was provided through the use of three theoretical perspectives to analyze the interview data, as well as through the inductive method of open and axial coding of the interview transcripts. Stewart (2002) provides a thorough discussion of how this was carried out and how it shaped the data analysis. The findings reported in this study come solely from a fresh use of inductive data analysis described more fully below.

Limitations

The inclusion of only Black students limits the study. Identity integration is a relevant topic for all individuals, regardless of racial and ethnic identity (Wolcott, 1994), and the experiences of students from other racial and ethnic categories would add greater depth and richness to the understanding of this aspect of student development. In addition, the

role that the specific cultural environment of Rosse College (a pseudonym) played in informing and shaping the students' meaning making about their sociocultural identities is obscured. Comparing and contrasting data from students at different types of institutions would reveal the role of institutional environment in the development of identity. Current research has addressed some of these limitations by including a larger sample of students attending three institutions (Stewart, 2006).

Procedure

Participants engaged in four semistructured, multistaged individual interviews. A demographic survey was also administered to the participants prior to the first interview. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by consent and took place on campus at Rosse College between February and May 2001. The use of an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and the liberty to follow interesting threads that came up during the interview reflects the semistructured nature of the interviews (Seidman, 1998). The purpose of the first stage of the interview was to get a picture of the life history of each participant, clarifying and expanding upon responses given in the survey. The aim in the second stage of the interview was to procure the students' descriptions of their own identities and to investigate the students' understanding and acknowledgment of their multiple sociocultural identities and development of identity integration. The third stage of the interview focused on the respondents' self-knowledge of the ways in which race, gender, and class intersected and interconnected in their lives as Black college students on campus. The last interview centered more specifically on the issues discussed by Parks (2000) of having social support systems to depend on in times of crisis. The interviews lasted anywhere between 45 minutes and 120 minutes.

Sampling Method

This study explored how five individual students negotiated and integrated their multiple social and cultural identities in their self-images. The students selected were all self-identified Black students at Rosse College, a rural, selective liberal arts college in the midwestern United States. Rosse enrolled about 1,600 students at the time of the study in a residential setting. Beset with a conflicted history of both opportunity and exclusion (e.g., women were not admitted until the early 1970s), Rosse College had an enrollment of 54.6% women, 9.2% students of color (i.e., Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans), and 2.3% international students. However, the college seemed to be attempting to fashion a marriage of its isolated and

distinctive character with the educational needs of a diverse intellectual community to produce a democratic elite with the same high idealism and stubborn determination of its founder. The close examination of this microworld, created by narrowing my focus to students at one institution, afforded me the opportunity for greater in-depth study and understanding of the phenomenon investigated, identity integration (Patton, 2002). This particular institution was used because it closely mirrored the type of institution at which I first observed Black students struggling with issues of multiple identities and negotiation of identity.

The selection of the student participants used the following rationale. I first sought to recruit upper-class students, at the sophomore, junior, and senior levels. This decision is supported by student development theory, which has demonstrated that the capacity for critical (self-)reflection is connected to the duration of one's college experience and general maturity levels (Baxter-Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Secondly, within this group of advanced standing Black students, deliberate attention was given to recruit participants who would represent a broad diversity of experiences and backgrounds within the African American experience.

Students at Rosse who identified as Black or African American were recommended by the campus multicultural affairs officer. From this initial list, I intentionally selected even numbers of men and women students to contact. This garnered an initial list of six students. I then contacted the students directly to inform them about the study and to gain their consent to participate. Four students (two men and two women) agreed to participate, and I was prepared to begin with this group, holding open the possibility of recruiting more students into the study. The study's rationale and methods supported this choice. During the first round of interviews, each student was asked if they knew someone else who would be interested in participating and would have the time to participate. This garnered an additional student who agreed to join the study.

My initial conversations with the students before recruiting them into the study explored their backgrounds and the diversity of the Black experience in the United States that they represented. This intentional attention to diversity ensured the inclusion of Black students who were men and women, from working-class and more privileged families, from suburban and urban neighborhoods, and with public and private educational backgrounds. I was thus able to document unique or diverse variations that emerged and identified important patterns that cut across variations (Patton, 2002). The students chose the following pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality: K. B., Kashmir, Ophelia, Poke, and Sage.

