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Complex, Positive Views of Race Help Black Students

By Alex P. Kellogg, BET.com Staff Writer

Posted June 12, 2003 -- Who do you think would do better in high school, the militant Black youth with a head full of conspiracy theories or the Black teenager who feels good doing well in school because it reflects positively on his community?

Perhaps not surprisingly, a study to be released in the December edition of the Social Psychology Quarterly found that minority youth benefit significantly from having positive, complex beliefs about their ethnic identities. Meaning that the militant who can't engage society won't do as well as the one who feels he's changing social attitudes about his race by performing well.

But some of the study's other findings might be more surprising. Led by Daphna Oyserman, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the study examined how junior high and high school students' racial identities affected their performance in school. It looked at African-American, Latino, and Native American adolescents in the American Midwest, as well as Arab students in Israel.

What it found is that minority youth, and African American youth in particular, did a lot better if they had what researchers categorized as two quite distinct attitudes toward race. The first group could be called the upbeat Black kids. They had a "positive, optimistic, assimilationist attitude," while the second group had a "skeptical view of America at large but a positive attitude toward the Black community and their place in it. Upbeat Black kids had a positive view of both their place in the Black community and society as a whole. Skeptical Black kids were wary of racism, but still felt like they should step outside the Black community.

That meant that;

- the Black kid who felt good about being Black and about being an American did well in school.
- the Black kid who felt good about doing well in school because it reflected positively on the Black community excelled, even if he viewed society as a whole as somewhat racist and against him.

These two types of students performed equally well in school but their counterparts didn't. They fell in two categories: militant Black kids and, perhaps surprisingly, the Black kids who didn't think that racial identities are all that important (the first group gave answers like "we're all the same" or "we're all human."). The second group of students were often very

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alienated and rejected the idea that getting A's was a good thing.

That meant that, for example;

- the militant Black kid who hated "Whitey" but still his Black brothers and sisters, did significantly well students who engaged society at large even in the way of racial prejudice.
- the kid who said, "everyone is the same and it doesn't matter whose Black or White" couldn't cope with it. Such students, Oyserman told The Chronicle of Higher Education, can't easily deal "with prejudice or but themselves from stereotyping. So it rattles them the time they encounter it."

The study is the first of its kind to point out that student attitudes toward society as a whole may play a large part in their academic performance. Previous studies have shown African American youth who report caring a lot about their education can maintain a very positive attitude about themselves even as their grades suffer.

Oyserman says she hopes her work will show educators how important it is for Black and other minority youth to feel good about being Black and not too radical. She's now focusing on intervention programs that help African American students in Detroit have a positive attitude about themselves and their racial identity, and says those programs have helped boost students' grades.

What do you think about these conclusions? Are you surprised that the militant Black student who refused to give up his conspiracy theories and hates "The Matrix" is doing badly in school? Or does it seem like scientific evidence of the obvious? What about the positive results? Are you surprised that kids who feel that doing well in school is a part of being Black do better than kids who don't see themselves as Black? Tell us what your experience has been by clicking [Discuss Now](#).

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MESSAGE BOARDS

What do you think about this study? Are you surprised by the results or do they seem like scientific evidence of the obvious?

Be Proud not Ignorant... Jun 13 2003 10:23:34AM

posted by: cano17

Look I am very proud of being Puerto Rican and I love to help my people and am very proud when I see a Puerto Rican succeed but, I do not hate other races nor do I try to keep away from other races I love to have friends from other races and do not mind having a relationship with another race right now my last girl friend was from America she calls African American and I am looking for another beautiful dark skin woman for a serious relationship that is why I say it is ok to be proud but do not be ignorant by hating someone for being a different race or color. One Love Rodney Marquis Serrano... aka Cano17

corrections Jun 13 2003 10:26:33AM

posted by: cano17

when I wrote my comment I hit the space bar ahead of time for example When I wanted to say for hating someone for being a different race it came out like that hating someone for being a different race I apologize

that ok

Being Aware Jun 13 2003 12:18:03PM

posted by: ellzey66

Being aware of who you are and where you came from and embracing everything that surrounds that give the initial advantage to get off of Hate Avenue. Once you thereafter, begin to pursue success for the benefit others, your motives line up with God and you end up on Success Boulevard.

