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Doing Well and Being Well: Conceptions of Well-Being Among Academically Successful Adolescent Girls of Color in a Catholic School

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DOING WELL AND BEING WELL: CONCEPTIONS OF WELL-BEING AMONG ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL ADOLESCENT GIRLS OF COLOR IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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This article reports the findings of an ethnographic study conducted in an urban Catholic high school, with a focus on girls of color. By giving voice to this regularly neglected group, this research gives us the opportunity to hear from girls of color and to learn firsthand of their successes, joys, and struggles. Academic achievement and psychological health are presented as goals for high school programs.

The little research available on school success among girls of color tends to document failure rather than success (Bempechat & Ginsburg, 1989; Fordham, 1996; Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). Interestingly, many of the studies that do highlight success among students of color take place in Catholic schools. In fact, the literature has documented that students of color in Catholic schools perform at higher levels, on average, than their peers in other private and public schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Convey, 1992; Marsh, 1991; York, 1996). Yet we know little about what success means to those students who are managing to do so well academically in Catholic schools. Therefore, research needs to include the voices of high-achieving students of color, attending to what enables them to succeed and how they make meaning of their success. This study addresses such a need, with the aim of helping Catholic schools continue to rise to the challenge of educating a large percentage of students of color (Russo, Adams, & Seery, 1998).

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The risk factors that urban girls of color face, such as living in poverty and attending under-resourced schools, may lead to the associated outcomes of school dropout and teenage pregnancy (Fine, 1991), which receive considerable attention in both the media and research. For example, high school dropout data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1996 show that adolescents from families with incomes in the bottom 20% of the income distribution are six times more likely to drop out than adolescents from families in the top 20% of the income distribution; Latino students are more likely than White students to leave school before graduating, and the rate for Black students falls between the two (McMillen & Kaufman, 1997). Missing from the prevailing portrait of inner city girls of color are their many faces of success, images of ways in which these girls are doing well in their communities. As a consequence, girls of color who do well in school probably do not see themselves represented in the prevailing discourses on success.

In educational research, achievement and psychological health have been studied largely in isolation. The literature on achievement underscores the importance of doing well (Nicholls, 1989; Weiner, 1980), and the girls' development research emphasizes the necessity of being well (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990; Rogers, 1993). Taken together, the literatures on girls' achievement and psychological health broaden our conceptualization of what it means to do well and be well.

Where the achievement research addresses girls in particular, it tends to focus the investigation on sex differences related to outcomes among predominantly White students (e.g., Eccles, 1984; Stipek & Gralinski, 1991). Knowledge about girls' achievement therefore exists within a frame that emphasizes measurable outcomes, such as grades and test scores. Since this research defines success *a priori* and investigates correlates of students' performance (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1989; Weiner, 1980), it contributes very little to our understanding of how doing well is understood and experienced by students.

From the perspective of girls' development research, ideas about psychological health are informed by a model that defines well-being in terms of connection to oneself and others and as an ability to be "outspoken" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Rogers, 1993). Outspokenness is defined as the capacity to express a full range of thoughts and feelings, even when that expression risks conflict or loss of relationship. In this framework, girls' capacity to be in relationship with themselves and others is seen as a central feature of being well, but achievement is rarely addressed directly. Further, it is difficult to assess the cultural relevance of the early findings of this research, given the small number of girls of color included. More recently, research has focused on urban girls generally (Leadbeater & Way, 1996) and poor and working-class urban girls in particular (Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995), many of whom

are girls of color; but these girls were not high-achieving, nor were their experiences of school achievement addressed directly.

This research aims at building a grounded understanding of success among adolescent girls of color who are known to be high achievers in a Catholic school. Joining achievement and psychological health, this investigation takes a "whole child" perspective, which is consistent with the mission of Catholic schooling to support students' academic, psychological, and spiritual well-being (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

METHODS

This paper draws on findings from an ethnographic study that includes interviews from students in grades 9 through 12 attending an urban Catholic school. A Catholic school was chosen for this study because research indicates that Catholic schools have remarkable success, compared to public schools, in promoting high achievement among students of color, particularly in urban neighborhoods (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Irvine & Foster, 1996). Rather than focusing on extraordinary achievement among students of color who are exceptionally resilient (Arnold, 1995), the researchers selected students who simply are doing well in a school that serves primarily students of color. The research site is a coeducational Roman Catholic archdiocesan high school with approximately 200 students in a city in the Northeast. The student population is approximately 36% African-American, 20% Latino, 15% Haitian-American, 10% Asian-American, 9% White, and 10% from other groups. This school reaches out to students with various degrees of academic potential as well as diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, acting on a belief common among Catholic schools that every student has the right to a socially just, academically strong, and caring education (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). Ninety-eight percent of the school's students receive financial aid. Eighty percent of the school's graduates continue with postsecondary schooling.

