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Article

Jesus and the streets: A hermeneutical framework for understanding the intraracial gender academic achievement gap in black urban America and the United Kingdom

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Abstract

In this article, against John Ogbu's oppositional culture theory and Claude Steele's disidentification hypothesis, this work offers a more appropriate neo-Marxian hermeneutical framework for contextualizing, conceptualizing, and evaluating the locus of causality for the black male/female intra-racial gender academic achievement gap in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Positing that in general the origins of the black/white academic achievement gap is grounded in what Paul C. Mocombe refers to as a 'mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function'. Within Mocombe's neo-Marxist theoretical framework the intra-racial gender academic achievement gap between black boys and girls is a result of the social class functions associated with the urban street life where the majority of urban black males achieve their status, social mobility, and economic gain, and the black church where black females are overwhelmingly more likely to achieve their status, social mobility, and drive for economic gain via education and professionalization.

Keywords: BLACK/WHITE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP; DISIDENTIFICATION THEORY; MISMATCH OF LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CLASS FUNCTION; OPPOSITIONAL CULTURE THEORY

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The black male/female academic achievement gap is an empirical problematic that dates back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. Overwhelmingly, like all other groups in the United Kingdom and United States, black females tend to significantly outperform black males on standardized tests, reading and writing in particular, giving rise to what is commonly referred to in the academic literature as the black intra-racial gender academic achievement gap between black boys and girls (Wright, 2013; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013; Showunmi, 2013). Unlike white British and Americans, however, where boys typically tend to outperform girls in science and math, and girls tend to outperform boys in reading and writing, in the African American and black British Caribbean communities in the United States and United Kingdom, respectively, girls typically outperform boys in almost all areas (except math, albeit this gap is rapidly closing). Differences in reading, writing, and science, on standardized tests lead to great social inequalities in the society and disidentification with school among black males (Ogbu, 1986; Steele, 1997, 1998; Wilson, 1998; Mocombe, 2005, 2008; Wright, 2013; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013; Mocombe *et al*., 2013; Showunmi, 2013).

In the United States, the academic achievement reading proficiency rate of black males is twice as low as both white males and black females. The employment rate of black men aged 18 to 24 is 30 percent lower than that for young men of other races or nationality. Two-thirds of these black males do not attend college compared with approximately 60 percent of both white males and black females. Black men make up 40 percent of all prison inmates, but less than 7 percent of the entire population; and they are less likely to attend any form of religious institution (Steele, 1997; Haskins, 2006; King, 2006; Hanson et al., 2007; Wilson, 2007; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013). Conversely, black women constitute over 80 percent of the black church. The unemployment rate for black women is nearly 20 percent less than that for black men, while in the past three decades the annual mean income of black women has nearly equaled that of black men. Black women enroll in college at the same rate as white males and graduate at twice the rate of black men. Black women earn 63 percent and 71 percent, respectively, the number of graduate and professional degrees awarded to all African-Americans (King, 2006; Parker and Orozco, 2008; Cross, 1999).

Similarly in the United Kingdom, the academic achievement rate of black British males on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is twice as low as both white males and black females. Black British men aged 16–24 years of age have the highest rates of unemployment, 48 percent, of all groups. Black British women are more likely to be employed where they form 67 percent of the British Labor Market, and earn twice as much as black men. Black British Caribbean men 18–24 are overwhelmingly repre-

sented in the British prison system *vis-à-vis* their general population. Lastly, black British women constitute over 80 percent of all black church-goers in black British communities (Peach, 1996; Berthoud, 2009; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013).

As these statistics demonstrate black females, in both the US and UK, are more likely to attend church, be academically successful, educated, and employed, than are their black male counterparts, who overwhelmingly are unemployed, associated with athletics, the urban street life, and criminalized. In this work, we posit the Protestant capitalist social structure of class inequality and its ideological apparatuses, the black church, education, and the streets, in black communities in the US and UK as the background for 'enframing' and exploring the black/white academic achievement gap in general and this intra-racial gender gap between black boys and girls in particular.

Background of the problem

For the most part, two dominant theories on different sides of the epistemological spectrum attempt to explain the gender academic achievement gap, and its social ramifications, as it pertains to all ethnic and racial groups. First, researchers typically highlight the neurological and psychological maturation of girls over boys. That is, the differing maturation speed of the brain between boys and girls affects how each gender processes information and how they perform on standardized tests. Girls mature faster and typically perform better on standardized tests early on in their academic careers; however, boys tend to catch up and perform better in their adolescent years especially in science and math (Hanlon *et al.*, 1999; Sax, 2005). Second, other researchers point to social roles and gender socialization (Good, 1987; Wilson, 1998; Jencks and Phillips, 1998; Tach and Farkas, 2006). Girls are more likely to do well in subject areas, reading and writing, that are deemed more feminine and boys tend to do better in areas, math and science, that are deemed more masculine. This is a product of gender socialization.

In terms of understanding the academic achievement gap among African American and British Caribbean black males and females in the United States and the United Kingdom the socialization, as opposed to the biological, hypothesis has dominated the social science literature over the past two decades (Wilson, 1998; Jencks and Phillips, 1998; Carter, 2005; Wright, 2013; Mocombe *et al.*, 2013). In this work, we posit a neo-Marxian hermeneutical framework, Paul C. Mocombe's (Mocombe, 2005, 2008, 2009; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013) 'mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function' hypothesis, as a more appropriate hermeneutical (socialization) framework for framing, conceptualizing, and exploring the black/white academic achievement gap in general and the black male/black female intra-racial aca-

demic achievement gap in particular. This neo-Marxian hermeneutical framework posits the Protestant capitalist social structure of class inequality and its ideological apparatuses, the black church, education, and the streets, in black communities in the US and the UK as the background for 'enframing', conceptualizing, and exploring the black/white academic achievement gap in general and the intra-racial gender gap in particular.