It is hard to be militant and not hate. A quote from the late slain civil rights leader, Megar Evers: "When y people, some of them don't know and the others don't care". It appears that you are the one that is left w the negative energy.

We must stay encouraged and continue to pass positive knowledge down to our people no matter what ob we encounter along the way.

Who gives the grades Jun 13 2003 08:40:59PM

posted by: seeknspeakthatruth

I do not think there is any "scientific evidence" as to why the "militant" black students do worse. I do believe attitude reflects in work. But, their performance may deal more with the fact that they refuse to assimilate the consequences are lesser marks. Lesser marks, not because they're smart, but because no one (name! teachers) understand them.

corrections and additions Jun 13 2003 08:44:33PM

posted by: seeknspeakthatruth

I meant to say, "because they're not smart." And, you can be militant and not hate. Militant has such a negative connotation, but it is just very principled, very strong beliefs. Just because you're PRO does not automatically make you ANTI- though it often happens like that.

Self esteem and education Jun 13 2003 11:20:00PM

posted by: Naynay55

The evidence is quite obvious. I teach in Title I inner city public school district in the Houston area. The demographics of the district are 54% Hispanic, 38% African American and 8% Anglo. Almost every day I get put down mainly amongst African American students. I do not hear that from the white or Hispanic students. I am not saying that these groups do not put each other down but not to the extent that the African American students do. The put downs from the African- American students often refer to clothes, "nappy" hair or skin color. As an African American teacher and parent, it breaks my heart to hear children putting each other down. Actually, they are practicing self hatred. African-American students get an 'A' in that area. I try to be as positive as possible by exposing all of my students to positive remarks. I purposely show pictures of dark skinned people with ?? black-brown coffee colored skin?? and tell them that all hair is ?good? hair. I put an immediate end to the put downs, but the hatred continues. I have seen that inferiority complex acted out in all of my 11 years of teaching. I believe that part of the reason our children may not reach their potential in school is due to low self-esteem. I know as a teacher my influence is felt but positive self-esteem begins at home but unfortunately that self-esteem is also practiced by African- American adults, sometimes without them even realizing what they are doing or that they are impacting their children. African Americans are bombarded with subtle reminders of how racist the country still is through the media and through daily contact within that Eurocentric society.

Color Jun 14 2003 12:29:11AM

posted by: cherrykakes24

Color is still a big issue today, but we tend to ignore. Even though today millions of afro-americans do extra well we still criticize. When a black person is broke they are considered "REAL". When a black person is wealthy they are considered A "SELL OUT". E

Realize Jun 14 2003 12:42:50AM

posted by: cherrykakes24

Realize that the more a person reads, learns, and research a topic it becomes more important to them. When a black person learns more about the things their ancestors have been through, the more things they start to learn about the people who were in charge at that period in time. Some of us (Afro-Americans) can't control our emotions when we learn more about it and that usually turns into hate which is the wrong way to go. Afro-Americans just don't have the support from family like they should to make grades and go far in life; were getting there but not quite there yet.

Minority Power Jun 14 2003 11:56:46AM

posted by: bajachica

As a black student in a predominantly white high school, sometimes I feel like I have to prove myself. I struggle to make good grades, because when you are in an honor class and you might make a bad grade, the excuse would be because you are a black student. I feel that a person should be proud of their race in everything, just like in one's religion. Also, you are making a difference even though it might not feel like a big one. So, you shouldn't feel race is important because of where and who they are growing up around. But it is important not to be forgotten. I know some "militants" who do really well so it's not really what you are classified as, but think it is your family background. If all you live for is to get on top, so you can look better than everyone else, you won't get far. But if you strive to succeed to make it better on yourself, that is what will take you far.

Certain blacks represent the whole black community Jun 14 2003 03:19:43PM

posted by: impactplayer419

I think I would have to be in the category of "the Black kid who felt good about doing well in school because he reflected positively on the Black community, excelled, even if he viewed society as a whole as somewhat racist and against him."