Sixteen girls of color, four per grade, were included as participants. Six are Latina, four African-American, three Haitian-American, one biracial, one Portuguese-American, and one Vietnamese (See Table 1). The students selected were from a group of girls of color whose cumulative grade point averages placed them in the top quartile of their classes. The racial and ethnic diversity of the girls in this study generally reflects that of the school's student body. Five of the girls speak English as a second language (with Spanish or Vietnamese as the first language), three grew up speaking English along with their families' native language (Spanish or Portuguese), and seven are fluent only in English.

Findings are based on data from a sequence of in-depth interviews (totaling between 2 and 2.5 hours) conducted with each girl by the first author over

Table 1
Description of Participants by Grade and Racial/Ethnic Identification

Name	Grade in School	Racial/Ethnic Identification	Country of Origin
Rochelle	9	Haitian-American	U.S.
Flora	9	Peruvian	Peru
Julia	9	Colombian	U.S.
Andie	9	Haitian-American	U.S.
Ariana	10	El Salvadoran	El Salvador
Isabela	10	Colombian	Colombia
Melissa	10	Colombian	Colombia
Vera	10	Puerto Rican	U.S. (Puerto Rico)
Casey	11	Biracial (African-American and Caucasian)	U.S.
Linh	11	Vietnamese	Vietnam
Lauren	11	Portuguese-American	U.S.
Chanté	11	African-American	U.S.
Shaylyne	12	Haitian-American	U.S.
Renee	12	African-American	U.S.
Tracy	12	African-American	U.S.
Zoe	12	African-American	U.S.

the course of an academic year, along with weekly meetings with the girls in grade-level academic support groups (i.e., focus groups). The data were analyzed using narrative and coding strategies (Maxwell, 1996). Beginning with the interview transcripts, profiles were developed (Seidman, 1991) for each girl's conceptions of doing well and being well. Using these profiles as text, codes for doing well (e.g., achievement goals, overcoming obstacles, and accomplishments) and being well (e.g., references to health, balance, and self-expression) were identified. Next, the codes were sorted into a series of thematic matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to look for similarities and differences within and across grades. Feedback from colleagues on data interpretation was also sought.

FINDINGS

The girls in this study are introduced by telling stories about their hopes and worries, their feelings of pride and vulnerability, and the sources of inspiration and disappointment in their lives. These are the stories that were told during the interviews when the girls reflected on what is most important in their lives, and these are the stories that we as educational researchers and practitioners must listen to if we hope to understand and support the well-being of all such students.

CONCEPTIONS OF DOING WELL

Doing well holds enormous importance for these girls because they expect their high performance in school to create future opportunities. For all of the girls, doing well now is a vehicle for building a bright future, one in which they will be able to fulfill their hopes and feel rewarded for their hard work.

These girls relate staying in school and achieving academically with success in life. Since all the girls are struggling financially or come from families where their parents are making large sacrifices for their children's education, the girls see themselves as having "the responsibility" to do well. In a matter-of-fact way, Tracy, an African-American 12th-grader, explains why going to college is necessary:

> I care about college because that's another step in life that I have to take. And if I don't take it, then I might just stay where I'm at. I don't want a job just working at The Gap for the rest of my life.

Having worked in minimum-wage jobs for a long time, Tracy sees college as her way out, an opportunity she must take. Putting emphasis on family, Rochelle, a Haitian-American student in the ninth grade, explains:

> My family's counting on me to do well. They want me to do the best that I can in school, keep up those grades. They want to see me go to college and become a pediatrician because that's something that I always wanted to do.

Knowing that she will be the first student in her extended family to attend college, Rochelle feels responsible to come through for her family, who has invested so much hope in her education and her future. For Linh, an 11th-grader from Vietnam, this feeling of fidelity to self and family is expressed as privilege, rather than obligation. Linh channels her sense of good fortune into motivation for achievement:

> The goal before I came here [was] to study. That's why when I got the chance, I tried. And I don't want to disappoint the people back there [in Vietnam]. My friends, my family, they didn't have the chance.

Linh's sense of responsibility extends beyond herself and her family, to the people in her country, which is unusual among the girls in this study. All of the girls, however, express awareness of their responsibility to do well mixed with absolute confidence that they will succeed.