Contemporarily, social scientists appropriate two dominant socialization theories to contextualize, conceptualize, and explain the black male/female intra-racial gender social and academic achievement gap: John Ogbu's (1986) burden of acting white or oppositional culture hypothesis and Claude Steele's (1997) stereotype threat theory. Ogbu's and Steele's positions are broader theories that attempt to explain the black/white academic achievement gap in general. The black/white academic achievement gap is a product of black socialization within marginalized and black social groups that are discriminated against, which causes them to disparage academic achievement or disidentify with school either for fear of confirming white stereotypes regarding black inferiority, *á la* Steele, or for fear of being labeled white by their black peers, *á la* Ogbu. As these theories pertain to the black male/female academic achievement gap, both positions posit that the black male/female intra-racial gender academic achievement gap is a product of disidentification with school amongst black males as opposed to black females, who are more likely to academically out perform their male counterparts (Showunmi, 2013; Wright, 2013).

Traditional environmental theories, building on the cultural-ecological approach of Ogbu, posit that black American students, given their racial marginalization within the socioeconomic social structure of American capitalist society, either developed an oppositional social 'identity-in-differential' that defined 'certain activities, events, symbols, and meanings as not appropriate for them because those behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings are characteristic of white Americans' (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986: 181), or that such an 'underclass' identity stemmed from a 'culture of poverty' that devalued educational attainment (Jencks and Phillips, 1998: 10). This thesis has come to be known in the social science literature as the oppositional culture thesis (Gordon, 2006; Tyson *et al*., 2005; Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998, 2002; Cook and Ludwig 1998; Wilson, 1998; Farkas *et al*., 2002; Steele, 1997; Ogbu, 1991). Both positions, essentially, argue that the choice between exercising a black cultural ethos and striving for academic success within the larger society diametrically oppose one another. Further goes the argument, this conflict contributes to underachievement among black adolescent students, *vis-à-vis* their white counterparts, who do not encounter this cultural opposition. Black students intentionally underachieve for fear of being labeled 'acting white' by their black adolescent peers, who view academic achievement and success as the status marker of whites (Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010).

For Fordham and Ogbu the 'burden of acting white', among black Americans is a constant phenomenon throughout the United States, which among black school children has come to be used as a larger oppositional peer culture with respect to indicators of academic performance and success (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986: 181). That is to say, as Tyson *et al*. points out, 'academic achievement is not valued in the community because it is perceived as conforming to standard norms of success among white Americans' (Tyson *et al*., 2005: 584). This position is complimented by the broader conservative hypothesis that incorporates the following: the culture-of-poverty position, which posits that impoverished black Americans, the 'black underclass', as a cultural community devalues education; 'the Protestant work ethic'; and the two-parent family in favor of instant gratification and episodic violence, which gives rise to the larger oppositional peer culture prevalent among adolescent school-aged children (Steele, 1990: 95-96; Steele, 1992: 75). Within this oppositional cultural understanding, black males academically underachieve *vis-à-vis* their female counterparts, because they view academic success as the status marker of white males and females, and disidentify with achieving academically and socially for fear of being labeled white or effeminate by their black male peers. Instead they are more likely to identify with black non-dominant cultural capital: speaking Black/African American English Vernacular (BEV/AAEV), athletics, playing the class clown, Hip-hop culture, and street life where they achieve their status in the larger society (Ogbu, 1986; Carter, 2005). On the contrary, black females, who are underrepresented in the Hip-hop culture of black urban America, are more likely to achieve academically where they do not encounter the burden of the acting white stigma. Numerous scholars in the United Kingdom have extrapolated Ogbu's theory to black British Caribbean pupils (Wright, 2013; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013). That is, black British youth, males in particular, view academic success and education as the status marker of women and white British society. As a result, they are less likely to apply themselves academically for fear of being labeled 'acting white' by their black British male peers, choosing instead the street, athletic, and entertainment life of black urban America (Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013).

Whereas in the socialization of blacks in the larger mainstream society, Ogbu focuses on racial marginalization and identification, blacks view academic success as the status marker of whites, as the locus of causality for black disidentification with school, Steele focuses on self-esteem and racial stereotype threats. Similarly to Ogbu's hypothesis, Steele's (1997) stereotype threat theory posits that blacks underachieve *vis-à-vis* their white counterparts for fear of confirming the negative racial stereotypes whites associate with their intellectual abilities, and the threat that poses to their self-esteem. In other

words, blacks do not place much effort on standardized tests for fear of confirming white stereotypes of their intellectual abilities when they do not do well, and this subsequently affects their feeling of well-being and racial pride. Within this understanding, black males predominantly disidentify or disconnect with school for fear of confirming black intellectual inferiority, and the threat that fear poses to their self-esteem and racial identity. The coping strategy implemented by the group at risk for being stereotyped is to disidentify with the domain that poses the threat. In the case of academic achievement, this domain would be school (Steele, 1997). School identification is the central component of stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1998). As a result of their lack of success in school and fear of confirming white stereotypes associated with their lack of success, black males are more likely to disidentify with school as opposed to black females, who tend to be more academically sound and successful because of their identification with education.

