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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

COLORBLIND, DEAF AND DUMB:

EXAMINING RACE IN A CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

BRENDAN M. BEDELL

CHICAGO, IL

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to better understand the ways in which race works in the contemporary high school. Statistically, the academic success rates of white high school students undisputedly outnumber the academic success rates of students of color. This study was an attempt to understand this phenomenon in one school specifically. This project was a qualitative study aimed at analyzing the ways that recent black alumni talk and think about race as compared to faculty members at an urban, Catholic, all-male high school.

This study found that there are significant unnoticed and unaddressed disadvantages for black students at this high school, which, for the sake of maintaining the school's anonymity, will be referred to as "Catholic High." These disadvantages exist despite Catholic High's talented, hard-working and well-intentioned faculty and administration. Catholic High's faculty is composed of dedicated professionals who make major financial sacrifices to work in a high school with a Catholic mission. Teachers at Catholic High could make significantly more money by working in a public school. This project will illustrate the subtle mechanisms by which black students experience disadvantage at Catholic High. Although these mechanisms of disadvantage may seem obvious in the light of this research, they are not easily identified by the students or faculty in the school.

This paper will demonstrate that Catholic High, as an institution in a society with race problems, also has race problems, and yet, very little formal conversations or interventions have been employed to confront these problems. Chapter One will synthesize the work of other researchers on this country's race problem as a whole, and in schools specifically, while demonstrating the research gap that this project addresses. Chapter Two will outline the exact methods that this project used to address the research question. Chapter Three proposes that race remains a secret at Catholic High. For a variety of reasons, this chapter will show that race remains unexamined by the faculty and administration. Chapter Three also demonstrates that teachers and students see race's role in school in very different ways. While students understand race as an "ongoing multi-sited project" (Staiger, 2006), teachers understand race as an "omnipotent alien intruder." Students see race working everyday and in every classroom while teachers see race as part of the "baggage" that students carry to school. Chapter Three will demonstrate that these opposing conceptions of race in the school building blind faculty to race's role within Catholic High itself while contributing to the school's silence on the topic.

This project has also found that an unnoticed system of visibility and invisibility has fueled a cycle of ascribed and achieved identity that significantly influences black and white students. Chapter Four demonstrates that this cycle reinforces racial identity to the detriment of black students' academic achievement. This project found that black students are highly visible at Catholic High when they are on the athletic fields whereas, the academic achievements of black students remains invisible. Conversely, the academic success of white students is highly visible. Chapter Four will discuss the

specific ways that visibility and invisibility works to discourage black academic success, serving as a mechanism that disadvantages blacks.

The concept of authority works as another mechanism to disadvantage black students at Catholic High. Chapter Five demonstrates that black alumni and teachers think of authority in very different ways. Conversations with black alumni demonstrated that they struggled to relate to a majority-white faculty while they were students at Catholic High. Their inability to relate to teachers proved to be frustrating for these former students and scarred their relationship with the school's adults. Chapter Five will also argue the ways that differing conceptions of authority can profoundly impact student success.

This project also exposed the power of language when discussing the race achievement gap. Chapter Six illuminates this power through an analysis of the ways that teachers and students both talk about black and white academic achievement. Chapter Six also examines the confusion surrounding the concept of "colorblindness" at Catholic High. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the notion of "colorblindness" is harmful to the black population of Catholic High students as it perpetuates a white-dominated school culture.

This project has unveiled significant subtle mechanisms of disadvantage that for the most part remain unnoticed by a highly dedicated and well-intentioned faculty. Although these mechanisms are subtle, they have considerable consequences for the daily life of black students.

Statement of the Problem

When race serves as a predictor of academic success, our education system fails in its meritocratic promise. Rhetoric and policy surrounding American education today makes lofty and noble promises to “leave no child behind.” In doing so, the American system touts opportunity for “all children,” an equal shot at academic, and, ultimately, economic success. However, this research will suggest that despite undoubted progress in educational opportunity for minorities, the American system still advantages white students while disadvantaging minority students. Specifically, this paper will demonstrate how race works in today’s American high school. The problem of race is deep-seated in the history of the American school. One can only understand the way that race works in schools today by examining how race has worked in the past. This paper argues that one can understand racism in school in three historical eras: pre Civil War, Civil War to 1954, and 1954 to present.

Racism During Slavery

Alexis Tocqueville, a nineteenth century political scientist, mapped out some of the ways that slavery affected both the master and the slave. He argued that, “the slave is a servant who never remonstrates and who submits to everything without complaint. He may sometimes assassinate his master, but he never withstands him” (Tocqueville, 1835, 394). Slavery is the institution which guided relations between black and white Americans from early colonial times to the end of the Civil War. The notion that blacks were inferior to whites was explicit and rarely questioned during slavery times.

Conversely, slavery taught white Americans how to be authoritarian figures. Whites learned to expect to be in charge. White supremacy was considered God-given.

