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 English 120

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Can I See Some ID Please?

# Thesis Statement: In developing through high school years, teens struggle with making friends and fitting in. Stereotyping, peer pressure, opinions and parents’ views are all obstacles teens will come face to face with during the process. While overcoming these obstacles, teens typically find that they are facing themselves, in search for their racial identity.

# Without being completely aware of it, kids being to leave what were close friends to become friends with other kids who are “more like them”.

## Sixth and Eighth grade-children begin changing their friends when entering middle school. By the time they enter high school the change has already been made.

### Racial refinement and ethnic generalizations from their parents.

### Kids learn at a young age racial preference and growing up their racial discrimination is highly associated with their racial identity in the future.

# Once adolescents enter high school, their friends are usually made and set to stone depending on race and ethnicity, while going through changes with friends during middle school.

# Once the change was made, significant differences in grades are shown, and whites and blacks are split according to grade differences.

## Research shows that when teens have the idea of “acting black” set in their minds more than just personality and friends are affected.

#### Grades, style and culture are all affected by the simple phrase “acting black” and that it is cool to “act black”.

#### Patterns are seen according to academic achievement levels in teens that “act black” compared to kids that “act white”.

##### It seems to be, that white teens are in higher-level classes, honors and AP courses, while black kids are all together in the lower level classes.

##### Black kids think its cooler if they “act black” and be in lower level classes as opposed to “acting white”

## NJ high school is taking the racial separation amongst groups of friends to a new level.

# Competing against each other through projects, the author demonstrates how the high school takes advantage of the separation amongst teens, and how they can benefit from it.

# People must look beyond cultural explanations in order to achieve success.

# Peer group selection amongst teens is examined, and the influence of racial identity, ethnicity, culture and style are all major contributors.

# Racial identity, feelings of racial similarities, composition of race and one’s neighborhood and background are all related to peer group selection

### A scientific study was done on African American high school students

# The research serves as evidence as to why black students will choose to stay with other black students

# Black students feel more comfortable sitting at the ‘black table’ at lunch table or the “differing races table” rather then the “white table”

# Black students feel more comfortable meeting someone when there is a racial similarity

##### A. Racial Identity Development was predominantly developed because African Americans had to understand the black experience in the United States of America

##### B. At first a “resocialization experience” took place, which was a time where black people were learning other cultures and progressed into an non-Afrocentric to a multicultural identity.

##### C. However through this movement, individuals usually find themselves closing in on just their culture, almost unaware, and focus more on their own culture compared to others.

# Teens exploring racial identity face several obstacles that may pressure them or force them in a certain direction that they never intended on.

# Studies and research show that teens face peer pressure, parental opinions and stereotyping which are all contributors on peer group selection.

# The three young girls from Growing Up and Growing Apart are examples of leaders because despite their differences the three stuck together while everyone around them fell apart.

### Maurice Berger in, White Lies, is not necessarily a leader, however not a follower either. Instead of getting caught up in the racial situation he was surrounded by as a teen in NYC he decided to observe rather then get caught up in the dilemma.

 Edward W. Howe once said, “It is hard to convince a high-school student that he will encounter a lot of problems more difficult than those of algebra and geometry.” High-schoolers are arrogant when it comes to drama with friends and relationships and somewhat ignore the issues that they face emotionally. High school is a time experienced by adolescents, going through their “awkward stage”, and learning to adjust to the change from middle school, or high school. During the process, identity crisis is something that every adolescent goes through. Every teen struggles with the concept of finding themselves, and who they are to a certain degree. In developing through high school years, teens struggle with making friends and fitting in. Peer pressure, stereotyping, opinions and parents’ views are all obstacles teens will come face to face with during the process. While overcoming these obstacles, teens typically find that they are facing themselves, in search for their racial identity.

In the *NY Times* article, “Growing Up and Growing Apart” by Tamar Lewin, the subject of ‘racial identity’ is said to start at a young age. Without being completely aware of it, children tend to break apart from those who are “different” and come together with those who are “more like them”. This strange yet common process seems to begin around sixth grade. As children are moving up from elementary school and closer to high school, kids are changing their peer groups. Once entering high school, the ‘change’ regarding friendships has already been made, because of style, culture and race. Although this may seem to be strictly the child’s decision to change their peer group, there are many influences that have been noticed, tested and proven. As seen in a study done by Brown University and New York University’s Deborah Rivas-Drake, Diane Hughes and Niobe Way, parents may have a high contribution to kids peer group selection. “Many youth reported high levels of ethnic centrality as well as private regard”(575). Adolescents receive racial refinement and ethnic generalizations from their parents, causing them to change their friends based on race. “Centrality refers to the extent to which adolescents define themselves in terms of their ethnicity, whereas private regard refers to adolescents’ personal affect toward or feelings about their ethnic group”(561). Kids learn at a young age racial preference and growing up their racial discrimination is highly associated with their racial identity in the future.