Critique of Ogbu and Steele

For the most part, researchers have found very little empirical evidence to support Ogbu's oppositional culture hypothesis as either the locus of causality for the black/white academic achievement gap, or the disidentification with school found among black males (Wilson, 1998; Carter, 2003, 2005). Instead some scholars, such as Carter (2003, 2005), interpret the hypothesis as a real struggle that inner-city African American youth face between pursuing the dominant cultural capital of the larger American society at the expense of their non-dominant cultural capital of their inner-city communities. This in turn highlights other activities, including athletics, Hip-hop culture, speaking Black/African-American English, and the street life as status markers. We agree with Carter on this identification of non-dominant cultural capital with (black underclass) identity as a more appropriate interpretation of Ogbu's thesis. However, we see the struggle from a structural as opposed to the postmodern Bourdieuian cultural capital perspective highlighted by Carter. That is, the conflict as we frame and interpret the opposition found among inner-city African American and black British Caribbean youth is not between different forms of cultural capital. For us, Bourdieuian cultural capital is an account of class structure reproduction and differentiation in capitalist societies, not an account of alternative forms of cultural practices, outside of class structure reproduction and differentiation, arrived at through the deferment of meaning in ego-centered communicative discourse, as highlighted by Derrida's notion of *différance*. As such, the conflict as we frame and interpret the opposition found among inner-city African American and black British Caribbean youth is a relational problem between social class roles fostered

in black America and the United Kingdom by the capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality in the larger societies, and not their cultural values, which is no different from white America and the United Kingdom, respectively. That is to say, historically speaking, the capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality via ideological apparatuses such as the black church, education, and the streets in both countries structurally produced two distinct racial-classes, or social class language games, in black communities, i.e., a black middle class and an underclass centered on their social class roles in the societies. Their cultural worldviews, structured by the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism via ideological apparatuses such as the church, education, the streets, and Hip-hop culture, is no different from their white counterparts. However, what is distinguishable between some blacks and their white counterparts are their class divisions/positions and social relations to production not their cultural identities (Wilson, 1978, 1998). Church-attending and educated black middle class practices are more in line with that of their white middle class counterparts rather than with the practices of the black underclass (Steele, 1997, 1998). However, the latter's practices are not cultural but structural. The black underclass tends to be less educated and poor, and as a result engages in material practices around their poor material conditions within their urban (street) environments. These poor material practices – attending (or not) church, speaking Ebonics or Black British Talk, hustling and pimping, playing sports, and entertaining on the block – which are responses to structural practices, poor housing, schools, economic opportunities, despair, of the inner cities, become cultural over generations in the logic of Carter and other oppositional cultural theorists. However, our position here is that the underlying ontology, the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, of the black underclass is the same as in bourgeois black and white America, which seeks status, upward mobility, economic gain, etc. via education and professional roles over street life, rapping, playing sports, the entertainment industry, etc., of the black underclass.

As such, whereas Carter and many oppositional cultural theorists view the opposition between blacks and whites as a conflict between different cultural capital and habitus in Bourdieuian parlance, we view Bourdieu's theory and its use among scholars as a culturalization of capitalist racial-class structural reproduction and differentiation. We view the black/white academic achievement gap and the disidentification with school among black males in the US and the UK as opposed to their female counterparts to be a product of their identification with dominant social class roles, i.e., athletes, entertainers, and street life, which do not require education or academic success. This structural framing is a subtle difference between our position and the position of oppositional culture theory. In our view, it is not that black males choose not

to place effort on education as the means to achieving economic gain, status, and upward social mobility. Our position is that they choose, as Ogbu highlights, to identify with other avenues, which we deem social class functional roles (athletics, entertainment, etc.), and which are more likely to lead them to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility in the larger society's capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality than is the education avenue of their white and black bourgeois counterparts in the suburbs where they are less represented.

Be that as it may, it is our position that Steele's stereotype threat theory under-analyzes the problem. It overlooks what ideological apparatus and its functions black males identify with as their status marker (athletes, entertainers, and hip-hopsters) in the larger society, and the impact that that identification has on their academic underachievement and or disidentification with school. In other words, Steele's argument is problematic for three reasons. First, unlike Ogbu, who places other blacks as the cultural reference group through which black adolescents constitute their identity and self-esteem, which leads to their subsequent underachievement, Steele posits whites and their negative stereotypes of black intelligence and black internalization of these stereotypes as the locus of causality for their academic underachievement. In both cases individual responses and scores on standardized tests are attributed to black internalization of cultural group norms – white stereotype norms for Steele and black adolescent norms for Ogbu. As mentioned in our critique of Ogbu, the reference group should not simply be whites or blacks. Instead, the relational roles of blacks, and their identification with the ideological apparatuses of these economic social roles within the Protestant capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality of the society should be the reference point, over white stereotypes and an oppositional culture.

Second, Steele's position, as with Ogbu's, is an *ex post facto* argument regarding the academic achievement gap. That is, it explains the effects of perpetual black academic achievement and why blacks are not putting in the effort to catch-up to their white counterparts. However, it does not explain the initial locus of causality for that initial effect.

Third, the argument is inconsistent. It explains how black women come to identify with school because of their success, and how black men do not identify with school because of their underachievement or lack of success. However, as previously highlighted, to be consistent with its inherent logic that identification with an institution leads to success, the hypothesis should highlight what it is that black men identify with, their non-dominant cultural capital, that leads to their success, and lack thereof, in the society, and how this identification impacts their academic achievement or underachievement. In other words, in overlooking how their (black males) stereotypical identifica-

tion with their social class roles as athletes, hip-hopsters, entertainers, and the street-life in the larger society impacts their self-esteem, social status, and lack of academic achievement or identification with school, a partial picture is painted of the framework for conceptualizing and evaluating the black intra-racial gender academic achievement gap.