Tocqueville goes on to argue that “the first notion he [the white person] acquires in life is that he is born to command, and the first habit which he contracts is that of ruling without resistance” (Tocqueville, 1835, 394). These entitlements enter the white psyche from a very young age. They are not easily unlearned because they formed the identity of the white person. Shannon Sullivan, a race and feminist scholar at Penn State University, later argued that the institution of slavery formed unconscious habits in white people. Expounding on Tocqueville, Sullivan argues that “The white southerner learned as an infant to be a ‘domestic dictator’” (Sullivan, 2006, 26). These habits were ingrained into the very being of whites. Since the founding of the United States, white Americans have learned to expect to lead.

Slavery taught black Americans to be servants and to expect to be told what to do by a white authority. Black inferiority was seen as innate; God-given. Sullivan argues that “the slave’s submission could be seen in many of his or her habits—physical and emotional, as well as mental—which is to say that slavery contributed to the composition of the slave’s self (2006, 26). Black Americans could not help but to internalize all of the messages American culture ascribed to them. The physical habit of living as a servant affected the way that blacks saw themselves. The habits of serving and of thinking of themselves as inferior weighed heavily on the unconscious and conscious minds of black Americans.

The education of blacks and whites was practical. Blacks were taught how to listen and obey while whites were taught how to critically think, read, and write. Education maintained slavery as an institution for over a century in the different approaches it took towards black children and white children. The education system

insured that black Americans were dependent on whites for food and housing by maintaining illiteracy among black children. Racism during the time of slavery is very easily identified. No one doubts that black Americans were mistreated. No one doubts that black Americans were robbed of educational and economic opportunities. Racism at this time was explicit and obvious.

Racism From the Civil War to Brown Vs. Board of Education

Despite the abolition of slavery, racism continued to thrive into the twentieth century. One can characterize the post-bellum education system paradoxically as both a cause of racism and a result of racism. The post-bellum politics regarding race and school paralleled the ante-bellum politics regarding slavery. The North's political dialogue included educational opportunities for black Americans, whereas Southern whites sought to use education as a means of maintaining white power. William Reese, an education historian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, argues that, "Black citizens struggled to provide their children with access to schools and other avenues to learning. Poverty and the doctrine of white supremacy insured that the northern radical dream of integrated, common schools withered on the inhospitable soil of racial politics" (Reese, 2005, 73). The practice of sending black and white children to separate schools became normal and the U.S. Supreme court ruled that "separate but equal" schools were constitutionally permissible (*Plessey vs. Ferguson* 1896).

As the rest of the country spawned a "new education" in the early twentieth century, black students received "practical information about the soil and the crops and various trades, horses, cattle, and, most importantly, how to work, and work hard" (Reese, 2005, 103). Much like during slavery, the mission of educating black children

was very different from the mission of educating white children. Teaching academic skills to black children was seen as useless by many. Reese quotes the *Dixie School Journal* in 1895, “Manual training has recently been suggested as one of the means of combating the criminal tendency in the young, and this suggestion is being received with increasing favor” (quoted in Reese, 2005, 103). Schools, especially in the South, sought to keep black children “out of trouble” by training them for work while teaching white children the academic rhetoric needed for leadership. Louis Harlan, in *Separate but Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States*, argues that while schools were segregated, black schools were grossly under-funded. Repeatedly, money that was allocated for black schools was diverted by school boards for white schools (Harlan, 1968). Harlan’s work demonstrates that “separate but equal” was not an adequate way to describe segregated schooling in the United States. Therefore the period from the end of slavery to the Brown versus Board of Education decision contained institutional racist policy that denied black students both the money for schools and the curriculum necessary to provide black students with future opportunities.

The New Racism (1954- present)

The Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling on Brown versus the Board of Education deemed segregation unconstitutional and seemed to lead to new opportunities for black students. Although the process of desegregation was undoubtedly slow, many characterize the past fifty plus years as a period of increasing educational opportunity for all minority students. There is nothing essentially incorrect with this characterization. The past fifty years have seen black and white students go to the same school in numbers unparalleled in American history. Black students today certainly have more academic

opportunities as compared to the days of slavery and Jim Crow. However, as race and education scholar John Ogbu has argued, desegregating schools has simply not led to equal educational opportunities (Ogbu, 1978, 79). This paper will demonstrate that although we have come a long way in granting black students opportunities; many racial injustices remain unaddressed.

While dropout rates for elementary and high school students have steadily declined for the past forty years, the U.S. department of education reports that white students continue to remain in school at double the rate of black students. White students have continually outperformed black students on standardized test scores and in admissions and attendance at institutions of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Although American education policy has explicitly provided more and more educational opportunities for minority students, the American education system somehow continues to fail these students. Before *Brown versus Board of Education*, it was easy to identify how a racist, segregated educational system failed black students. Black students clearly attended inferior schools and were forbidden to attend schools that provided real opportunities. Today, it is much more difficult to identify the ways that race operates in schools.

Now, race works in schools in very subtle yet powerful ways. Researchers looking to identify the ways that race works in school to advantage whites and disadvantage minorities seem to have the cards stacked against them. Race scholar Beverly Tatum points out that because race carries emotional power, researchers can have a difficult time getting at the problem (Tatum, 1997, 10). Harvard School of Education researcher Micah Pollock found that race is avoided among school

professionals in formal conversations (Pollock, 2004, 16). In situations like faculty meetings when the stakes were high and real change was possible, teachers were silent on race. Students and teachers alike understand the history and the gravity of race talk. No student or teacher would want to say something “racist” or be seen as “racist.” This makes researching thoughts on race extremely difficult.