I think it is very important to represent our community in the highest manner. I am often the only black

the particular University I go to. And unfortunately I have to represent to whole black race on some occasion

I am also a strong believer in W.E.B Dubois talented tenth. 10% of black people will be crafty enough to move into high positions and its up to them to determine the fate of the other 90% of the black population. So its essential that we be competent and able to do our occupations with the upmost ability.

i agree with the article Jun 14 2003 10:44:46PM

posted by: whatup2003

Well im not sure how to address my answer but, when I was in high school alot of my black peers used (t blackness as an excuse to misbehave ex. Say u have a group of black students cutting up in class and the was white, when the teacher got on to the students that was cutting up more then likely they would always an excuse like (oh they just got on to me cause my azz black they dont say nothing to them white folks o) And from my experience the students that surrounded themselves with theories on how the white folks t to keep a brotha down did poorer then the black students who only wanted to learn and better themselves of worrying about white folks and conspiracies etc so in a way i guess i agree with the article. Im not down forgetting where i came from or anything but i think we as black people need to focuss more on bettering ourselves then pondering on theories and conspiracies.

Being Black does not mean that one is ignorant..... Jun 15 2003 09:59:54AM

posted by: kalanchoe

Black parents who nurture, spend quality time, make their children a priority, educate their children about culture, community responsibilities, self-respect, self-worth, encourage and expose their children properly, produce healthy educated children.

That is an ongoing preparedness for the real world. Black children have to given the strength, through the and even in the Church, for the pit-falls of rascism and be encouraged to rise above it.

That does not mean that rascism still does not exist. It certainly does, especially when a young black pers comes out into the real world and realize that they have stepped into a totally different world where the sc affirmative action is also within the White structure.

One love,
Kalanchoe

"Education, the Key to Prosperity." Jun 15 2003 03:37:39PM

posted by: jvb123

When are, we, as a people, going to start working with our youth to eliminate the lies that are fed to them media that prevent them from achieving to their fullest potential? When are we, going to stand up and figl idea, pervasive in our youth, that if you are excelling in school, in advanced classes and dominating (acad you classmates, you are ?acting white?. That idea is absurd! Throughout history, we have pushed educatic it was forbidden upon pain of death! Even during Jim Crow, we created over 150 colleges to serves our chi when the mainstream ones refused to let us in. When mainstream businesses refused our money, we beca entrepreneurs and set up thriving districts such as Little Hayti in Durham, North Carolina and Black Wall S Tulsa, Oklahoma. That all happened, because we educated ourselves, either formally or informally!! Now, people fought to open doors to the mainstream of American intellectual life, a thief come in the night to st victory and perseverance from our kids; the idea that academic excellence is ?acting white?, our ridicule o brothers and sisters who strive for educational and professional excellence. As they go forward in their acc accomplishments, we have Black idiots taunting them with the label ?acting white.? Do not confuse professionalism or academic excellence with ?acting white.? One has nothing in the world to do with the of fact, those Black folks who do not encourage nor support their fellow Black students or Black businesses a actually the ones ?acting white.? They also act white when they do not sound their objections or defend a other races that denigrate their Black brothers and sisters, or when they mistreat their own Black people v same lies, injustice and incorrectness as white supremacist do. Those who are accusing other of ?Acting w are simply being niggerish, or, put a better way ?stupid?, themselves! I issue a challenge to everyone! Ch state?s, your individual district?s, your child?s school?s status on proficiency tests. You will see a great ga performance of black and white students. Check the ACT, SAT, AP, and other tests. With affirmative actior to go off into history and the standards rising, we must reaffirm our intellectual tradition. Start reading (newspaper, books, magazines, etc., use the public library, etc.). As a special treat, give your kids gifts ce for bookstores. Take your children to museums, galleries, parks, etc. We must challenge the idea promulg through BET and throughout history that all we do is play sports and rap!! That will prove we do not need affirmative action to succeed as well as make the proficiency test gap nonexistant. View my sites at: <http://www.geocities.com/jvbzook>, <http://groups.msn.com/BlackIntelligence> or http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Afro-American_Intell_ectual_Association/, . Or, you can email me at Jeffrey_V_Brown@hotmail.com.