The value the girls place on education as an investment plays a strong role in their motivation to achieve. They work hard and earn high grades in school despite the fact that many of them feel frustrated that school is not always engaging or immediately relevant to their lives. For example, 7 of the 16 girls said that, if it were possible, they would rather begin their careers

after high school than attend college. Nonetheless, they are unequivocally committed to graduating from four-year colleges because they see this as absolutely necessary for their future success.

The girls report that achieving academically is vital to them, and they speak of doing well in concrete terms, such as "getting good grades." However, their standards for what constitutes "good grades" vary. Twelve of the 16 girls think A and B grades are good enough. For example, Andie, a Haitian-American ninth-grader, explains that her father brought her up not to feel satisfied with a C. Like most of the girls in this study, Andie considers A and B grades as evidence of "doing real good in school." In contrast, a smaller group of four girls sets a higher standard for themselves. These girls strive for and feel satisfied with nothing less than straight-A grades. Zoe, an African-American girl in the 12th grade, notes that she wants to get all As this year

> ...so I can be valedictorian, so I can get into a good college, and 'cause I need to apply for a lot of scholarships to go to college because I know that I'm not going to be able to afford it.

Zoe wants not only the recognition of being named valedictorian, but also the opportunities afforded by getting admitted to a "good college" and receiving financial aid to make college affordable. Although she knows that B grades are above-average in this school, Zoe does not feel satisfied with them for herself:

> I got an 80-something [on an Economics test]. That's good compared to everybody else, but I still want higher.... I almost cried the other day, because I got an 87 on my [math] test. I was sad, mad, disappointed that I didn't do good.

Fortunately for Zoe, she channels this disappointment into motivation to work harder in these classes. Her example highlights how each girl's standard for doing well in school shapes the way that she reacts, emotionally and behaviorally, to the performance feedback that her grades provide.

In their future lives, however, the girls speak of doing well in broader terms, such as graduating from high school and going on to college, working in a secure and perhaps lucrative career, not having to worry about money, and being able to take care of themselves and their families. For these girls, most of whom will be first-generation college students, doing well is highly valued as a crucial way to better themselves and their families. They have witnessed or heard stories about mistakes their parents have made in their own lives (e.g., getting pregnant as a teenager or not finishing college), struggles they have endured (e.g., raising children on their own or holding multiple jobs), and sacrifices they have made for their children's future (e.g., leav-

ing their home country or paying Catholic school tuition). The girls appreciate the chance to learn from their parents' mistakes and struggles and to benefit from educational opportunities their parents never had.

During the interviews, the girls spoke about how they envision their futures. In analyzing their stories, a contrast emerged that breaks out along racial lines between independence and interdependence as goals connected to achievement. Specifically, independence as a salient theme in the narratives of six African-American and Haitian-American girls contrasts with interdependence as a salient theme in the narratives of four Latina and Vietnamese girls. To be fair, the Latina and Vietnamese girls also expect their academic achievement to bring educational opportunities and material rewards to them directly; and the Black girls know that their success will ultimately reward their parents and communities as well. While this finding is based on evidence from a small sample, it identifies a question to be investigated in further research.

All three of the Haitian-American girls and three of the four African-American girls emphasize independence as their primary goal in stories of the future. These girls plan to support themselves and do not intend to "depend on a man" because they have seen too many women left disappointed and struggling. Renee, an African-American student in the 12th grade, gets support from her mother regarding school because getting a good education is seen as the key to becoming "independent," "to making something good of my life":

> [My mother] wants me to be successful, 'cause she's a strong person for education.... She just wants me to make something of my life. She wants to make sure I'm independent like her; I can take care of myself.

Renee feels inspired by the aspiration her mother holds for her, and she knows that her success in life will be gauged in large part on her ability to be self-sufficient. Independence as a way of life modeled by her mother continues in the narrative of Shaylyne, a Haitian-American 12th-grader. Shaylyne explicitly connects her own determination "to succeed [her] hopes and dreams" with having witnessed her mother struggle so hard to raise three children on her own:

> My father left, so my mom had this huge responsibility to take care of these three kids. She's trying her best, she puts us through Catholic school all our lives, and she's working just so that we can get there. I think that's one thing that I realize from Black people, especially females, whenever there's a situation, females these days, they'll find a way to make it better. That's one thing that I think that I like about my mom, she tries to make the best for us. I see that our characters are similar in a way, like I'll struggle to get what I want and she'll struggle to help her family to get what we want.