This project argues that a useful way to identify the ways that race operates in schools is to ask the students and the teachers in candid conversations. When black students are disproportionately failing, dropping out, and not enrolling in institutions of higher education; we need to ask questions. This project asks black high school graduates and high school faculty members why blacks continue to fail in school in an effort to understand the students’ and the school’s roles in these failures.

Review of the Literature on the Impact of Race in Schools Today

This section will identify what contemporary American students and teachers have said about race. There is a significant amount of scholarship regarding students’ understandings of race and one recent project that articulates the ways in which educators have discussed race. However, research on educators’ understanding of race leaves the race and education discourse wanting. Ultimately, although this research has been beneficial to understanding students’ perspectives on race, more needs to be done to explicitly compare student and teacher languages and perspectives on race. This Literature Review will first look at what scholars have identified in students and then will examine the emerging scholarship on professional educators and race. As a component of a qualitative project, this Literature Review will paint the race and education scholarship in broad strokes. Throughout my project, I will continue to refer to the

literature specifically as it applies to the topics that each chapter treats. Many of the broad findings discussed in this Literature Review will be used more specifically throughout this research. Research on race's role in school has been extremely beneficial to the direction of my research. This Literature Review will introduce the pressing questions for those studying race's role in schools today. This coverage of the literature will also demonstrate a hole that this project intends to fill in our attempt to understand race phenomena. For the sake of the reader, this Literature Review is broken into subheadings which demonstrate the common findings of race and education scholars.

How Minority Students Have Found Family Life Different From School Life

Angela Valenzuela, Signithia Fordham, Annegret Staigler and Nancy Lesko, all race and education scholars, exposed ways that minority students feel disenfranchised in American schools. Their work has shown that minority students feel that when they are walking into school they are entering a foreign "white world" and must act, communicate, and learn accordingly. Therefore, these scholars have demonstrated that minority students wishing to be successful must learn to simultaneously and successfully navigate school culture and family culture if they are going to do well in school. It is important to note that the immigrant and minority students have perceived school to be a "white world."

Angela Valenzuela, in her ethnography of a large urban school in Texas, argues that "schooling is a *subtractive* process, it divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (Valenzuela, 1999, 3). In Valenzuela's interviews with second and third generation Latino students, she discovers that their expectation of school was very different than their experience.

Signithia Fordham's ethnography of black student culture at "Capital High," a diverse high school in Washington, D.C., led her to argue that the purpose of schooling is to reproduce the dominant culture (Fordham, 1996, 21). In other words, schools conduct themselves according to white culture and students coming from a different culture must change. Fordham found that the black students at Capital High recognized school as a white-dominated forum. She also found that black students noticed the difference between black culture's emphasis on "egalitarianism" and white culture's emphasis on individual competition. Fordham argues that blacks have a strong "fictive kinship." Black culture is highly community-minded (Fordham, 1996, 71). Therefore, when black students are forced to learn in a school that focuses on individualism and competition, they experience difficulty. Nancy Lesko, in studying a southern co-ed Catholic High School, characterizes schooling as a process whereby students become highly individualized. She classifies the school that she studied as, more than anything else, a location for competition (Lesko, 1988, 37). One can easily see how students from cultures that do not value competition would experience frustration in school. These are merely samples of a wide range of research that demonstrates ways in which non-white students have found school to be a very white world. Astoundingly, these studies all agree that immigrant and minority students feel a cultural divide between their home life and their school life. These researchers have demonstrated small mechanisms of disadvantage that non-white pupils face at school.

Annegret Staiger, in an ethnography of an urban high school, demonstrates that some teachers have interpreted black cultural styles of dressing as "dangerous" (Staiger, 2006, 132). Therefore not only are black students forced to play by white rules, when

they fail to do so they are perceived as “dangerous” by school officials. Staiger’s work is a great example of a school that claims to be “colorblind” while determining that black cultural norms are not only deviant, but “dangerous.” This discussion would be significantly enhanced through an examination of the teachers’ attitudes towards race. Do those teachers consider themselves to be “colorblind?” Do the administrators in the schools consider the school to be “colorblind?” This dialogue would benefit from additional and explicit studies on “colorblind” policies and perspectives.

The Impossible Choice That Black and Other Minority Students Must Make

There is a significant amount of Sociology of Education research illuminating the ways in which white culture dominates schools (Fordham, 1996, Ogbu, 1978, Valenzuela, 1999, Kochman, 1981). Sociological research has demonstrated that some black students have conformed to white norms in school while other black students have avoided academics altogether. University of Maryland education researcher Signithia Fordham describes conformity as “unqualified acceptance of the ideological claims of the larger society” (Fordham, 1996, 39). Conforming students are the black students who do not question the system that does not allow their culture in the school building. Tatum found that often these students pay the price of being perceived as “sellouts” by their black peers (Tatum, 1997, 62). Fordham describes “avoidance” as a “willful refusal to learn” (Fordham, 1996, 39). This is not to be confused with the “inability to learn” or “laziness.” Black students in American schools often refuse to learn out of avoidance, but are interpreted as “lazy”, “stupid”, or “culturally deprived.” Therefore, because white culture dominates schools, black students are left with the choice between abandonment by their black peers or not investing themselves in school in order to not support an

oppressive system and being labeled “stupid” or “lazy.” Race scholars believe that both of these reactions are strategic attempts by black students to gain power back (Fordham, 1996; Tatum, 1999; Ogbu, 1978; Staiger, 2005; Kochman, 1981; Lewis, 1975; McGarry 1992; Valenzuela, 1996)