Once adolescents enter high school, their friend groups are usually set to stone after going through that change in middle school. Peer groups in high school are usually based upon interests, style and more recently noticed, race and ethnicity. Once these groups and cliques are formed not only is personality and style affected, but there have been other changes that have been noticed as well. In the split of whites and blacks, it has been seen that there is a significant difference in academic levels and achievement within the two different groups. Most whites are in the upper-level courses, like AP and college level courses where as blacks are in the lower-level high school classes. The popular terms amongst teens, “acting black” and “acting white” play a huge role in this contribution toward racial identity. When teens have the idea of “acting black” they visualize a certain look and a certain attitude. Not only are their styles changing, but their attitudes toward certain people and certain things are too. Sonja Peterson-Lewis and Lisa M. Bratton state that these ideas of “acting white” and “acting black” play a huge role in teens throughout their search of racial identity. The argument presented by African American students to avoid academic achievement is that a peer culture declares academic achievement as a white domain(81). Black students feel that caring about grades and schoolwork is “acting white” and that “negatively labels achievement-related behaviors as ‘acting white’”(82). African American students perceive doing well in school as a “white domain” so they slack purposely to keep their image. Grades, style and culture are all affected by this simple, derogatory term “acting black”.

In the *NY Times* article mentioned earlier, “Growing Up and Growing Apart” by Tamar Lewis, patterns are also seen according to academic achievement levels in teens that “act black” compared to teens that “act white”. Again, actual teens that have been interviewed have also come to realize and notice that white teens are in high-level courses when black kids are all together at lower-levels. Sierre, one of the interviewed teens from Columbia High School says, “It sometimes bothers me to see how many of my African-American friends aren’t in the higher-level classes, and how they try to be cool around their friends by acting up and trying to be silly and getting into fights”(246). Again the idea of “acting black” is taken note of, because these African-American teens think it’s cooler to act up in class rather then paying attention and taking it seriously. Students in high school are developing this corrosive idea that “behaving like honors students is “acting white”, while “acting black” demands they emulate lower-level students”(246).

In a New Jersey high school, a similar study was done regarding racial separation. Melissa Marinari did a study based on Korean students and their struggles throughout high school because of discrimination, and how they succeeded anyway. The study shows that schoolwork was actually getting competitive amongst the racial groups to see who could do their work better. Although this may seem beneficial in a way, because students are striving to succeed in their work, it also lead to controversy throughout cliques in the school. Many of the white teens made comments about how the Korean population was increasing, calling them a “gang” and how this was almost a student conflict for them(385). Although the white students of this New Jersey high school were discriminatory against Korean students, there was also black lash from the Asian students as well. The term “bragging” about one’s race came up a lot in the student interviews and when asked why they used the term, one particular girl, Laura, had an interesting answer. “Korean students at BCRS who ‘refused’ to speak English, even though they were able to, instead chose to communicate with each other almost exclusively in Korean”(385). This, to American students, was taken offensively because this refusal to speak English “was an indication of how Korean student felt that they were in some ways better then American students”(385). Simple separations of language and culture set apart teens in high school, causing controversy and problems amongst teens. In this case, white teens were actually angry at the fact that Korean’s were thinking they were better, although there is no lasting competition between the races at all.

Although the given reasons of style, culture and parent opinions all come into play while teens select their friends and peer groups, more obvious reasons also take a toll during the process. Racial identity, feelings of racial similarities, composition of race and one’s neighborhood and backgrounds are all also related to peer group selection. A study “Racial Peer Group Selection in African American Students” serves as evidence as to why black students will choose to stay with other black students. Research, done by Jay C. Wade and Olayiwola Okesola, shows that black students feel more comfortable sitting at the ‘black table’ or the ‘differing races table’ rather then the ‘white table’. This shows that teens tend to stick with others that have more in common with themselves because they will simply feel more comfortable, and more welcomed. “The results of the study provide insight into the influence and importance of racial identity and other factors in understanding the racial attitudes and behavior of African American adolescents in a multiethnic environment”(106). In a multiethnic environment, although it may be diverse, black students will still find themselves with other blacks, and white students will still find themselves with other whites. However, something even more interesting found in this study is that teens that don’t find themselves with other peers like them would rather be alone than with someone that is of different race. “Also consistent with Black racial identity theory is the finding that confusion related to racial identity was associated with not choosing to associate with a peer group that is multiracial and, rather, choosing to be alone”(107).