"Education, the Key to Prosperity." Jun 15 2003 03:39:13PM

posted by: jvb123

When are, we, as a people, going to start working with our youth to eliminate the lies that are fed to them media that prevent them from achieving to their fullest potential? When are we, going to stand up and figl idea, pervasive in our youth, that if you are excelling in school, in advanced classes and dominating (acad you classmates, you are ?acting white?. That idea is absurd! Throughout history, we have pushed educatic it was forbidden upon pain of death! Even during Jim Crow, we created over 150 colleges to serves our chi when the mainstream ones refused to let us in. When mainstream businesses refused our money, we beca entrepreneurs and set up thriving districts such as Little Hayti in Durham, North Carolina and Black Wall S Tulsa, Oklahoma. That all happened, because we educated ourselves, either formally or informally!!

Now, after our people fought to open doors to the mainstream of American intellectual life, a thief come in night to steal the victory and perseverance from our kids; the idea that academic excellence is ?acting white? of ridicule of our brothers and sisters who strive for educational and professional excellence. As they go forw: their academic accomplishments, we have Black idiots taunting them with the label ?acting white.? Do not professionalism or academic excellence with ?acting white.? One has nothing in the world to do with the of fact, those Black folks who do not encourage nor support their fellow Black students or Black businesses a actually the ones ?acting white.? They also act white when they do not sound their objections or defend a other races that denigrate their Black brothers and sisters, or when they mistreat their own Black people v same lies, injustice and incorrectness as white supremacist do. Those who are accusing other of ?Acting w are simply being niggerish, or, put a better way ?stupid?, themselves!

I issue a challenge to everyone! Check you state?s, your individual district?s, your child?s school?s status proficiency tests. You will see a great gap in the performance of black and white students. Check the ACT, AP, and other tests. With affirmative action about to go off into history and the standards rising, we must our intellectual tradition. Start reading (newspaper, books, magazines, etc., use the public library, etc.). A special treat, give your kids gifts certificates for bookstores. Take your children to museums, galleries, par We must challenge the idea promulgated through BET and throughout history that all we do is play sports rap!! That will prove we do not need affirmative action to succeed as well as make the proficiency test gap nonexistent.

View my sites at: <http://www.geocities.com/jvbzook>, <http://groups.msn.com/BlackIntelligence> or http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Afro-American_Intellctual_Association/, . Or, you can email me at Jeffrey_V_Brown@hotmail.com.

Educate Instead of Encouraging Ignorance! Jun 15 2003 05:42:16PM

posted by: misstammy80

I fully agree with that article! It is important that we educate our children about their racial past but we as do not need to constantly talk negatively about other races, particularly "whites", just to stress Blacks' stru the past. It only burdens childrens with issues that they can not resolve. That in turn leaves kids feeling h angry, and always suspecting to be discriminated against!

To :jvb123 Jun 15 2003 05:44:12PM

posted by: misstammy80

AMEN!

A difference of opinion Jun 15 2003 10:11:13PM

posted by: Goddessoftheuniverse

I guess I would be considered the "militant" black student in that particular case. I would have to disagree the study and point out that there are other reasons why those children might not do well in school. The b issue is that the so-called "militant" students are conscious and culturally aware students. In being cultura aware you are going to have a different opinion from those who are seeking to play it safe and want to cor everyone equal. Meaning those students who have a different and/or challenging opinion will oft times cla: the teacher who is teaching His-Story and a number of other subjective subjects. These clashes also affect attitude of the teacher toward the student, thus affecting their grade.

Now I will agree that every child must learn people skills and how to survive living in a ?culturally diverse? country. However I don?t feel that it should be at the expense of blacks having to blend in and act as if th problems of the past and present is just water under the bridge.

I agree with the article in part Jun 16 2003 01:15:32AM

posted by: CrackersGoldilock

I really agree with the article. Before I commence, let me just call on the hypocrisy of the comments made Cano17. He said he is proud of his race and with a concluding remark that he is looking forward for anothe relationship with an african american. If I may ask what makes him a Puerto Rican? Is it because his parel of different races or because they are of the same race? If that person thinks he loves his race, then he w ensure that his race is preserved. Your race cannot be preserved by interracial marriage ok!