As black students are given the impossible choice of staying true to their family and racial culture or changing to fit in with the white-dominated school culture they have two responses: they either conform to white culture or reject white culture altogether by avoiding school. “Conformers” are black students that accept the ideological claims of the dominant society and work within them. “Avoiders” are black students that reject the idea that they must operate within a white world in order to succeed (Fordham, 1996, 39). These students avoid doing work and make every effort to demonstrate that they do not buy into the system. These students generally fail out or drop out. Fordham points out that both conformity and avoidance are usually unconscious efforts on the part of black students to gain their power back by asserting the validity of their own culture (Fordham, 1996, 282). Fordham argues that black students forced to operate within a white “colorblind” world experience significant disadvantages.

The Cost of Success

Thomas Kochman, professor of Communication at the University of Chicago, argues that the “white standard” has been used to assess the physical, intellectual and social growth of black children. Using the “white standard” universally ignores the physical and cultural differences that black children become accustomed to in youth. Specifically, Kochman identifies the ways that whites communicate, debate, compete, argue and brag as fundamentally different than the norms that blacks use (Kochman,

1981, 8). Consequently, for a black student to be successful in school, he must learn new social expectations for behavior. Again, this dialogue would be enhanced by an unequivocal comparison between the ways that adults talk about race in schools and the ways that minority students talk about race.

Education research has been extremely helpful in identifying ways in which school is often foreign territory for minority students. Therefore, race is extremely useful in studying the ways that school is not an equal playing field for all students. Research on the impact race makes on schools continues to identify ways in which race can serve as an advantage for whites and a disadvantage for blacks and other minorities as educators seek to be more “colorblind” in their approach to students.

“Black students don’t go to College”: The Power of Expectations

Expectations for the future have a significant impact on the mind of an adolescent. Research has found that one’s race determines the expectations of him or her. Walter Feinberg and Jonas Soltis, authors of *School and Society*, argue that some of the most profound lessons that one learns in school are not taught overtly. They argue that each school imparts a “hidden curriculum” on its students. “Hidden curricula” are imparted in the small, but very powerful messages schools send students (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004, 60). This dissertation maintains that Sociology of Education research has uncovered a hidden curriculum in many schools that has taught black students that they are not as smart as white students in “colorblind” environments. One profound way that schools advance this curriculum is through a system of tracking.

Tracking is a pervasive policy of separating students by ability. A plethora of sociologists of education have been critical of this practice (Oakes 1985, Hallinan, 1988,

Ogbu, 1977, Staiger, 2006, Labaree, 1997). Maureen Hallinan found that lower tracked groups suffer from negative attitudes and behaviors related to the learning process (Hallinan, 1988, 260). Research has found that the policy of tracking, which is found in virtually every high school, has major negative consequences for lower-tracked students.

Research has also discovered that tracking has segregated races within schools. In *Learning Differences: Race and Schooling in the Multiracial Metropolis*, Staiger argues that, “The organization of Roosevelt High School and its labeling of students illustrates that “colorblind” labels such as “gifted” and “at-risk” function as code words for race” (Staiger, 2006, 4). Tracking is done under the guise of “colorblindness.” Administrators and educators alike place great stake in standardized test scores and their ability to measure “intelligence.” Staiger questions the validity of a system wherein half of the students in the honors program are white in a school in which whites merely make up one-fifth of the student population (Staiger, 2006, 37). The disproportional representation that Staiger uncovered is not unique to Roosevelt High School. Adam Gamoran, a researcher from the University of Wisconsin, finds that throughout U.S. high schools, “black students are overrepresented in non-college tracks, and this overrepresentation reduces their achievement and attainment relative to whites (Gamoran, 2001, 138). Only people that believe black students are inherently less intelligent than their white peers across the board can accept this insidious practice.

Staiger also discovers a disparity in discipline between the “honors” white students and the “at-risk” black students. Honors classrooms are inviting atmospheres of open-dialogue in which student creativity and criticism are encouraged. These classes are alive. At-risk student in the “Bus-Tech” program (colloquially known as the

“Academy for Morons”) are expected to individually and quietly complete rote exercises that neither welcome discussion nor creativity and criticism (Staiger, 2006, 77). Other researchers have found that the better teachers are assigned higher tracked classes and the new teachers are assigned lower track classes (Metz, 2001, 142). Therefore white “honors” students receive a hidden curriculum that is very different from the black “at risk” students’ hidden curriculum. This disparity profoundly forms the ways that black and white students understand themselves and school.