Racial identity is an issue that teens are facing today presently however this is not just a twentieth-century issue, and actually goes back many years. W.E.B. DuBois once said, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line”(2). In the book “Black and White in American Culture: An Anthropology from the Massachusetts Review”, Chametzky Kaplan goes into great detail about how the issue of racial identity may have started. Racial identity development was predominantly developed because African Americans had to understand the black experience in the United States of America. At first a “resocialization experience” took place, which was a time where black people were learning other cultures and progressed into a non-Afrocentric living to a multicultural identity. However, through this movement individuals usually find themselves closing in on just their culture, almost unaware, and focus more on their own lives, style, ethnicity and culture compared to others. From one of the short stories, “A Negro Student at Harvard”, a black student explains that his bond with others around him is based around the color of their skin. “Thus the group of professional men, students, white-collar workers, and upper servants, whose common bond was color of skin…”(123). The author of this short article, W.E.B. DuBois explains no matter how old, where you’re from, occupation or what social class you’re in, you’ll always find yourself with the people that are like you “form[ing] a unit”(123).

Today, Teens exploring racial identity face several obstacles that may pressure them or force them in a certain direction that they never intended on. Studies and research show that teens face peer pressure, parental opinions and stereotyping, which are all contributors on peer group selection. The book *White Lies* by Maurice Berger mentions that teens that grew up in the past, growing up in the present and that will grow up in the future will all go through and overcome these same issues. However, how they overcome them is what will determine the kind of person that they are, being a ‘follower’ or a ‘leader’.

The three girls from “Growing Up and Growing Apart” are examples of leaders because despite their differences the three stuck together while everyone else around them fell apart. In Maurice Berger’s novel, the author wrote about his experience growing up in New York City as a teen. Berger took a different approach to his difficulties in finding his racial identity throughout his adolescent years. Not only being surrounded by generalization and stereotypes at home, and within his neighborhood, but at school too. “What do they choose to do? They choose to go out and sell drugs. They choose to go out and kill people. They choose to do a lot of other things. But they choose to not get on that bus”(69) Berger describes what his elementary school teacher, Ms. Johnson, says about blacks. The generalization of all black sell drugs and all blacks kill people coming from adults, especially a teacher, is just corrupting the young children’s minds. The repetition of “them” is also singling black people out as something different from white people, a stereotype.(69) Racial identity affects people’s idea of “normality” because being white isn’t at all the same thing as being “normal”. This is one of the many examples Berger presents in his novel that shows how people think, but never really admit. Throughout the novel Maurice questions why being white is so different than being black or Spanish. He wonders what is whiteness worth and why is it a big deal? “Any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me”(161). Berger makes reference to *Pipers My Calling*, artwork by Adrian Margaret Smith Piper, who would hand a card to anyone who laughed, agreed with or made a racist remark. Berger states that there is “no contemporary artwork that is more successful in dealing with racism”(161). Like the three girls from “Growing Up and Growing Apart”, Berger didn’t get caught up in racial separation when he was a teen. Instead he sat back and observed teens behaviors and his peers around him.

Racial identity affects teens all around the world, and there is basically no stopping it. Peer pressure, stereotyping, opinions and parents’ views are all obstacles teens have to deal with when facing racial identity. While overcoming these obstacles, teens typically find that they are facing themselves, in search of their racial identity. And within this search teens find themselves switching their friends, style and attitudes all around one thing, race. Is it really worth all of the trouble? Studies shows that teens are changing their whole life around just to fit a certain look or stereotype, meanwhile it is being done unintentionally. True identity is found within someone’s heart and soul, and as James Baldwin, an American novelist, said, “An identify would seem to be arrived at by the way in which the person faces and uses his experience.”

Works Cited

Berger, Maurice. *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999. Print.

White Lies, written by Maurice Berger, is a biography written about the authors life as a teen. Growing up in New York City with parents of different races, beliefs and customs, Berger struggled with fitting in and became a great observer and examined the racial matters. This was a good source because it have an outsiders view on racial matters and teens struggles with racial identity. Maurice Berger is an American author, cultural historian, curator and art critic. He has won numerous awards such as an Emmy Award from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, and was a finalist for the 2000 Horace Mann Bond Book Award of Harvard University.