In this work, in keeping with the socialization argument of Ogbu and Steele, we seek to offer a more consistent and sociohistorically comprehensive hermeneutical (structural) framework for conceptualizing and understanding the black male/female intra-racial gender academic achievement gap in the US and the UK that is based on Mocombe's (2005, 2010, 2012; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013) 'mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function' hypothesis. Mocombe's thesis places black social roles within the capitalist social structure of class inequality as the reference point over white racism or an oppositional culture theory for understanding black academic underachievement. It suggests that the black intra-racial gender academic achievement gap is dialectically a result of structural reproduction and differentiation opposing the social class functions associated with urban street life, athletics, and the entertainment industry from which black males overwhelming achieve their status, social mobility, and economic gain and the black church where black females achieve their status, social mobility, and drive for economic gain via education and professionalization.

Theory

Essentially, the theoretical framework and argument here is a relational one. Black male academic underachievement *vis-à-vis* their white male, white female, and black female counterparts in the US and the UK is an epiphenomenon of their socialization and consciousness as determined by class divisions and their social relations to the mode of production in the societies' capitalist social structure of class inequality. Ogbu and Steele overlook this theoretical framework for more individual analyses *vis-à-vis* white racism and black opposition to the racism, which overlooks the relational and material framework within which black individual practices take place (Wilson, 1978, 1998). Mocombe's (2005, 2008, 2010) Neo-Marxist 'mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function' hypothesis better captures this structural framework.

Generally speaking, Mocombe posits that black American students academically underachieve *vis-à-vis* their white and Asian counterparts because of two factors, comprehension, which is grounded in their linguistic structure, African American English Vernacular (AAEV), and the social functions associated with their linguistic systems and over-representation in social roles as athletes and entertainers in the American capitalist social structure

of class inequality as speakers of AAEV (Mocombe, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013). In other words, black American students have more limited skills in processing information from articles, books, tables, charts, and graphs *vis-à-vis* their white and Asian counterparts because of their linguistic structures and the social roles associated with the former. Early on in their academic careers the poor black social class language game, 'black American underclass', who have become the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for black youth the world over, created by the social relations of capitalism in the US, produces and perpetuates a sociolinguistic status group that reinforces a linguistic structure (Black/African American English Vernacular – BEV or AAEV), which linguistically and functionally renders its young social actors impotent in classrooms where the structure of Standard English is taught. Thus early on (k-5th grade) in their academic careers, many black American inner city youth struggle in the classroom and on standardized tests because individually they are linguistically and grammatically having problems with comprehension, i.e., 'a mismatch of linguistic structure', grounded in their (Black or African American English Vernacular) speech patterns or linguistic structure (Mocombe, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013).

This mismatch of linguistic structure component of Mocombe's argument is not a reiteration of the 1960s' 'linguistic deficit' hypothesis, which suggested that working-class and minority children were linguistically deprived, and their underdeveloped slangs' and patois' did not allow them to think critically in the classroom (Bereiter and Englemann 1966; Whiteman and Deutsch, 1968; Hess, 1970). On the contrary, as Labov (1972) brilliantly demonstrated in the case of African American youth, they are very capable of analytical and critical thinking within their linguistic structure, Black English Vernacular. As such, what Mocombe posits through his mismatch of linguistic structure hypothesis is that the pattern recognition in the neocortex of the brains of many poor African American inner-city youth is structured by and within the systemicity of Black/African-American English Vernacular (BEV/AAEV). As a result, when they initially enter school there is a phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic mismatch between BEV/AAEV and the Standard English (SE) utilized in schools to teach and test them. Given the segregation and poverty of many young blacks growing up in the inner-cities of America, they acquire the systemicity of Black English and early on in their academic careers lack the linguistic flexibility to switch between BEV/AAEV and SE when they take standardized tests. As a result, many black youths have a syntactic problem decoding and understanding phrases and sentences on standardized tests written in Standard English (Kamhi, 1996; Johnson, 2005; Mocombe, 2005, 2007, 2010; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013).

Later on in their academic careers as these youth become adolescents and acquire the linguistic flexibility to code switch between BEV/AAEV and SE, the test scores close dramatically and then widen again by the time they get to middle school (Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013). This widening of scores from middle school onward, according to Mocombe, is a result of a mismatch of the function of their language. Black American students are disadvantaged by the social class functions the black American underclass reinforces against those of middle class black and white America within the larger society. That is, success or economic gain and upward mobility amongst the 'black underclass', who speak BEV/AAEV, is not measured by identification with, and status obtained through, education as in the case of black and white American bourgeois middle class standards. On the contrary, athletics, music, and other activities not 'associated' with educational attainment serve as the means to success, economic gain, and upward economic mobility in the US's postindustrial society. Thus effort in school in general suffers, and as a result test scores and grades progressively move lower. Grades and test scores are not only low for those who grow-up in poor inner-cities; they appear to have also decreased as social-economic status (SES) rises: 'In other words, higher academic achievement and higher social class status are not associated with smaller but rather greater differences in academic achievement' (Gordon, 2006: 25).

It is this epiphenomenon (i.e., the 'mismatch of linguistic social class function', or the social bases of class-specific forms of language use (Bernstein, 1972) of the 'mismatch of linguistic structure') that many scholars (Ogbu, 1974, 1990, 1991; Coleman, 1988; Carter, 2003, 2005) inappropriately label 'the burden of acting white' or oppositional culture. Black American adolescents, males in particular, as they get older, turn away from education. The reason is not because they feel education is for whites or because they identify more with the non-dominant cultural capital of the black poor underclass. It is because they disidentify with education and academic achievement due to the fact that they have rationalized other racialized (i.e., sports, music, pimping, selling drugs, etc.) means or social roles, financed by upper-class owners and high-level executives, to economic gain for its own sake other than status obtained through education (Carter, 2003, 2005; Mocombe, 2005, 2007, 2011; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013). In America's postindustrial economy, many black American youth (black boys in particular) look to athletes, entertainers, players, gangsters, etc., many of whom are from the black urban underclass, as role models over professionals in fields that require an education. Historically, Mocombe argues, this is a result of racial segregation and black relations to the mode of production in America. Moreover, in the age of globalization black communities in other post-industrial economies, such as the United Kingdom, for example, are also heavily influenced by the

social class functions of the class structure of black America. Mocombe and Carol Tomlin (2013) demonstrate this latter phenomenon by extrapolating the hypothesis to black British Caribbean youth in the United Kingdom.