Characteristics of Participants

The participant group was sufficiently heterogeneous and a reflection of the diversity within the Black student population of Rosse College. This heterogeneity made the themes and experiences shared among the participants more powerful because of the diversity of backgrounds represented. The participant group is described below in five areas: race, gender, ethnicity, and age; family background; future aspirations; campus involvement; and central facets of identity based on data gathered from a demographic survey that was completed by the participants prior to their first interview.

Race, ethnicity, gender, and age. The participants generally defined themselves as Black or African Americans, consisted of three women and two men; they were all heterosexual and able-bodied, with modal age of 20, and in either their sophomore or junior year in college. Kashmir is a biracial woman, the child of an African American mother and White father, and did not select an ethnic identification. Sage clarified her ethnic identity in an interview by saying she was an "Americanized [African]" whose family moved to the United States while she was an infant. Ophelia was the only sophomore; she was 19 years of age at the time of the interviews.

Family background. Sage, K. B., and Ophelia identified their hometowns as urban and described the racial composition of their neighborhoods as mostly Black or African American. Kashmir and Poke described their hometown racial compositions as being mostly of another race or ethnicity than themselves, specifically White. Sage, K. B., and Ophelia also described their parents' socioeconomic status as working class, while Kashmir and Poke both described their parents' socioeconomic status as middle class.

There was much more diversity amongst the participants relative to the educational attainments of their parents. In only one case, Poke, had both parents attained professional degrees. The mothers' educational attainments ranged from some college to doctoral or professional degrees. The fathers' attainments ranged from having a high school diploma to having a doctoral or other professional degree.

Future aspirations. All the students had committed to pursuing some form of postgraduate education. With the exception of Ophelia, the rest expected their class status to change in an upwardly mobile direction. Since Ophelia was considering pursuing postgraduate work, she saw that as extending her current financial situation as working class. Generally, the group felt that it was part of their responsibility as children to outpace their parents and attain higher levels of formal education. It was hoped that their education at Rosse then would equip them to live better lives economically than their parents lived.

Campus involvement. Four questions on the survey asked the participants to report the number of campus organizations in which they were active members and their degree of involvement with Black students, faculty, and administrators at Rosse. The participants were spread out across the three ranges in the amount of their campus organizational involvement, with Ophelia at the low end with only one to two active memberships and Poke and Sage at the high end with more than four active campus memberships. As a group, they typically affiliated themselves with groups dealing with campus multicultural issues, although there was a great deal of diversity of other organizations represented, including religious organizations, the campus newspaper, and the sexual assault task force. In terms of leadership, Sage was the president of the campus organization for Black students; Kashmir was vice president for the local sorority for women of color (pseudonym, QENZ, pronounced "queens"); Poke served as the vice president for the local fraternity for Black men (pseudonym, KNGZ, pronounced "kings"); and K. B. was the live-in student manager of the campus multicultural center. At the time of the study, Ophelia did not hold a leadership position in a campus organization but planned to apply to be the student manager for the women's resource center on campus for the next academic year.

The degree of involvement with the Black community at Rosse College was ascertained through their involvement with students, faculty, and administrators. Generally, there seemed to be a great deal of interaction with other Black students among the students in the participant group. Considering the high involvement of these students with committees that were chaired by a Black administrator or to which Black administrators would belong, it was not surprising that, on average, these students also had a great deal of interaction with Black administrators. However, the fact that, on average, these students did not have a great deal of interaction with Black faculty was somewhat curious, especially for a campus where faculty-student relationships were highly valued and touted as a recruitment tool for prospective students.

Significant facets of identity. The survey asked participants, "Which of the following facets of identity do you consider to be the most important or most central to how you see yourself as a person?" They were allowed to check as many of the identity facets as they wanted, and they were not asked to rank them in any order of significance. Their options included race, culture, ethnicity, age, educational level, sexuality, spirituality, personality, disability, gender, class, and geographic origin. The number of times the students marked a facet as important or central to identity ranged from three to five. None of the students selected either sexuality or disability as a central or significant identity. Only one facet, personal-

ity, was chosen by all five respondents. The last question on the survey asked the participants if they ever felt that they had to pick out only certain aspects of their identity in order to be accepted in certain groups in college. Three respondents (Sage, K. B., and Kashmir) chose to answer this question "Yes" (Sage did so emphatically with stars and multiple exclamation points), and the other two said "No" (Poke and Ophelia).