Despite hardship and challenges, or perhaps because of them, Shaylyne "struggles" to get what she wants, knowing that her mother has done the same for the sake of her children. Shaylyne takes pride not only in her own strong will, but also in what she sees as the strength of Black women "to find a way to make it better."

For Tracy, an African-American girl in the 12th grade, achieving independence through education takes on especially significant meaning. Tracy has lived most of her adolescence in foster care, which has not provided her with the stability or caring that she wants and needs. When she is asked what it has been like to move around so much in foster care, her voice is quiet: "I don't like it. It's sort of hard, and I guess that's why I want to go to school, so I don't have to worry about being under somebody else's roof." In response to a question about why she is so invested in school, Tracy responds, "If I don't have an education, who's gonna take care of me? I have to get a job; I have to take care of myself." Tracy views independence as a fact of her life. Already she has taken on responsibility for paying her tuition, worrying about her bills, and setting plans for her future. With no adults or family to "take care" of her, Tracy knows that she will need to look after herself, and that getting an education is an absolute necessity toward that end.

While these six Black girls envision doing well primarily as a way to achieve independence and to better themselves, some of the other girls see it more as a way to reward their parents and to better their families' lives. Specifically, a theme of reciprocity and interdependence emerges as central in the narratives of four girls, all of whom are first-generation immigrants from either South/Central America or Vietnam. Like all the immigrant girls in this study, these girls' parents came to this country to provide for their children better educational opportunities and better lives.

Ariana, a 10th-grader who came from El Salvador at age five, finds motivation to excel in her parents' responses to her success:

> I like to get good grades because I know it'll make my parents happy. They have so many things to worry about, like my mom's work, my father with the shop. I feel like it's my job to at least put a little bit of happiness in my parents' lives, like taking a load off their backs.

Ariana simply takes it as her "job" to do well in school because this is her way of reducing her parents' burden, of making them "happy." Another 10th-grader, Melissa, who moved from Colombia during elementary school, knows that doing well in life will reward her mother, who has sacrificed so much for her children's education:

> I know that by doing well in life, I'm gonna pay my mother back. She's gonna get a lot of pleasure. She [tells me], "Just the fact that I know you're

> gonna be somebody when you grow up, that gives me the satisfaction of all my years that I worked so hard."

Whereas Ariana gets "good grades" to make her parents "happy" now, Melissa sees "doing well in life" as future compensation for her mother. Isabela, another 10th-grader who came from Colombia in the sixth grade, also wants her own success to reward her family, though she sees the emotional payback coming in part through material reward. Isabel tells me that in the future, "I'm hoping I'm gonna have my own house, and my parents are going to be living there or maybe in another bigger house." Feeling "so sorry" for her parents, who work incredibly long hours at manual labor jobs, Isabel looks forward to the time when she has money to give her parents a house so that they can rest after a lifetime of hard work and sacrifice. Finally, Linh, an 11th-grader from Vietnam, speaks directly about succeeding in school as a path not toward independence, but toward helping her family. She explains,

> Our family lives together, and we support each other. So all the money my [older] brothers and sister make, they give to my parents. If I'm doing good in school and I'm gonna get a good job, then that's gonna help the family.

Well aware that Americans seem to live differently than her own family, Linh makes a connection between interdependence as a value and her cultural identity, observing:

> We're not like American people, when you're 18 or older, you go outside and you live separate from your family.... American people live for themselves, but family's always the best.

Linh's life is oriented around her family, and it is family that makes her efforts worthwhile and her achievements meaningful in the end.

In summary, these girls feel a tremendous responsibility to succeed, for their families and for themselves, and regard doing well academically as critical to their success. As they approach their lives beyond high school, the girls are optimistic and look forward to their futures, in which they anticipate not having to struggle so hard and reaping the benefits of their hard work.

CONCEPTIONS OF BEING WELL

Whereas the girls speak of achievement in terms of future gain, psychological health seems to have more relevance in their current lives. For the girls in this study, well-being includes psychological (i.e., feeling balanced) and relational (i.e., feeling connected, listened to, and recognized) components. Feeling psychologically healthy becomes possible, however, only when the girls have their physical needs met as well. In physical terms, being well

means knowing that basic material needs are taken care of (e.g., clothing, food, and housing), having time for oneself (e.g., to sleep, to rest, or to have time for friends), and feeling healthy rather than ill. In many ways, the girls' psychological well-being depends on their physical well-being. And, as will be highlighted through Ariana's case, physical health and psychological health connect in crucial ways for some of these girls. Remarkably, the existing literature on adolescent girls' psychological health does not identify physical well-being as an aspect of psychological well-being, except in reference to the absence of eating disorders and perhaps pregnancy (Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991; Leadbeater & Way, 1996; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Furthermore, the clinical literature generally views psychological health as the absence of disorder, rather than as the presence of positive aspects of being well (*DSM-IV,* 1997).