Mocombe and Tomlin argue because of: (1) globalization; (2) the influence of black American religiosity and Hip-hop culture via the media; and (3) the similar structural experiences of British Caribbean blacks in the inner-cities of the United Kingdom, black British Caribbean youth, males in particular, overwhelmingly underachieve academically *vis-à-vis* all other groups in the United Kingdom. This is because of the initial mismatch between Standard British English and Black British Talk, and the social class functional roles associated with the latter among inner-city black British Caribbean youth of British inner-city communities. In this work, we extrapolate the thesis as a hermeneutical framework for conceptualizing and exploring the black intra-racial gender academic achievement gap between black males and females in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Discussion

For Mocombe the locus of causality for the black/white academic achievement gap is grounded in the constitution of black identity and consciousness within racial-class divisions and capitalist relations of production via ideological apparatuses such as education, the black church, and the streets. According to Mocombe (2005, 2009, 2013), ever since their arrival in America two dominant social class language games/groups, a black underclass and a black bourgeois class, created by the racial-class structural reproduction and differentiation of capitalist processes and practices, have dominated black America. In agricultural slavery, beginning in the early eighteenth century, black America was constituted as a racial caste in a Protestant class system dominated by two social class language games: (1) black bourgeoisie (E. Franklin Frazier's term), the best of the house servants, artisans, and free blacks from the North, under the leadership of black Protestant male preachers, who discriminated against the practical consciousness and linguistic structure; and (2) black underclass, i.e., field slaves and newly arrived Africans, working in agricultural production, on the other. As such, Black English Vernacular emerged among the latter, field slaves, whose way of life was juxtaposed against, the former, house slaves who identified and patterned their ways of dress, speech, and religiosity after their white slavemasters (Frazier, 1936).

Deagriculturalization and the industrialization of the northern states coupled with black American migration to the north from the mid-1800s to about the mid-1950s, gave rise to the continual racial-class separation between this urban, educated, and professional class of blacks and former house slaves

whose practical consciousness and linguistic system mirrored that of middle class whites, and a Black English speaking black underclass of former agricultural workers seeking, like their black bourgeois counterparts, to be bourgeois, i.e., economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility, through education and industrial work in Northern cities. However, racial discrimination coupled with suburbanization and the deindustrialization of Northern cities and outsourcing of industrial work to Third World countries, left the majority of blacks as part of the poor black underclass with limited occupational and educational opportunities (Wilson, 1978; 1998). Consequently, America's transition from an industrial base to a postindustrial, financialized service, economy beginning in the 1970s positioned black American underclass ideology and language along with Hip-hop culture, as a viable means for black American youth to achieve economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility in the society over education. That is, finance capital in the US beginning in the 1970s began investing in entertainment and other service industries where the segregated inner-city street, language, entertainment, and athletic culture of black America became both a commodity and the means to economic gain for the black poor in America's postindustrial economy, which subsequently outsourced its industrial work to semi-periphery nations thereby blighting the inner-city communities.

Blacks, many of whom migrated to the northern cities from the agricultural south looking for industrial work, became concentrated and segregated in blighted communities where work began to disappear, schools were under-funded, and poverty and crime increased due to deindustrialization and suburbanization (Wilson, 1993, 1978). The black migrants, which migrated North with their BEV/AAEV from the agricultural South following the Civil War and later, became segregated sociolinguistic underclass communities, ghettoes, of unemployed laborers looking to illegal, athletic, and entertainment activities (running numbers, pimping, prostitution, drug dealing, robbing, participating in sports, music, etc.) for economic success, status, and upward mobility. Educated in the poorly funded schools of the urban ghettoes, given the process of deindustrialization and the flight of capital to the suburbs and overseas, with no work prospects, many black Americans became part of a permanent *social class language game*, AAEV speaking and poorly educated underclass looking to other activities, i.e., hustling, athletics, and the entertainment industry, for economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility. Those who were educated became a part of the Standard-English-speaking black middle class of professionals, i.e., teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. (the black bourgeoisie), living in the suburbs, while the uneducated or poorly educated constituted the black underclass of the urban ghettoes.

Beginning in the late 1980s, finance capital, in order to avoid the oppositional culture to poverty, racism, and classism found among the black underclass, began commodifying and distributing (via the media industrial complex) the underclass black hustling, athletic, and entertainment culture for entertainment in the emerging postindustrial service economy of the US over the ideology and language of the black bourgeoisie. Be that as it may, efforts to succeed academically among black Americans, which constituted the ideology and language of the black bourgeoisie, paled in comparison to their efforts to succeed as speakers of Black English, athletes, 'gangstas', 'playas', and entertainers, which became the ideology and language of the black underclass urban youth of American inner-cities. Authentic black American identity became synonymous with black American underclass Hip-hop ideology and language as financed by the upper class of owners and high-level executives of the entertainment industry over the social class language game of the black middle class.