This data suggests that all of these students were aware of the multiple layers of their identities. Moreover, the selection of race and gender by four of the five participants (although not always the same four) as most important or most central to how they saw themselves as persons may indicate an internally defined component to these sociocultural facets of identity beyond externally imposed definitions. Data analysis of the interview transcripts seemed to support this assessment as well.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began with two assumptions. First, self-knowledge was developed intersubjectively through discourse as well as intuition, and it existed within the context of the multiple social worlds of which one was a part (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). Second, I did not presume to find that sociocultural identities were oppressive, externally imposed, inauthentic, or superficial. Rather, I sought to know what were the cultural resources used by these students to help them interpret their experiences as people consciously living out multiple sociocultural identities. The centering of sociocultural identity development as a valid and possibly desirable psychosocial outcome stems from this.

The aim in the staged, semistructured individual interviews was to elicit stories and narratives from the students (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Seidman, 1998). Through inductive reasoning, I used the phrasing and words of the students to cross-reference and identify the emergent themes and patterns. The analysis of the individual interview data represent "an iterative and generative process . . . , which draws out refrains and patterns and creates a thematic framework for the construction of the narrative" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185). After each individual interview, I sketched notes in which I developed key categories, identified areas needing further elaboration, and began sketching a holistic understanding of the students and the process of identity integration in their lives.

My analysis of the interview data used descriptive, interpretive, and pattern coding along the five modes of emergent themes used in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I listened for repetitive refrains spoken frequently by the students. Then I searched for resonant metaphors, which are expressions that reveal the ways that the students

experience their realities. Third were the cultural and institutional rituals that express certain themes in the students' lives. The initial codes were rechecked and were also reviewed by my inquiry auditor. The other triangulation techniques described above also helped to synthesize the data across the variance of the students' experiences (see also Patton, 2002).

Findings

An analysis of the data revealed much commonality among the students' experiences and their struggles with identity integration and the centrality of issues of race in their lives. The participant characteristics given earlier highlight the many ways that these students saw themselves involved in the campus community, with faculty and staff, and how they viewed their identities. Several themes emerged from this analysis of the data. The three that contribute most to our understanding of multiple identities and identity development among African American college students are presented below.

Validity of Multiple Identities

During the first interview, I asked students to use a word-picture or other metaphor that would be an appropriate representation of their identity. It has been said that "a picture is worth a thousand words," and indeed these responses were very telling.

> All right. First you would have a—I've actually drawn this before, so—First you have a silhouette of a person [laughter], one of those things that when you're in grade school you lie back on the ground and they trace you and then what you do is you take all the colors and you make them and you make curved lines and you make little pieces that sort of intrude on each other and back away from each other and you still have a little, the black background is still a big piece there, but all these little things that mingle and are intermixing, very colorful and very confusing. You have some things that are sharp and you have some things that are a little bit softer, some things that are completely round and others that are small, big shapes and little shapes and umm—you know thoughts, feelings, crises, I guess were the sharp lines and umm I remember drawing that a long time ago and feeling like I was very brilliant [laughter] and going "this is me." So that's the symbol, and there are things like I'm not sure about, things I'm sure about, things I pretend to be sure about. (Ophelia)

Ophelia's description of her self-portrait is very reminiscent of what might be a poorly cut jigsaw puzzle. Nevertheless, such imagery strongly validates the existence of multiple identity pieces that purport to fit together to create a uniform whole. Poke's metaphor does the same thing using a different image.

> I don't want to use a kaleidoscope so I'll say a collage because [pause] granted, when people see me they're going to pretty much view me and identify me one way, but once people really get to know me they do understand that there is a lot more to me than just being that young black male.

It is not until you stand close to a collage, or bring it more closely to you, that it becomes evident that the picture created by it is really the composition of hundreds of smaller, distinctive images. Likewise, Poke saw his identity in the same way. Where Ophelia perceived the pieces of her identity as evident, Poke saw them as evident only to the close observer and as wholes in themselves, not merely fragments of some other image. Kashmir also provided an image that was not unitary or solid.