In interviews, the girls talked plainly about the need to feel balanced. For them, being well is a feeling of balance that follows hard work blended with relaxation, seriousness with fun. Eleven of the 16 girls in this study participate in an extracurricular activity (i.e., a sports team, chess club, or Gospel choir) that they report as adding necessary balance to their lives. For example, Linh, who maintains a straight-A average, tells us that the relaxation she finds through playing volleyball balances out the energy she devotes to school work:

> I wish [volleyball] was the whole year. I like sports. I just like to catch and throw things. [Volleyball lets me] have a little physical exercise in addition to mind and brain exercise. I get to relax.

When the girls spoke of stress in their lives, they mentioned the necessity of findings ways to relieve that stress. Lauren, a Portuguese-American student who competes on the school's chess team, notes that the quiet and "concentration" of playing chess calms her down. Renee, an accomplished singer in the school's Gospel choir, explains that singing is a form of expression that allows her to deal with the "pressure" she is feeling about planning for college and the future:

> Pressure is part of growing up, so you gotta deal with it. I usually deal with it through singing 'cause that helps me get things off my chest, and it relieves stress.

Remarkably, Renee has the self-awareness to know that when she feels stress on the inside, she needs to sing to give it expression. Like Linh, Lauren, and Renee, all of the girls in this study spoke of ways of being well that are grounded in the present moment, rather than oriented toward the future.

Through these activities, the girls express themselves, reduce stress, connect with others, and achieve. Other girls speak of feeling satisfied in similar

ways through regular activities such as singing and dancing at home, going to church with their families, or just spending time with parents and siblings. While this finding may not be surprising, the conviction with which they insisted on making room for these ways of being well in their lives is striking.

For these girls, being well is not only a feeling of balance, but also a feeling of connection and recognition. When they are able to express their thoughts and emotions, they show signs of feeling connected to themselves and others. At the beginning of the ninth grade, for example, Flora, a Latina student, talks about feeling isolated at school because she does not feel "comfortable to express" herself. Not yet ready "to be how [she] really [is]" at school, Flora feels like "nobody knows [her]." Also in ninth grade, Andie, a Haitian-American student, speaks about coming to school one day overcome with emotion after just learning that a friend had been hurt in a fight. After noticing Andie's lateness and her "red and puffy" eyes, Andie's counselor called her in to talk. Simply being able to share what had happened with Sister Mary gave Andie a sense of relief: "Yeah, [I felt better after talking with her] because I had to tell someone. I didn't tell anybody that whole day." Twelfth-grader Renee discusses self-expression in a broader but related way. She speaks powerfully about the way in which singing allows her to feel connected to herself and others, since the words "come from [her] heart" and also "touch" other people. "Around [age] 10," she remembers,

> that's when I really started to get serious about singing, like started learning what the words meant and letting songs come from my heart. A lot of times, in church [my voice] really touches people, and I see them crying and praising God, and that just really makes me feel good, like the words are getting to them.

As she sings, it is as if Renee sees her voice reaching inside of other people and coming back to her as resonance. The girls speak compellingly about the necessity of having a space where they can express themselves, "to get things off my chest," in Renee's words.

Being well for these girls results from both honest self-expression—what Rogers (1993) calls the capacity to "speak one's mind by telling all one's heart"—and an experience of feeling heard, which is consistent with other research on poor and working-class urban girls (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Without exception, relationships that the girls describe as supportive (i.e., where there is genuine caring, trust, and a feeling of being known) are ones in which they feel someone listens.

Casey, an 11th-grader who identifies herself racially as "Black and White," told a story about how not being listened to by a teacher whom she had trusted left her feeling angry and betrayed. When Mr. Gray returned to his classroom one day to find Casey and another student watching television,

he accused the girls of breaking into his room. Exasperated at Mr. Gray's refusal to believe her defense that the door had been unlocked, Casey felt wronged and became very angry. In response, Casey "gave him attitude," in her words, withdrawing from what had once been a supportive relationship for her.