Hence, in America's postindustrial service economy where multiculturalism, language, and communication skills, pedagogically taught through process approaches to learning, multicultural education, and cooperative group work in school, are keys to succeeding in the postindustrial service labor market, blacks, paradoxically, have an advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, their bodies and linguistic structure or system growing up in inner-cities are influenced by the black American underclass, who in conjunction with the upper-class of owners and high-level executives have positioned the streets, athletics, and the entertainment industries as the social functions best served by their bodies and linguistic structure/system in the service economy of the US, which subsequently leads to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility for young urban blacks. This is advantageous because it becomes an authentic black identity by which black American youth can participate in the fabric of the postindustrial social structure. On the other hand, their linguistic system inhibits them from succeeding academically, given the mismatch between their system and the function it serves in the postindustrial labor market of the US and that of Standard English and the function of school as a medium to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility of blacks.

School for many black Americans, especially black boys, in other words, is simply a place for honing their athletic and entertainment skills and Hip-hop culture, which they can subsequently profit from in the American postindustrial service economy as their cultural contribution to the American multicultural melting pot; many black American youth of the inner-cities enter school speaking Black or African American English Vernacular. Their linguistic system in schooling in postindustrial education, which values the exchange of cultural facts as commodities for the postindustrial economy, is celebrated

along with their music and athletic talents under the umbrella of multicultural education. Therefore, no, or very few, remedial courses are offered to teach them Standard English, which initially leads to poor scores on standardized tests. That is, the phonology, morphology, and syntax of BEV/AAEV juxtaposed against that of Standard English (SE) linguistically prevents many black Americans from the inner-cities early on in their academic careers from grasping the meaning or semantics of phrases and contents of standardized tests. As blacks matriculate through the school system, with their emphasis of succeeding in music and athletics, those who acquire the systemicity of Standard English and succeed become part of the black professional class. In their new status positions, they celebrate the underclass culture, from whence they came. Those who do not make it and therefore dropout of school constitute the black underclass of poorly educated and unemployed social actors looking to the entertainment industry (which celebrates their conditions as a commodity for the labor market) and the streets as their only viable means to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility in blighted inner-city communities.

Hence American blacks, as interpellated (workers) and embourgeoised agents of the American postindustrial capitalist social structure of inequality, represent the most modern (i.e. socialized) people of color, in terms of their 'practical consciousness', in the process of homogenizing social actors as agents of the Protestant ethic or disciplined workers, producers, and consumers working for owners of production in order to obtain economic gain, status, and upward mobility in the larger American society (Frazier, 1957; Wilson, 1978; Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Mocombe, 2009). They constitute the American social space in terms of their relation to the means of production in post-industrial capitalist America. This relational framework divides black America for the most part into two status groups or social class language games. On the one hand, it produces a dwindling middle and upper class (living in suburbia) that numbers about 25 percent of their population (13 percent) and obtain their status as doctors, athletes, entertainers, lawyers, teachers, and other high-end professional service occupations. And, on the other hand, a growing segregated 'black underclass' of unemployed and under-employed wage-earners, gangsters, rappers, and athletes occupying poor inner-city communities and schools focused solely on technical skills, multicultural education, athletics, and test-taking for social promotion given the relocation (outsourcing) of industrial and manufacturing jobs to poor periphery and semi-periphery countries and the introduction of low-end post-industrial service jobs and a growing informal economy in American urban centers. Consequently, the poor performance of black American students, *vis-à-vis* whites, in education as an ideological apparatus for this post-industrial capitalist sociolinguistic worldview leaves them disproportionately

represented in the growing underclass at the bottom of the American post-industrial social structure of inequality unable to either transform their world as they encounter it, or truly exercise their embourgeoisement given their lack of, what Bourdieu (1973, 1984) refers to as, symbolic capital (cultural, social, economic, and political).

Ironically, contrary to Ogbu's (1986) burden of acting white hypothesis, Mocombe's hypothesis suggests that it is due to their indigent (pathological-pathogenic) structural position within the American capitalist social structure of inequality, as opposed to a differing or oppositional cultural ethos, that black American school children underachieve *vis-à-vis* their white counterparts. That is, the majority of black American students underachieve in school in general and on standardized tests in particular, not because they possess or are taught (by their peers) at an early age normative cultural values distinct from those of the dominant group of owners and high-level executives in the social structure. To the contrary, black American students underachieve in school because they acquire the 'verbal behavior' of the dominant powers of the social structure in segregated 'poor' gentrified inner-city communities, which lack good legal jobs and affordable resources that have been outsourced by capital overseas. As such, the majority, who happen to be less educated in the 'Standard English' of the society, have reinforced a linguistic (Black English Vernacular) community or status group of rappers, athletes, and entertainers (i.e., the black underclass) as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for black America. In turn, the structural practices of the black underclass, i.e., hip-hop cultural identity, have been commodified by finance capital to accumulate surplus-value in their postindustrial economy (Mocombe, 2005, 2006, 2011).

It is this 'mismatch of linguistic social class function', role conflict, the ideals of middle class black and white bourgeois America against the perceived 'pathologies' (functions) of the black underclass as a sociolinguistic status group in the American postindustrial social structure of inequality that Ogbu and other post-segregationist black middle-class scholars inappropriately label, 'acting-white', 'culture of poverty', or oppositional culture. Blacks, boys in particular, are neither concealing their academic prowess and abilities when they focus, and defer their efforts, on athletics, music, entertainment, the streets, etc. for fear of acting white, as Ogbu suggests, nor do they internalize residual white stereotypes of a remote past. Instead, they are focusing on racially coded socioeconomic actions or roles commodified in the larger American postindustrial capitalist social structure of inequality that are more likely to lead to economic gain, status, prestige, and upward mobility in the society as defined for, and by, the black underclass financed by finance capital.