> Umm, well, when I was a little kid, I used to always go to Dairy Queen and I would always order, umm, twist ice cream, chocolate and vanilla, it was always this thing, and then I would take it and it was always in a dish because I never liked cones for some reason and I would sit down and I would mix it all up and it wouldn't, the vanilla kind of dimmed down the color of the chocolate and it was kind of like a white chocolate-y color, but still have the look and the flavor of the chocolate and so I think that that would be kind of how—I think that kind of represents me in a sense, I started off with this thing that was Black and White and I kind of mixed it up and it looks a little bit more like chocolate ice cream now, but it still has that consistency of the vanilla underneath it all.

Kashmir placed a great deal of emphasis on her biracial identity throughout the study, and it showed in her use of this ice cream metaphor. However, also evident in her description is the validity that her identity was a combination of multiple facets.

A common theme among the students was the reality that there was more to them than met the eye, and yet what met the eye was an integral part of what laid beneath the surface. These students readily described identities that were composed of multiple facets that jointly affected their self-concepts.

Critical Role of Education and Reflection in Identity Articulation

A second theme, related to the first, then emerged. This theme focused on the role that educational systems played in promoting the development of identity concepts for the participants. According to the literature in educational anthropology, education and schools affect individuals' sense of self, identity, and meaning (Levinson & Holland, 1996; Luttrell, 1996). Therefore, I asked the participants how they came to understand their identities and how their experience at Rosse had impacted their identities as Black men and Black women. The students had

much to say about these questions, and all their comments cannot be included here. However, the following excerpts adequately represent the common theme concerning the influence of their educational experiences on their identity development.

Responding to a question about defining identity, K. B. said:

> *After having been here*, I guess it would definitely be black male, umm [pause] probably my age group category, twenty years old, um [pause], what else? Working-class family I guess, inner city, that kind of stuff, *having been boxed when having to fill out forms* and things like that. It would definitely be that way, that's how it would start. (emphasis added)

K. B. explicitly connected his interaction with application and other college entrance forms as the beginning point for his emphasis on the social and cultural aspects of his identity. "After having been here" was a critical statement that supported the idea that identity did not develop in isolation or within the individual but rather in connection with processes, structures, and external environments and through reflection on those interactions.

Ophelia's comments also depicted this reality.

> I definitely feel that *since I've been here*, I've become more aware of that identity [being Black and female]. You know, the, the most ironic thing of all being here at a predominantly White college, you'll come home and you now realize that, "hey, I'm Black!" And especially in light of the fact that when I was in elementary school, middle school, and high school I had mostly White friends and I—I had this whole philosophy on how race doesn't matter and how we all need to hold hands and sing and be happy with each other as people and personalities and now I'm realizing that race isn't just something in a vacuum, it isn't just a big—it's not just a matter of people uh you know, with uh different skin tones you know, there's culture, there's oppression, there's bitterness on both sides, they're all, all these conflicts and I'm realizing that . . . I'm sort of like acutely aware of it. . . . You know, it's just—it's kind of tough. I feel crazy. (emphasis added)

Again, the interaction with the institution made evident the salience of her racial and gender identities. Moreover, Ophelia clearly marked the transition in her perspectives about race and the salience of her racial identity as her matriculation into college.

Poke also discussed the intransigence of race as an integral part of his personal identity as the result of his time at Rosse.

> I guess from being at Rosse and from high school and all that the one thing that I know for certain, which is an obvious thing, but it's not as obvious as it sounds, is that I will be Black for life. . . . I think being in an [urban city], . . . you can go somewhere else and hang out with a whole different sect of people that understand . . . and then you're rejuvenated *but when you're at Rosse*

> *it's nonstop*, and after a while you just, I don't know *you become a lot more aware of who you are in the real world*, 'cause those are the people, that if you're going to be successful, you'll be with for the rest of your life anyway. (emphasis added)

Sage returns to the mutually selective interaction with the process prior to coming to Rosse:

> I guess, I guess, it probably started somewhere around the college process I guess, when you have to do all that reflecting and then putting it on paper kind of thing, *you start actually giving names to all things you've been thinking about* all the time. Umm, yea, I think [pause] a lot of the different ways that I see myself has always been in the works—you know, they've been manifesting themselves in different ways, especially post-independent school, from independent school on, and then I start seeing myself as not necessarily like everyone else, because all the differences become more crisp, more central, and more apparent, I guess. (emphasis added)

The college application was not merely a bureaucratic tool but an interactive process in which categories of identity were offered (race, gender, etc.) and students responded reflectively by selecting from among those categories. Indeed, for Kashmir, this mutually selective process occurred during a critical point in her personal development and triggered a set of choices regarding her perception and articulation of her biracial identity.