For these girls, being known for who one is rather than for what one does has the potential to resonate in a way that also facilitates being well. For example, Renee tells that other students and teachers respect her as someone who is "very outspoken" and "very confident," characteristics which she also sees in herself:

> I'm very outspoken, and everybody knows me for that. They call me the loudest person [at school]. If someone says something to me and I don't like it, I'm gonna tell them.... And I'm a very confident person. Everybody says that; my homeroom teacher says it. He used my name in [laughs] one of his classes. He was like, how some people walk around all sluggish, he was like, "But Renee, she walks around with a bunch of confidence. She walks with her head up. [laughs] You should be like Renee and have confidence."

For Renee, being known as someone who speaks up loudly and carries herself with confidence is an affirmation, since these attributes are ones that she associates with her "strength" as a person. In a different example, Casey, an 11th-grader, hints at her frustration with not feeling seen by one of her teachers. Casey says that Ms. Phillips treats her as a "favorite" student, but she rejects this approval because she believes it is superficially based on her school performance.

While the girls are familiar with the language of achievement and speak about what success means to them, they are less explicit in expressing their understanding of psychological health. The most striking contrast, however, is that being well is a state that the girls insist on in their present lives, while doing well is a goal they strive for in their future lives.

LINKING DOING WELL AND BEING WELL

In this study of how girls make meaning of success, the researchers learned that the desire for success all too often generated enormous tension, contradiction, and frustration in the girls' lives. Naturally, revisioning success as an active process oriented toward the future imparts critical significance to psychological health. Demanding far more than academic skills, motivation, and external supports, success calls on capacities for managing tensions often arising among a desire for doing well in the future, the necessity of enduring present hardship and struggles, and feelings of fulfillment or emptiness that accompany achievement.

Consistent with an integrated approach toward studying doing well and being well, an old question is raised within a new framework, asking about psychological costs of high achievement for adolescent girls of color. Connections between these minority adolescents' experiences of doing well and their unique experiences of being well are emphasized.

Ironically, sources of strength in the girls' conceptualizations of success also translate into psychological struggle. The girls' faith in the promise of success and their consequent orientation toward the future, however critical for their sustained efforts, necessarily pose a challenge. Success is constantly deferred, leaving the girls to endure through hardship and challenges in their lives. Furthermore, the girls not only enjoy the privilege of having opportunities to succeed on behalf of themselves, their families, and their communities, but they also feel the weight of duty bearing down. They imagine future lives brimming with possibilities and know they will find success, largely because they must. Yet their intense need for doing well is always countered by the possibility of failure, disappointment, and defeat, undeniable realities in their minds. Finally, these girls contend with stress generated not only from the imperative of their success, but also from the day-to-day responsibilities they must uphold if they are to stay the course toward future gratification, if they hope to translate aspirations into real prospects.

We present the case of one student to highlight connections between doing well and being well as they find expression across the data. Aiming for a contextualized understanding of girls' aspirations toward success and their experiences of psychological health, Ariana's story is presented, highlighting themes that resonate through the other girls' accounts. A tenth-grader from El Salvador, Ariana spoke in depth about her longing to be healthy, her frustrations over getting sick, and how these experiences are linked to her success in school.

Ariana has earned a reputation among peers and teachers as a "serious" student; she is a hard worker who excels academically. Outside of school, Ariana spends much of her time competing in gymnastics with a local team and teaches gymnastics to younger students as a part-time job. In the future, Ariana hopes to attend Harvard because it is "the best," and she has her heart set on becoming a physician. As a child in a tightly knit family, she describes feeling very "close" to her parents and siblings.

In response to an opening question about what is important in her life, Ariana states, "health," introducing what becomes a central theme. Ariana explains that she has been "getting sick" lately, and that her doctors first suspected that she had appendicitis. Unable to identify a physical cause for her pain, however, her doctors concluded that "it was just nervous tension, that I'm too stressed out, and that's why I get stomach aches. So I need to relax." Ariana agrees with her doctors' diagnosis, linking the onset of her symptoms to feelings of nervousness:

> I have so many things to do. I come to school, I do my homework, I dance, I get home really late. I don't have enough time to just sit down and watch TV. When I'm nervous, now I've started shaking, like my hands, and I'll get really cold, and my stomach will start to hurt. I get cramps.

Ariana traces the start of getting sick to the beginning of high school. Her desire to excel in school, combined with her belief that doing well in high school requires hard work, has led Ariana to "study like crazy":

> Getting sick all started when high school started. Last year I used to study, study, study, every free time I had I would study, take out my books, start making out the [study] sheets. Last year, I studied like really crazy.

Although Ariana is able to reflect on the reasons why she gets sick, she feels unable to interrupt what has become a distressing pattern. Ariana reflects on her recent experience of midterm exams:

> I think it's just my nature to get nervous and to freak out and get sick over it. With midterms, even a week before I was having fun, not even worrying. But when it was like a day away, I was really freaking out. I got really sick. I was trying to just brush the midterms off, but [the nervousness] always takes over or something.