The black underclass youth in America's ghettoes has slowly become, since the 1980s, with the financialization of Hip-hop culture by record labels such as Sony and others, athletics, and the entertainment industry, the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for the black youth community in America. Their language and worldview as constituted through the street life, Hip-hop culture, athletics, and the entertainment industry financed by finance capital, has become the means by which many black youth (and youth throughout the world) attempt to recursively reorganize and reproduce their material resource framework against the purposive-rationality of black bourgeois or middle class America. The upper class of owners and high-level executives of the American dominated capitalist world-system have capitalized on this through the commodification of black underclass bodies, culture, and linguistic system. This is further supported by an American media and popular culture that glorify athletes, entertainers, and the 'Bling bling' wealth, diamonds, cars, jewelry, and money of the culture. Hence the aim of many young black people, males in particular, is no longer to seek status, economic gain, and upward mobility through a Protestant ethic that stresses hard work, diligence, differed gratification, and education. On the contrary, a Protestant ethic that stresses hard work in sports, music, instant gratification, illegal activities (drug dealing), and skimming are the dominant means portrayed for their efforts through the entertainment and athletic industries financed by post-industrial capital. Schools throughout urban American inner cities are no longer seen as means to a professional end in order to obtain economic gain, status, and upward mobility, but obstacles to that end because schooling delays gratification and is not correlative with the means, social roles, associated with economic success and upward mobility in black urban America. More black American youth (especially the black males) want to become, gangstas, football and basketball players, rappers and entertainers, like many of their role models, who were raised in their underclass environments and yet obtained economic success and upward mobility over doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., the social functions associated with the status symbol of the black and white middle professional (educated) class of the civil rights generation. Hence the end and the social action remain the same – economic success, status, and upward economic mobility. Only the means (Athletes, entertainers, rappers, etc.) to that end have shifted with the rise of the black underclass, financed by finance capital, as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination in black America, given the commodification of Hip-hop culture and its high visibility in the media. These new social roles, athletes, entertainers, hustlers, etc., reinforce the aforementioned activities as viable means/professions to wealth and status in the society's postindustrial economy, which focuses on services and entertainment for the world's transnational bourgeois class as the mode of producing surplus value.

This linguistic and ideological domination and the ends of the power elites (rappers, athletes, gangsters) of the black underclass, 'mismatch of linguistic structure and social function', which brings about the role conflict Ogbu interprets as the burden of acting white, are juxtaposed against the Protestant Ethic and spirit of capitalism of the black middle and upper middle educated professional classes represented in the prosperity discourse and discursive practices of black professionals and American preachers such as TD Jakes, Juanita Bynum, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, etc. Whereas for these agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism the means to 'Bling bling' or the American Dream is through education and obtaining a professional job as a sign of God's grace and salvation. For younger black Americans growing up in gentrified inner-cities throughout the US, where industrial work has disappeared, Rapping, hustling, sports, etc., rather than education represent the means to the status position of 'Bling bling' So what we are suggesting here, building on Mocombe's hypothesis, is that many black youth are not 'acting white' when education no longer becomes a priority or the means to economic gain, status, and upward mobility, as they get older and consistently underachieve *vis-à-vis* whites. They are attempting to be white and achieve bourgeois economic status (the 'Bling bling' of cars, diamonds, gold, helicopters, money, etc.) by being 'black', speaking Ebonics, rapping, playing sports, hustling, etc., in a racialized post-industrial capitalist social structure. In this structure the economic status of 'blackness' is (over) determined by the white capitalists class of owners and high-level executives and by the black proletariats of the West, i.e., the black underclass, whose bodies, linguistic system, way of life, and image ('athletes, hustlers, hip-hopsters') have been commodified (by white and black capitalists) and distributed throughout the world for entertainment, (black) status, and economic purposes. This underclass culture as globally promulgated to urban black youth throughout the black diaspora by finance capital via Black Entertainment Television (BET) and other media outlets is counterbalanced or opposed by the bodies, linguistic system, and images of black preachers promoting the same ethos – The Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism – via the prosperity gospel, patriarchy, misogyny, biblical conversion, etc., of the black American churches to the black administrative bourgeoisies around the world. Hence, the social structure of class (not racial or cultural worldview) inequality that characterizes the black American social environment is subsequently the relational framework, which black youth and the black administrative bourgeoisie in America and the diaspora are exposed to and socialized into when they encounter globalizing processes through immigration, the outsourcing of work from America, and the images of the entertainment industry and black church. Throughout America, the continent of Africa, the Caribbean, and black Europe black American charis-

matic preachers are promoting a prosperity gospel among the black poor and administrative bourgeoisie, which is usually juxtaposed against the emergence of an underclass culture among the youth in these areas influenced by the Hip-hop and athletic culture of the black American underclass (Ntarangwi, 2009; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013; Tomlin *et al*., 2014).

The aforementioned processes, what Mocombe *et al*. (2014) calls the African-Americanization of the black diaspora, is clearly evidenced among black British Caribbean youth in the United Kingdom, whose structural experiences parallel those of black Americans in the United States. As with the black Americans in the US, the under-achievement of black British Caribbean youth is tied to this mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function, which is an epiphenomenon of the capitalist social structure of class inequality. In the Caribbean, most ex-slaves participated in local affairs only marginally more than East Indians during colonialism. In the French and British Caribbean, for instance, whites controlled the local legislature with a handful of men of color who were ideologically and linguistically interpellated and 'embourgeoised' as middle class administrators of the colonial system. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, witnessed a shift in power in the Caribbean following the end of the colonial system. Black and other people of color increased their influence in government and other institutions under the middle class or European influences (embourgeoisement) of the handful of men of color who once ruled with whites during colonialism. Although, the relationship between blacks and whites changed, the continued separation of the black majority from the white and brown minorities meant the poor, who were mainly blacks, developed their own underclass patterns of behavior and beliefs, ideologies and linguistic structures, which became juxtaposed against the middle class and European identities of those in power. Education in the Caribbean, for the most part continued to be an elite privilege. The poor constituted a poorly educated underclass living either in the overcrowded Caribbean capital cities or small farm towns, looking to immigrate to the homeland of their former colonial masters for work and better economic opportunities. The well-to-do, for the most part, paid for private, parochial education; upon completion, they subsequently sent their children abroad for secondary schooling. In many instances, they returned back to the islands where they assumed administrative and bureaucratic roles in government or the private sector. Hence Caribbean society, as well as its immigration pattern overseas, would become juxtaposed between, or against, the poorly educated underclass speakers of Creole or Caribbean patois and an embourgeoised middle class of non-white administrators, who served the same purpose as the handful of colored persons who administered the islands with whites during the colonial period. Be that as it may, upon