> Um, I don't know, I think that, when it came down to um, in high school *when I did have to fill out the college application*, it kind of came down to having to make a decision on what box I was going to check. And um, instead of choosing to check "other," you could say "I'm bi-racial," I decided to go ahead and check "African American" because I do feel that I relate more with saying that I'm my mother's child, versus I'm my parents' child at this point in my life. . . . Um, and I think that's kind of influenced me a lot on how I am in college more so than anything, just because I felt like I was kind of forced to check a box. I think that that kind of shaped a lot of things for me in more recent years.

These extended quotations demonstrate the powerful impact of the college admissions process as well as the Rosse college environment on these students' perceptions of their identity and the meaning of that identity in their social worlds. For several of the students, going through the college admissions process provided the first opportunity to intentionally think about and, in one case (Kashmir), to intentionally shape their racial identity beyond high school and their home neighborhoods. These students' stories indicate that checking boxes on application and scholarship forms were not cursory or automated processes.

Moreover, the college environment at Rosse ("the sea of White faces," as K. B. put it in an interview) was more disconcerting for him than for

the other students. Coming from predominantly White environments in high school to Rosse made the predominantly White racial demographics at Rosse less overwhelming. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the responses above and other comments made by the students, the social meaning of their racial and gender classifications took on substance and formed the foundation of their current critiques of the climate at Rosse and in society at large.

The Intractability of Identity Integration

Choosing to embrace or abandon identity has been discussed in the literature as a common struggle for people with multiple oppressed identities. The students in this study were generally no different.

> I guess it's difficult for me to do that type of integration I suppose, for some reason, I do have a real preoccupation with pleasing others, . . . I really am concerned with what other people think because of the way that they'll view me or the way that it will come back and affect me later. So there are times [when] I just have to be a fragmented person and only showcase so much of myself. [pause] Don't necessarily like it, especially, sometimes I'm just accustomed to it and it happens automatically, but other times, it's a real chore to be silent. (K.B.)

For K.B., the shifting and negotiation of his identity facets was directly tied to who else was in the room at the time. As he admitted, pleasing others was very important to him and inhibited his ability to "showcase" as much of himself as he might like to display to others.

Ophelia also described a shifting sense of self, influenced by the situations in which she found herself.

> It's one thing when you go to one class and they talk about this sort of identity, and you go in another class and it's like, you know what, nobody has an identity. You know, you get that idea too, and you're like that works, you know, that works for um my Black days, and my feminist days, and my, you know, we'll talk about my fashion days, but it's definitely been a struggle here to sort of not be self-centered and look at the larger picture. . . . I'm not necessarily in conflict all the time, there are many things here that I've learned and they complement what I already felt. . . . I, I really, just don't know what to do with myself sometimes.

Ophelia's exasperation came through very clearly during this portion of the interview. Trying to sort through all the different philosophies about identity and self that were presented in classes along with her personal struggles seemed to have worn her out on some days. Yet, it was clear that despite her earlier acknowledgment that all the pieces of her identity fit together in her jigsaw puzzle metaphor, her public articulation of her identity was much more segmented.

Sage's comments suggested the same kind of segregation and negotiation.

> When I look at the groups of people who I hang out with, that's what they are, they're groups of people and there seems to be no unifying thread aside from me. . . . [T]he result of that is that I start pulling myself away from all the different groups that I'm in because none of them understand, you know. . . . And I have to define them as my Christian friends, or as my sorority friends, or as my volleyball girls, you know and I get tired of that! I forget their names after a while because it's just like—ugh!

Sage also discussed having to "pick and choose what gets emphasized" because she was not "comfortable asserting all of [her] at once."