Ariana wants to relax more, but that seems nearly impossible because she feels as if she should be doing something all the time:

> I always have something to do. It's either like a project that I have to be doing or studying for a quiz or test. Or I have stuff to do around the house. So if I have free time, I have to do something.

In response to a question about what Ariana would like to do if she had more free time, she thinks aloud:

> Maybe just relax and sleep, just stay home. I can relax at home. I can do anything, like I can walk in my pajamas at home, just relax, and that's fine. And just being there, just being able to go up to my room and just watch TV if I want to or play with my computer, not having to worry.

Ariana thinks of home as the only place where she can relax. As she puts it, "I'm myself [at home]. I just go wild, I'm crazy, goofy crazy. I really am really funny." Sadly, though, Ariana feels as though she never gets enough time at home because she spends so much of her life attending to her responsibilities—school, dance, household chores, and helping her parents at their jobs.

In contrast to how Ariana describes herself at home, she characterizes herself as "definitely less goofy" at school. The pressure is so much for

Ariana much of the time that after school, she says, "I just want to go to sleep, it's like I can't take it anymore." The nearly constant worry that she feels around school connects with her achievement goals:

> I worry about school a lot because I like to get good grades, and I kind of get upset when I don't. So [laughs] I guess that's a problem because I always want to be like getting As, As, As. I worry about getting good grades, getting everything done the right way and on time.

According to Ariana's criteria, a "good grade" is an A or A-, and a "bad grade" is anything less than an A-. Ariana is aware that her own standards for high achievement exceed those set by other students: "Everybody tells me, 'I can't believe you think a B+ is a bad grade.' But I guess I set high goals for myself. So, I guess a B+ isn't good enough for me." After seeing her last report card, Ariana felt in her body the disappointment of getting a B+: "My body just like tensed up or something and my stomach started hurting." In such moments, Ariana tells herself that a B+ is enough, that she needn't hold such high expectations for herself: "Sometimes I start thinking, 'It's not a big deal. It's a B+. You got good grades on other ones, so it's fine.'" Though part of her wants to believe that a B+ is "not a big deal," Ariana never manages to convince herself. Driven toward success, she is captive to her own compulsion.

Ariana's reputation as a high achiever began a long time ago, and it has significantly shaped how others see her. She remembers, "Ever since I was little, I've been getting good grades. In kindergarten, I was nominated with this little banner of excellence. It's nice 'cause ever since I was in kindergarten, I stood out." Ariana's continued success in school has earned her more public recognition. For example, a Spanish television station featured Ariana in a spotlight on outstanding Latino students. "Just that they're acknowledging me for what I do is nice," she explained, especially because this helps to show "that Spanish people can achieve stuff just as well as anybody else." Ariana appreciates having her achievements highlighted, but being known for getting good grades has created internal pressure for her. Ariana feels that if she were to get lower grades, she would be "letting everybody else down," at school, at home, and in the community. From Ariana's perspective, "It's like you have to keep up what you were seen as being, like a good student." For Ariana, this expectation of success has come to feel like a burden, as she feels the pressure of representing her community.

Paradoxically, Ariana both appreciates and resents being recognized as a high achiever. She gets "aggravated" when students or teachers see her as "a brain" with "[her] head in the books all the time." Asked how she wishes those people could see her, Ariana responds, "That I don't have to have my head in the books all the time. I'm a fun person. I have fun with my friends, I dance after school, I do other things. People think I'm weird or something."

Though the recognition that Ariana gets for her achievements in school feels affirming, it also leaves her feeling unseen for who she really is.

An appreciation of the intensity with which Ariana pursues "good grades" leads to the question of the source of her motivation. Ariana explains that she needs to do well in school because she wants to get into a highly competitive college:

> I guess getting good grades has become such a big factor because now I'm in high school, [and] I worry about college. 'Cause I want to go to Harvard, I want to be a pediatrician, but I hear it's so hard to get in there.

On a deeper level, though, Ariana feels driven to "get good grades" because that is how she makes her parents happy:

> My mother says, "I know you're working for your grades for yourself cause you want something for yourself, a good education and everything." And I do it for that, 'cause I want to go to college and everything, so I want to get good grades so that's good for college. But I do it mainly for them.