These are just some of the reasons that Signithia Fordham’s ethnography of Capital High leads her to argue that schools are the “social glue that maintain racism” (Fordham, 1996, 64) or why Angela Valenzuela discovered that within Latino students, academic success is looked down on and labeled “acting white” (Valenzeula, 1999, 17). Research on the causes of racially segregated tracking inequity needs to catch up to the research on the effects of tracking inequity. When causes of tracking disparities are specifically identified, it will be easier to prevent them. Nevertheless, tracking remains a great example of a “colorblind” policy that appears meritocratic but, in reality, reproduces racial inequalities. Ultimately, it seems that tracking has contributed to a hidden curriculum that has entitled whites while leading blacks to believe that they do not belong in college.

Race Castes Students

John Ogbu, a leading scholar on black education from the University of California at Berkeley, argues that although the United States claims to provide opportunity for all; in reality, our system castes blacks into specific tracks both in schools and in the economy. Ogbu calls the American belief that any intelligent hard-working student can

succeed academically the “mythology of individualism” (Ogbu, 1978, 102). Ogbu maintains that economic racial disparities had the most significant impact on school success and has served to solidify a caste system (Ogbu, 1978, 2).

Ogbu calls education “future oriented” (Ogbu, 1978, 19). He argues that one cannot separate one’s future expectation from one’s academic work ethic. For students who do not expect to do well financially, school becomes irrelevant. Ogbu argues that this is what has happened to black students in American schools. Ogbu, like Tatum, argues that racism is a system which determines where black and white citizens will work, where they will go to school and how they experience school (Ogbu, 1978, 63). This system continues to cyclically create and reify a job ceiling that hinders the opportunities of black citizens.

Sociological research on race’s impact in school has been extremely useful in understanding the racial education gap. Unfortunately, the rhetoric of “colorblindness” seems to continually hurt immigrant and minority students. Continued research on race’s role in schools can only benefit our understanding of the complex and disguised ways that blacks and other minorities are disadvantaged in a system which continually insists that they can succeed. Specifically, the literature suffers from a lack of explicit analysis of the ways that educators talk about race as compared to the ways that immigrant and minority students talk about race.

What Have Professional Educators Said?

Micah Pollock’s book *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School* has inspired research on the ways in which educators approach race. Pollock found that the attention adults pay to race in school is either deficient or inappropriate.

In her ethnography of Columbus High School in California, Pollock discovered that race is often discussed colloquially among professional educators, but is ignored in more meaningful settings (Pollock, 2004, 47). In other words, teachers would speak freely and frequently about race off the record but were hesitant to speak on the record. Pollock also discovered that teachers were afraid of talking about race because they were afraid of being perceived as “racist.” The very utterance of racism is threatening to any educator’s career. Teachers and administrators realize that racism carries serious moral overtones that threaten to destroy the lives of any adult that works in a school building. Understandably, school employees tread carefully around the race issue.

Pollock also found that race was easily used to describe student / student conflict but was never used to describe teacher / student conflict. Pollock found that discussions regarding race were often inextricably linked with talk of conflict; even riots among the student body. Pollock argues that “riot talk became so nonchalantly racial that it somehow served to instruct listeners in the way race was *supposed* to matter at Columbus” (Pollock, 2004, 60). Pollock’s point was not only that these conversations normalize race conflict, but that these conversations are always centered around student / student racial conflict and never on student / adult racial strife. In failing to discuss student / adult racial issues, administrators and educators may be failing to understand some of the root causes of the racial gap.

Pollock’s work identifies the reluctance of professional educators to both discuss race in a formal setting and acknowledge racial conflict between adults and students. Beyond Pollock, there is very little research examining how both students and adults

discuss race in schools. This dialogue will benefit from more examination of the ways that both students and professional educators talk about or disregard race.

Which is More Significant: Race or Class?

This project does not seek to illuminate disadvantages based on family income levels. Many scholars have discovered considerable academic advantages that upper and middle-class families receive when compared to working and lower-class families. In fact, many scholars have argued that class advantages are more significant than race advantages in school.

University of Pennsylvania sociologist Annette Lareau found significant disadvantages regarding the interplay of social class and education among poor families in the United States. Lareau argues that, “Working class and poor children show an emerging *sense of constraint* in their interactions in institutional settings” (Lareau, 2003, 6). Lareau demonstrates that working class and low-income parents are often unaware of what goes on at school and, at times, they dismiss school rules as unreasonable when their children are in trouble. Lareau, after interviewing various working-class and low-income families, explains that “Wendy Driver’s mother told her to ‘punch’ a boy who was pestering her in class; Billy Yanelli’s parents were proud of him when he ‘beat up’ another boy on the playground, even though Billy was then suspended from school” (Lareau, 2003, 6). Lareau argues that parents of low-income families receive messages at home that can be very different from the messages that they receive at school. This again leads these children to make a choice to either adapt to the culture of the school or listen to their parents. Schools and working-class parents have not been on the same page. These conflicting messages often lead students of working-class and poor families to

believe that the school is “picking on” them and contributes to a sense of constraint among the students.