Back on the subject. I'm glad to see that study is now vindicating the struggles of your parents who toiled night under slavery. They were proud of their heritage and avoided interracial marriage.

While those on the extreme fail to do better is not far fetched. Too much of every thing is bad so goes the But one thing I know about conducting a survey is that a 1% flaw in the outcome rubbishes the whole find esence what I'm saying is that all the three groups the study fall into have their flaws. What is missing fro study is that individual performance were not considered. If some of those on the extreme performs bette those in the other groups then the objective of the study is defeated.

However the report or finding excelled in its concluding remarks. It's time to teach african children to be p who and what they are. While they should be taught to have a positive outlook of the society they live in, should be a limit. The children should be taught to be proud of their identify. They should not follow those bandwagons of africa american achievers who continue to belittle their race. One's race is a lasing thing. P come and go but the race still remains.

Parents of African American please endeavour to teach your children their heritage. Teach them to be prou themselves and to have a positive look of the society they live in. It's good having friends cut across the d races but let your borderline should be interracial relationship. 'Africans keep you culture and don't be afr world order'.

Teaching the Youth Jun 16 2003 03:14:55PM

posted by: bdg2090

I'm not suprised by the findings. I think it is very important that black parents(especially black men) like r teach our children at home. The one topic that I say we should teach our kids is History. I remember grow

in Kansas and the only time the teacher talked about blacks was during Black History Month and the only : covered were about slavery and Martin Luther King. The school system both consciously and subconsciously teaches our kids they are no more than slaves that were brought to the Western Hemisphere and that Abe was 1/4 black and he freed slaves because he felt slavery was wrong. Now imagine being a black child and all you hear throughout your whole schooling...Pretty soon you will buy into the propoganda that the scho system pushes on our kids. Don't leave the teaching of our future just to teachers, it isn't fair to our future generations.

Not surprised at all Jun 16 2003 04:56:35PM

posted by: **forensicfox**

I'm not surprised by the results because if you think about it, it makes perfect sense: the militant student hates "Whitey" will reject everything put forth by "The Man" and the system. That means not only missing the bad things, but all of the aspects of education. They see no need to succeed in that world and refuse to assimilate because it may be seen as "selling out," so they go in the opposite direction. What they don't realize that their militancy may be keeping them from absorbing what is good and they only hurt themselves. As those who believe we are all the same and that color doesn't matter, it makes sense that an incident where made an issue would rattle them; they're not used to it, so they may be distracted by it and thrown off to see the student with elements of both: aware of racism, but not distracted by it, as the most successful. It makes sense to me.

I agree with article Jun 16 2003 11:20:50PM

posted by: **darrius3365**

I am a 19 year old black male college student. I have always believed that blacks who blame all of their problems on the "white man" where only hurting themselves, and that article and the study itself will help me tremendously in future debates that I have with others.

I know that racism exists, and I know that I am a victim of profiling and stuff, but I cannot let those things: the injustices of the past prevent me from doing what I have to do to have a decent life. When someone blames all of their problems on someone else (and that applies to so many things other than race as well) doesn't give them any accountability for their actions. The "white man" might have introduced drugs into the community, but that doesn't give me an excuse to use them. There could have been an AIDS conspiracy, but not being forced to have sex (or in the case of the sexually active, unprotected sex).

Yes, it is important to be aware of the past. But that cannot be used as an excuse for you to live inappropriately. The whole conspiracy theory complex just causes people to live a life full of fear and insecurities, which only hurts them.

Another Post Jun 16 2003 11:30:12PM

posted by: **darrius3365**

Hey. It's me again. That is something that I have been thinking about lately.

Blacks in the slave days were not allowed to receive formal education. That was to prevent them from becoming functional members of society. (Notice that most of the old civil rights leaders were highly educated: Dr. Martin L. King, Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington, etc.)

For the blacks that think that it isn't cool to do well in school (and I got made fun of by some of them), they are only fulfilling the white racists' desires.

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