Chametzky, Jules. *Black and White in American Culture: an Anthology from the Massachusetts Review*. [Amherst]: University of Massachusetts, 1969. Print.

Black and White in American Culture is an anthology made up of short stories, poems and opinions based on African Americans in white culture. Whether it is socially, or through music or literature the book gives the views of several black people. This was a useful source because it exemplified blacks' point of views in adjusting to white culture. Chametzky attended Brooklyn College and the University of Minnesota and received a PhD in 1958. Chametzky is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and the founder and co-editor of The Massachusetts Review.

Lewin, Tamar. "Growing Up and Growing Apart." *The New York Times Series-The*

*World Is Text* (2000). Print.

“Growing Up and Growing Apart” is a piece that was published in the *NY Times* in 2000. The piece discusses those hardships between three friends during the time of entering high school. Their struggles to stick together while everyone falls apart according to race are explained in depth throughout the article. The paper is based around this article and demonstrates the actual struggles teens face when entering high school. Tamar Lewin is a national reporter covering education. Lewin was a contributor to the Pulitzer Prize-winning series, “How Race is Lived In America,” in 2000 and the “Class Matters” series in 2005.

Marinari, Melissa. "Racial Formation and Success among Korean High School Students."

*The Urban Review* 37.5 (2005): 375-98. Print.

This article was a good source because it shows the relationship between academic success and racial identity. It goes into great detail about how American students feel toward Korean students, and their opinions on racial identity. It explains how it affects them and more importantly, how they learn to cope with it. Melissa Marinari specializes and has a PhD and a CIE in Anthropology. She graduated from Columbia University and is a middle school teacher who also researches and follows her research by experiments regarding race, language and the public school system.

Peterson-Lewis, Sonja, and Lisa M. Bratton. "Perceptions of "Acting Black" Among

African American Teens: Implications of Racial Dramaturgy for Academic and Social Achievement." *The Urban Review* 36.2 (2004): 81-100. Print.

This article shows teens' ideas of "acting black" and what it means to live that type of lifestyle. "Acting black" contributes to change in style, academic achievement and most importantly, friends. This article was a good source because it goes into detail about one of the causes of racial separation amongst teens. Sonja Peterson-Lewis graduated and received her PhD from Temple University, she focuses and researched African American psychology, pop-culture and ethnographic methods. Lisa M. Bratton graduated from the University of Maryland and received her PhD from Adelphi. She is now a professor at the University of Maryland and focuses on history. However, she also runs research and experiments focusing on African-American psychology.

Revas-Drake, Deborah, Diane Hughes, and Niobe Way. "A Preliminary Analysis of

Associations Among Ethnic-Racial Socialization, Ethnic Discrimination, and Ethnic Identity Among Urban Sixth Graders." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* (2009): 558-81. Print.

The research provided in this article was extremely helpful because it shows how racial identity has an effect on kids before they even enter high school. The research shows that this racial formation that teens struggle wish starts at a young age. Deborah Revas-Drake graduated from Brown University. She is now a professor there and is also an assistant professor of Education and Human development. Her focuses in research base racial identity and the processes teens make to decide their status in society. Diane Hughes is a professor at NYU teaching Applied Psychology. She also studies children from sixth to twelfth grade and mains her focus around the socialization goals, beliefs and practices of kids and how they change as they grow. Niobe Way is also a professor at NYU teaching Applied Psychology. She is also the co-Director of the Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education at NYU and the President for the *Society for Research on Adolescence.* She received her doctorate from Harvard University in Human Development and Psychology and was an NIMH postdoctoral fellow in the psychology department at Yale University.

Wade, Jay C., and Olayiwola Okesola. "Racial Peer Group Selection in African

American High School Students." *Multicultural Counseling and Development* 30 (2002): 96-109. Print.

This article discusses the influence racial identity has on teens entering their adolescent years. The research done shows that this is one of the main reasons why African American teens choose to stay with other black kids. This was a reliable source because it states real facts about black teens and their selection in friends based on race, all backed up with strong evidence. Jay C. Wade is a well-known professor at Fordham University. His disciplines are Psychology and Social and Behavioral Sciences. He is known for his abstract experiments and research of African-American teens and males. Okesola Olayiwola also studied and now teaches at Fordham University. Olayiwola is teaching psychology and also goes into further research regarding teens and their racial identities.