Lareau’s portraits of working-class antagonism provide stark contrast to characteristics of middle-class families that she has identified. Lareau discovered that as middle-class children are raised, they develop an affinity towards language and a sense of entitlement. These characteristics have advantaged middle-class students in school (Lareau, 2003, 107). Lareau points out that, unlike poorer parents, middle-class parents rarely mention the cost of their kids’ activities. This facilitates a sense of entitlement in their children. Children from lower-class families rarely feel a sense of entitlement (Lareau, 2003, 59). Activities and constant interaction with adults teaches children from middle-class families how to relate to adults and how to respect adults. Middle-class families also emphasize words as the means of resolving conflict. This teaches students the value of debate and how to respond to discipline carried out through language (Lareau, 2003, 107). These skills give significant advantages to middle-class children when they enter the school building.

Lareau argues that the differing methods that low-income, working-class parents use in child rearing as compared to their middle and upper-class counterparts provides significant advantages to the children from middle and upper income households. Lareau argues that our schools grant social capital to skills promoted by middle-class families therefore giving them a significant advantage over children from poor and working-class families. (Lareau, 2003, 12-13). Other researchers have identified similar advantages for middle-class families and disadvantages for working-class families (Willis, 1977).

This project does not seek to directly engage the debate between the power of race versus the power of class in the school building. However, this project may indirectly contribute to this debate by illuminating race subtleties in school.

What Brought Me to This Research

As an educator I am fascinated by the variables that cause some students to succeed and other students to fail. For any given student there is an infinite amount of these factors. I work in a successful school with students from various neighborhoods, races and income levels. In my time as an employee at this school, the school that I am researching, I have noticed that our black students have continually been under-represented in our honors classes and our honor roll while they have continually been over-represented in places like detention. The school I work at, an all-male, Catholic, urban high school in a large Midwestern city, is diverse in everything but gender. This school should be an example of the great progress this country has made in academic opportunities for minority students. This school should be proof to past generations that black students, when given the opportunity to go to good schools, will thrive. However, I continue to notice that although black students are admitted to this school and seem to have the same opportunities as their white peers, something happens that disadvantages them. Something goes on that sends black students to detention while white students go to the Honors Banquet. I was not able to identify what that something was. This project is an attempt to name some of the advantages white students still receive today in a good school with a diverse student population. Identifying contributions or, as I will call them, mechanisms, of disadvantage is not at all easy but it is vital to the notion that every student has an equal chance at success in school.

Research Question

This study seeks to understand the language and perspectives that educators use in talking about race as compared to the language and perspectives that black students use in talking about race. Therefore, the research question that this project will answer is:

- What language and perspectives do school personnel use to describe the race achievement gap and what language and perspectives do black students use to describe the race achievement gap?

A gaping hole resides in the literature on how educators and students understand the relationship between race and education. Very few researchers have looked explicitly at the language and perspectives of black students as compared to the language and perspectives of professional educators in explaining the race achievement gap. Schools will do well to understand any discrepancies that may exist in the language and perspectives of students and teachers. The literature on race and education has been helpful in identifying some of the obstacles immigrant and minority students face. However, the body of research suffers from a lack of analysis regarding student and educator approaches to race.

This study argues that Catholic High, with a diverse student population, unconsciously promotes and allows mechanisms that advantage white students while disadvantaging black students all while ignoring race in formal conversations. In doing so, Catholic High welcomes the racist distortions and omissions in society into the school building. As a result, black students have a difficult time maintaining an image of academic success, and struggle with authority. Catholic High has also unconsciously

supported a hegemonic system of blaming black students on their disproportionate failure rates. Doing so ultimately justifies economic and social racial disparities.

Limitations

Although case studies focus on particular situations and environments, one can use their findings and apply them to other cases. Case studies are specific by nature, but have generalizable findings (Johnson & Christenson, 2003, 47). This project is no exception. The research will focus on teachers and students in one particular high school, but any high school with a student population that includes minorities will stand to benefit from the findings.

I have found that I have been limited in that I am a white male trying to become an “expert” on blackness. As Shannon Sullivan points out, whiteness becomes a part of one’s unconscious habits and thought. It is not easily recognized (Sullivan, 2006, 4). My background as a white teacher makes me much more inclined to identify with the “colorblind” perspective. It has taken endless reading and research on this area to learn the problems with “colorblindness.” Sullivan would argue that what I really have done is begun to “unlearn” my default white perspective. Therefore, my whiteness has limited my understanding of this issue and has served as a limitation.

Ultimately, this project should be seen as an avenue to pose more questions. It will not offer hard and fast answers. In the end, this project should offer new ways to look at “colorblind” perspectives in schools. This research will not solve the racial academic achievement gap, but is an attempt to pose questions that can lead us sociologists of education and concerned parties in the right direction.

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

This project's research question is best answered using qualitative methods. This project is a case study focusing on the language and perspectives of teachers, administrators and minority students regarding the racial gap in a diverse, urban, Catholic high school. The case of the high school that I have studied can be considered "bounded system" (Creswell, J.W., 1998, 61). This project was completed in a specific school, during a specific time period with the school's faculty and administrators. However, one should be able to apply the findings of this case to other times during this school's history and to other high schools generally. Although one must tread carefully in applying this study's findings to other schools, this practice is entirely possible.