The emotional toll of identity negotiation was apparent. Frustration, anger, resignation, passivity, confusion, and hope were all emotions that the students expressed as they discussed situations in which they had to pick and choose certain aspects of their identities to showcase to others.

These comments demonstrate the ways in which these students had to negotiate their identities for certain audiences and in certain situations. However, Poke's response to the issue was to avoid contact with anyone and any situation that would require such negotiation on his part. The other students all seemed to decide that negotiation was necessary, even though the painfulness and often the confusion of it were readily apparent to them. As K. B. said, "It [i]s a real chore to be silent." Again, relationships and external expectations, wanting to be "comfortable" or to "please everybody," came up often among a number of the students to varying degrees. Those who seemed to be the least interested in pleasing others had an easier time choosing not to negotiate their identities situationally. Those who were more invested in others' opinions or in maintaining relationships with people connected to a salient identity facet, experienced more identity conflict, and were more likely to concede to negotiation.

Nevertheless, the students varied in their understanding of identity integration. For Poke, it seemed to be a simple issue of identity management. For others, identity integration was an crucial issue of purpose, identity, and self-concept that was mediated by situations and environments but not totally encompassed by them. Yet, the concept itself was slippery at times. K. B. confessed that although there were moments when he seemed to get it, the more he thought about it, the "hazier and hazier" it got. Sage's ability to weave and connect the facets of her identity also wobbled. As she said, "[It] depends on when you catch me. This has not been a good semester for weaving things together." Desiring to make sense of it all was not in question. However, there were deep doubts expressed about the feasibility of the task.

Perhaps, though, perceiving the possibility of identity integration manifests the plus-one staging concept (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Stroad, 1976, as cited in Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Developed within cognitive-structural theory, plus-one staging is the idea that people are able to recognize and even be attracted to a level of development that is slightly more complex than their own. Thus, these students were able to recognize and appreciate the value of identity integration, even though they had not yet developed to this point in their identity structures. Moreover, if plus-one staging is applicable here, identity integration seemed to present itself through the lives of these students at Rosse as a psychosocial developmental task with cognitive complexity, similar to Baxter Magolda's (2001) model of self-authorship.

Discussion

As Pope (2000) and Sedlacek (1987) have suggested, race and racial identity are important factors in psychosocial development and specifically the establishment of identity. These students were committed to exploring issues of race and their racial identities, and this exploration was very salient to the establishment of identity generally. Moreover, these findings suggest that it might be necessary to take another look at the Reynolds and Pope (1991) Multidimensional Identity Model and unpack the last identity resolution option, internalizing multiple facets of identity. It would appear that there might be at least two dimensions of this option that are suggested by these findings. The first would be an internalized acceptance of multiple facets of identity and a willingness to name them, but only in certain environments perceived as nurturing and supportive. This individual is still susceptible to negative evaluations by others. The second dimension would be an internalized acceptance of the multiple facets of one's identity and a willingness to name those multiple identities (or center them in the conversation) regardless of the climate of the environment. This individual no longer relies upon or seeks external validation. Such a clarification would be helpful in applying the model developed by Reynolds and Pope (1991) to students encountered by faculty and staff.

These findings also connect this research to Renn's (2004) model of patterns of multiracial identity among college students. The types she described may also be applicable to students who identify as monoracial but who acknowledge multiple, cross-dimensional salient identity facets. Within her model, Renn identified a "Situational Identity" (p. 68), in which students with multiple racial identities acknowledged those racial identities as both separate facets and as blended or integrated concepts

and shifted their presentation of self and self-identity according to the situation or environmental context in which they found themselves. Adapting these characteristics for students embracing multiple dimensions of identity, such a situational identity may be an appropriate way to interpret Poke's , K. B.'s, and Sage's discussions in this study. However, some of Sage's and Ophelia's comments may be better understood as similar to multiracial individuals in the "Multiple Monoracial Identity" pattern (Renn, 2004, p. 67). In this pattern, the identity with which the person identified shifted according to the situation or audience. Such a "multiple dimensional identity" would fit Sage's and Ophelia's comments about having completely segregated groups of friends according to the salient dimensions of their identities (Sage) or having "Black days," "feminist" days, and other days in which neither would be discussed (Ophelia). The difference between these two patterns is that those displaying a situational identity pattern recognize and can articulate the relationship between or among their multiple identities while those in the other pattern cannot (Renn, personal communication, March 2005). Further research would be needed to support these assertions.