From the achievement perspective, Ariana's story epitomizes success—an immigrant girl from a working-class family, a student with a solid record of high academic performance and a strong drive to do well in the future, an adolescent with the ability and the motivation to achieve. As we listen to Ariana speak about her life, though, we hear ambivalence that complicates any simple notion of success. For Ariana, doing well is not the same as being well. Her visible successes mask a less obvious story of distress, of struggles around health that she connects directly to the "stress" that accompanies her high achievement. Feeling as though she has so much to do and expecting to do everything exceptionally well creates a tension so extreme that Ariana experiences it as pain in her body. An ironic point of hope is that Ariana's episodes of sickness lead her to reflect in a healthy way on the role of achievement in her life.

Ariana's intense motivation stems from a commitment to give her parents satisfaction and to better their lives. On the one hand, Ariana's parents serve as a valued source of love, support, and encouragement. On the other hand, their pride in Ariana's success and their high expectations translate into pressure. Ariana feels that it is her "job" to make her parents happy, that their very happiness depends on her success. Paradoxically, this weight of responsibility enables Ariana to sustain her impressive commitment to her schoolwork, but it also burdens and overwhelms her.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Unlike most research on achievement, which is outcome-oriented, this study investigated how adolescents make meaning of achievement in their every-

day lives. Engaging in this research, which focuses on girls' perspectives on their own achievement, has allowed us to appreciate their strengths and vulnerabilities outside the constraints of the deficit discourse (Gergen, 1994) that generally frames how students of color are portrayed. In this sense, the stories that the girls shared are humbling. Above all, what we have learned is that prevailing impressions mask much more complicated individual and collective stories. It is these stories of doing well that inform conceptions of achievement in the lives of adolescent girls of color.

If we as educators are to motivate students toward success on their terms, then we need to begin with an understanding of what achievement means in the context of students' lives. This study contributes to the dialogue on how Catholic schools can best support students of color. From the perspective of achievement motivation research, academic success, which is defined objectively in terms of criteria such as grades and test scores, is held out as the desired outcome in adolescents' development. The achievement motivation model becomes more complex, however, when we consider that conceptions of high achievement vary from students' perspectives. For example, the girls value achievement not as an endpoint in itself, but especially for the sake of self-sufficiency (i.e., being able to take care of themselves) or reciprocity (i.e., giving back to their families). These values are directly informed by where the girls come from materially and who they are culturally, which points to the concept of achievement as fundamentally relational and contextual. Furthermore, this study points to the importance of supporting students toward both doing well and being well. As Ariana's story illustrates, high achievement does not necessarily imply psychological well-being. In fact, doing well academically can become a source of stress for some students, particularly when they feel that so much is riding on their continued success. Ariana, along with other students who are succeeding in school but struggling to feel psychologically healthy, would benefit from an intervention aimed at helping her identify in herself the capacity to be well, so that reclaiming her health might become a real possibility alongside maintaining her high achievement.

For educators who work to support adolescents in schools, this study suggests ways to foster both achievement and psychological health. For example, in a school that targets students of color, many of whom come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, there would be value in helping girls to address the stress in their lives. Given the necessity of self-expression and relaxation as conditions for being well among the girls in this study, having a range of non-academic activities available at school (e.g., athletic teams, music, and art) became a valued resource for them. Additionally, over the course of this research, weekly focus groups with the girls that were designed as a form of data collection actually became a school-based intervention. Not having any other context at school where they could simply talk about impor-

tant issues in their everyday lives, the girls appreciated group meetings as a time "to get things off [their] chest," to listen to one another, and to give and receive advice. The girls found this semi-structured format of sharing to be so helpful that they requested a continuation of this practice for next year. Through this focus group and other extracurricular activities, then, a school with very limited material resources helped to support the well-being of these girls by offering them ways of relieving everyday stress and cultivating balance.

It is hoped that this study will inform continued dialogue and research on achievement that will help educators to design programs and offer supports in ways that make doing well and being well truly accessible goals for girls of color and for all students. Toward this end, we suggest promising directions for future research that connect to the finding about ways that the girls' feelings of responsibility for doing well and their aspirations for the future are always grounded in supportive relationships at home; doing well matters so much to these girls because it is valued and prioritized in their families. Given this finding, educators would have much to learn from ethnographic research that looks at the culture of Catholic schooling alongside the culture of students' families, particularly those from minority backgrounds. In what ways does schooling or family life mediate students' conceptions of achievement and the actions they take to achieve their goals? How do the values or practices of school or home converge or come into conflict for individual students? Exploring these questions through empirical research would lead to valuable insights for understanding cultural, familial links to achievement for students of color in Catholic schools.

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