Research Participants

The participants in this research project were teachers, administrators, and alumni at an urban Catholic high school. Of the teachers and administrators that I interviewed, one teacher was black and one of the administrators was Latino. The vast majority of faculty members that work in this school are white. Out of the school's nearly eighty employees, roughly ninety-three percent are white, three percent are Latino and four percent are black. Thus, my teacher interview sample roughly corresponds to the racial makeup of the school staff. I interviewed a total of eight teachers, three administrators and sixteen alumni.

Black students comprise roughly thirty-percent of the student body. However, all my alumni interviewees were black because my research project seeks to compare the race perspectives and language of black students with the perspectives and language of the school's faculty. All of the alumni that I interviewed had graduated from the school within the past two years, so their high school experience was still sufficiently "raw." I avoided interviewing current students at the school to avoid any undue power relationship that may exist between myself (a current faculty member of the school) and current students.

I selected my participants using what qualitative researchers would call "convenience sampling" (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). To select the faculty members to interview, I simply placed a memo in each faculty member's mailbox, inviting him or her to sit down and discuss race issues at the school. To gain interviews from alumni, I obtained home addresses from the school and sent out a letter explaining my project and asking for willing interviewees. I had twenty-one responses and I interviewed the first sixteen alumni respondents. The majority of these students were home from colleges and universities for semester breaks, which enabled them to come to the high school and sit for an interview. No names referenced throughout this project are real. I changed all of the names of the alumni when quoting them in the project. I also referred to teachers and administrators in non-specific terms to conceal their identities. My research project was administered in accordance to a human subjects protocol approved by the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board.

Apparatus / Instrument

The only instrument that I used to collect my data was a digital recorder to record all of the interviews. I then hired a transcriber to transcribe the interviews onto word documents. During my interviews, I consulted a list of questions to ask the interviewees.

Procedure

Interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes. The interviews were unstructured in that I did not necessarily ask the exact same questions in the exact same order for each interviewee. I had a list of questions that I wanted the interviewees to address. I allowed interviewees the liberty to talk at length about issues that they wanted to address. Because my goal was to analyze the “race talk” at this high school, I tried not to interrupt interviewees when they spoke on race. Often interviewees introduced ideas that I had not considered. In such cases, I was careful not to censor their ideas by asking them to discuss a new topic. In following the protocol of bounded case studies, my fundamental commitment in the interview was to the integrity of the phenomena and the viewpoint of the subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 84). See Appendix A, Interview Protocol for a list of the questions that I asked during the interviews.

Alumni interviews took place in a meeting room at the high school. I did not conduct the interviews in my office so that the interviewees did not feel like a visitor in a foreign environment. The neutrality of the meeting room may have helped the respondents to relax and respond more candidly. For the faculty and administrator interviewees, I conducted the interview in the most convenient location for the interviewee. When I interviewed faculty members who have offices, I generally

interviewed them in their own offices. I interviewed many of the teachers in their own classrooms to make the interview process as comfortable and convenient as possible.

Obstacles

There were two major obstacles to my research. The first obstacle was the topic itself, race. The second obstacle was my relationship with both the faculty and the alumni interviewees.

Many scholars have argued that whites and blacks alike are taught not to talk about race (Jensen, 2005, Tatum, 1998). Therefore when I bring up race in my interviews, teachers and students will simply not have much practice discussing race, especially in a somewhat formal setting. These scholars also agree that race tends to make whites uncomfortable because it makes them question and confront deep seated ideas about themselves and the world.

Race scholar Joe Feagin studied the language white people use when they are not in public settings and found that whites speak very differently in private among other whites (Feagin, 2007). This phenomenon is a definite obstacle to this research project. Although I tried my best to make these interviews informal and “friendly,” due to the fact that they were scheduled appointments and recorded might make my white interviewees less inclined to speak as though it were an informal conversation within a group of white people. Feagin’s work points to the strength and influence of circumstances and company when discussing race.

Almost all researchers that study race acknowledge the difficulty in discussing it, especially in a school setting. My project is no exception. I noticed during interviews with teachers that they were hesitant to speak on race. At times, it was apparent that

teachers were careful with their words. During one interview, after a faculty member had discussed race, she said “that sounds racist, doesn’t it?” This showed me that this teacher was nervous about saying something that could get her into trouble. Chapter Three will demonstrate that teachers are hesitant to discuss race, in part, because the very topic challenges their professionalism. Throughout my interviews, I attempted to overcome this obstacle by reassuring interviewees of their anonymity and making them feel comfortable every way that I reasonably could. As an example, when the teacher mentioned above expressed concern about being perceived as a “racist” I responded to her by saying “No. This project is not about identifying ‘racism’ This is about talking about race.” This project undoubtedly pays a price in its validity as it explores a sensitive, politically charged topic like race. However, this research took steps to make faculty members and alumni comfortable with race discussions in order to encourage candid responses and reliable data.

Arguably, the biggest obstacle in this project was my relationship with the faculty that I interviewed. I reassured all teachers that their responses would remain confidential and that they would not, in any way, affect my perception of them as professionals. As Micah Pollock and Beverly Tatum illustrate, discussing race can be a very sensitive issue. When some teachers think about race, they immediately feel threatened (Tatum, 1998; Pollock, 2004). I constantly reminded myself of the perceived threat surrounding race talk while conducting interviews.