These data also highlight the role of educational processes in promoting the development and framing of identity for young adults. Each of the students in this study shared that the college admissions process indelibly influenced their current ideas about the nature and structure of their identities. Their comments bear witness to the fact that students engage in a great deal of reflection about themselves as they matriculate into college. These moments of reflection may be the first time that students critically engage the concept of social and cultural identity, especially for those who live and attend school in predominantly monoracial environments where the social and personal significance of the interaction of diverse races, cultures, and ethnicities may be muted. Thus, college officials should be attuned to the broad impact of the college admissions process. Students do not merely engage the higher education sector as consumers but as young adults in development. Therefore, based on these findings, I urge college administrators to take time to include opportunities for structured reflection for students on the intersection of their college experiences, inclusive of admission and orientation, and their developing ideas about identity.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study lead to the following suggestions for future research. Longitudinal and follow-up studies are necessary to build more complex models of individual experiences with identity integra-

tion. These research questions should be explored with different groups of students attending different college and university settings to acknowledge the variation that institutional environment may bring to this aspect of development. As Parks (2000) has noted, the college or university context plays an important role in the possibility for awareness of these issues as well as the probabilities for resolving or, more accurately, for positively engaging with identity integration issues. This role, which may be termed the environmental press toward integration, deserves further study. In addition, more specific investigation into the role that admissions, scholarship, and financial aid applications—the college matriculation process—play in a student's engagement with questions of identity would be beneficial. Lastly, continued research into the performance of self, race, gender, and other aspects of identity on college campuses would provide greater clarity about the relationship between the performance of identity and the development of identity in young adults.

Conclusion

The push and pull of issues of identity marked and contoured the college experiences of Poke, Kashmir, K. B., Ophelia, and Sage. Rosse College became the laboratory in which each of these students tested the limits and boundaries of their identities as well as the place that presented them with the realization that these pushes and pulls existed. The very challenge that such a dissonant experience provides encourages the type of self-reflection that can lead to the development exhibited by these students. However, their stories do paint a stark picture of the "agony of educational choices" (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 158) and experiences lived by these Black students at this predominantly White college. Therefore, acknowledging this developmental hurdle in our models of the psychosocial and cognitive tasks of college students is both necessary and empowering, making the unconscious conscious and the unknown known.

APPENDIX A

Excerpt from interview protocol

Stage One: Life History

1. What are your most memorable childhood experiences, positive and negative?
2. Where are you from? (Follow ups included: How did you feel about growing up there?)
3. How did you come to attend this college?
4. What does it mean to you that you are pursuing a college education?
5. What campus organizations are you a member of?

Stage Two: Multiple Sociocultural Identities

1. How would you answer the question, "Who am I?" (Other versions of this question were sometimes used: How would you complete this sentence, "I am…")
2. What image would you use to describe how you see the parts of your identity? (Students usually asked for an example of what I meant by image, I would respond with different objects, like "mirror" or "kaleidoscope" or "ocean")
3. How did you come to see yourself this way?
4. Have you always felt this way? How has your understanding of yourself changed over time?
5. Have you ever felt conflict in your identity, as you have described it, while you have been at this college? In what ways?
6. How do you negotiate situations in which you are asked to choose or pick out certain identity aspects?
7. Have you been able to weave these identities together somehow? (Follow up question usually was, "Do you want to or feel that you should?"
8. What does it mean to you be a Black man/woman? (All the respondents identified themselves as Black) Has that ever conflicted with how other people think you should act/feel/think as a Black man/woman?
9. Do you feel any sense of ownership over your racial/gender identity?

Stage Three: Making Sense of it All

1. How is your experience being Black and female/male different from what you would suppose your experience would be if you were Black and male/female?
2. How has your education, however you define that, here changed you as a person?
3. How has your education here changed your definition of what it means to be Black and female/male, if it has at all?
4. How important is it for you to be whole? Why or why not?

Stage Four: Support and Dependence

1. What do you depend on when it feels like your world is falling apart?
2. If you could remake yourself in any way, what would you change, if anything?
3. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

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