immigration to places such as the UK, racism in the labor, housing, and educational markets, which paralleled what happened to the black Americans in the US, segregated the majority of the black Caribbean immigrants seeking to achieve the embourgeoisement of their former colonial masters. What developed then was a caste, color, and class system in places like the UK. That is to say, black Caribbean immigrants to the UK sought the embourgeoisement of their former colonial masters through education in segregated poor black communities where work was beginning to disappear to the suburbs or overseas. As such, they reproduced a class system amongst themselves in which those who did not attain the middle class ideology and language of the former colonial masters constituted an underclass of poorly educated, unemployed, and patois speaking blacks looking to hustling, the entertainment industry, and sports as viable means to status and upward economic mobility in the UK's emerging postindustrial economy.

Ostensibly, influenced by the success of the black American underclass, black British youth have sought to do the same as they positioned black British Talk (BBT) and underclass practices, hustling, participating in sports and the entertainment industry, as means or social class roles to status in Britain and the global marketplaces over and against the educational orientation of the black British and American middle classes of earlier generations who did not perceive their embourgeoisement as the status markers of whites. This has led, as in the case of the black Americans, to the academic underachievement of black British Caribbean youth due to two factors: a mismatch of linguistic structure (mismatch between black British Talk and Standard British English) when they initially enter school, and later on due to a mismatch of linguistic social class function as they do not apply themselves to academically achieve because of the disconnect between their linguistic structure (black British Talk) and economic success for blacks in the UK and global marketplaces.

Globally, more blacks, of any nationality, are over-represented in the media as having achieved status and upward economic mobility speaking their patois, hustling, playing sports, and entertaining than achieving academically and speaking the *lingua franca* of the power elites. As a result, black males, unlike their female counterparts, are less likely to identify with, or put much effort into, education as a viable means to economic gain, status, and upward mobility in a global marketplace under US hegemony dominated by images of successful black males as hustlers, athletes, and entertainers. The latter are social class roles in which black females have been less likely to achieve status, economic gain, or upward economic mobility. As such, it is within this class dialectic that the black male/female intra-racial gender academic achievement gap in the US and the UK must be framed and studied.

Conclusions

Within the deductive logic of Mocombe's 'mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function' hypothesis, the black intra-racial gender academic achievement gap is a result of the social class functions associated with the urban street life of postindustrial America and the United Kingdom where young black males are over-represented and predominantly achieve their status, social mobility, and economic gain, and the black church/education where black females are over-represented and achieve their status, social mobility, and drive for economic gain via education and technical professionalization. In other words, as many black males of the urban cities in the US and UK sought to achieve economic gain, status, and upward social mobility via athletics, entertainment, and the street life, which led to high school dropout, criminality, and murder rates in the urban inner-cities of postindustrial America and the United Kingdom beginning in the 1980s, their efforts to achieve academically was superseded by their efforts to succeed via the streets, the entertainment, and athletic industries of industrial and postindustrial America where their bodies and images became embraced by the larger society. Conversely, given the limited opportunities afforded to black women by the athletic and entertainment industries and the urban street life, they turned to the black church where they found solace from the murder rates and criminality of the cities. Within the church, they encountered a prosperity gospel under the leadership of black charismatic Protestant preachers in the likes of TD Jakes, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, Juanita Bynum, etc., promoting the same status, economic gain, and upward economic mobility of black urban America and the United Kingdom via the status associated with the church, education, and technical professionalization against the misogyny of the street, athletic, and entertainment culture of black urban Hip-hop America. As a result, black females, who are grossly over-represented in black churches predominantly under the leadership of black male preachers, were more likely to place emphasis on achieving economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility via the church, as prophetesses, evangelists, etc., education, and technical professionalization over the streets, athletic and entertainment industries where their opportunities were limited by young black males who relegated them to dancers and groupies in Hip-hop music videos. Black womanhood became defined by black women, on the one hand, through their depictions of black educated and professional females who attended church regularly, and on the other, by those females represented through their depiction in Hip-hop music videos and the streetlife. The former is more highly esteemed than the latter.

It is due to this mismatch of linguistic social class function between the church/Jesus and the streets/athletic/entertainment within the racial-class dy-

namic of black America and the United Kingdom that the black intra-racial gender academic achievement gap emerged. We are hypothesizing that black females given their limited opportunities in the streets, entertainment, and athletic culture of post-industrial America and the United Kingdom were, and are, more likely to place their efforts on achieving status, economic gain, and upward social mobility via the church, where education and technical professionalization are stressed over the lifestyles of the urban street life in both countries where young black males strive and define their manhood via athletics, entertaining, and hustling. It is within this hermeneutical (structural) framework that black identity and consciousness emerged, and the black male/female intra-racial gender academic achievement gap must be conceptualized and explored.

Future research must explore the black/white and black male/female academic achievement gap within the sociohistorical structural logic of the aforementioned hermeneutical analysis.

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