Data Analysis

My data analysis began during the interviews. I was constantly making meaning from responses and trying to ask questions that allowed like themes to come out of the

data. Research methodology scholars Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman refer to this as “interim analysis” (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Themes emerged that surprised me as I was conducting interviews. As this occurred, I tried to give these themes due time by asking follow-up questions during interviews on topics that I did not plan on addressing. For instance, I did not anticipate teachers talking about the role parents play in their son’s academic success. Yet, almost every teacher talked about the role of parents. I adjusted my questioning accordingly to allow ideas regarding parents to emerge in the data. I also used the qualitative technique of memoing as I was interviewing in order to keep track of my thought and the themes that were emerging (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, 501).

When the interviews were completed, I had the recordings transcribed. I began sifting through the transcriptions by printing them out and highlighting all of the information that I found to be interesting. I looked for “chunks” of information that seemed important or “chunks” that seemed incongruent with the rest of the data. Johnson and Christenson call this process “segmenting” (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, 501).

I then went through the highlighted material and labeled my rationale for segmenting that section of data. These labels then became “codes” for the different topics that were discussed. I kept the “coded” responses separated by interviewee categories of “alumni,” “teachers,” and “administrators.” Miles and Huberman define codes as,

Tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to ‘chunks’ of varying size—words, phrases sentences or whole paragraphs...They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one. (Miles and Huberman, 1994, 56)

My codes were pages long in some cases and also were as short as one word in others. My coding process allowed me to draw connects among different interviewees' responses. They also served as my basis for comparing and contrasting data.

I then created a master list of codes and began the process of checking for intercoder reliability and intracoder reliability (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, 504). Within my data there was a large quantity of intercoder reliability. By checking for this reliability, I was able to parse out the data that did not fit. Later on, the data that did not fit proved to be very useful at times. I also found a significant amount of intracoder reliability issues with my alumni responses. There were times when interviewees contradicted points that they had made previously in their interview. These contradictions were important to be aware of because, in some cases, I was able to discern why these interviewees contradicted themselves. In other cases, I had to disregard a response because of its lack of intracoder reliability.

My coding system allowed me to enumerate the codes to check for strength. The process of enumeration did identify certain topics that had to be analyzed simply because of the number of times that they came up. See Appendix B, "Interview Data Coding Analysis" for a list of the codes and interviewee response references that I used.

I then created typologies for major codes. For instance, I had to create a typology for codes that dealt with the concept of "colorblindness" because there was an abundance of data on it. My typology parsed out interviewees that corroborated with "colorblind" policies and interviewees that dissented with "colorblind" arguments. Finally, I was able to break my work down into chapters that dealt with how alumni and

teachers think and talk about race, the identity that is formed around race, how race affects authority and how teachers and alumni think of the race achievement gap at Catholic High. This study is founded in the language of the alumni and teachers of the school that was researched. My concern throughout the research was remaining authentic to their language and ideas.

This project compares the ideas and language of the teachers and alumni of Catholic High with the literature on this topic. Throughout the paper, I weave these perspectives together in my analysis. Within each chapter the language and perspectives of Catholic High alumni are analyzed using the literature available on race and education.

The process of analysis began during my interviews and continued throughout the writing stage of this project. Data analysis seemed to be a “stage” that ran throughout the entire process of the research process as opposed to a specific time frame. Ultimately, the analysis of this data led me to the chapters that I have created in this paper.

CHAPTER THREE:

RACE: CATHOLIC HIGH'S BEST KEPT SECRET

The Problem

In one interview, I asked Kevin, a black alumnus of Catholic, “What advice would you give a white eighth grader coming to Catholic next year?” Kevin said, “I would tell him to work hard or something.” When I asked Kevin what advice he would give a black eighth grader coming to Catholic, Kevin said, “I’d tell him it’s racist and not to go here... If he is someone who even mildly gets in trouble I’d tell him not to go here.” Charles, another black alumnus of Catholic, when asked the same questions said, “I would warn the kid that this is a racist school and that he should know that before he decides to come here.” As a member of the faculty at Catholic High, these responses were very upsetting. In my four years working at Catholic, I sensed that the school had racial problems, but I had no idea that our black students were this upset with their experience at the school. How could I be so naïve to not notice problems with racial injustices? How could these students be this upset about racial injustices while the school seems oblivious to the problem? This research project will demonstrate that major race problems have gone unnoticed by a hard-working committed faculty because race at Catholic has been altogether avoided in consequential, formal conversations. Race has remained a secret at Catholic High.

Despite the fact that every single teacher, administrator and alumnus that I interviewed recognized major tracking, achievement, and discipline disparities at Catholic High; race seemed to be the best-kept secret at the school. Every teacher, administrator and all but a few of the alumni interviewed freely admitted that black students are over-represented in the lowest academic tracks, under-represented in the honors classes, over-represented in the detention room and under-represented on the honor roll. However, the vast majority of faculty members had little to offer to solve these problems. When asked questions about racial disparities in tracking, achievement or discipline, faculty members often responded by saying “I haven’t really thought of that” or “We haven’t looked at that as a school.” How could racial disparity in achievement, tracking and discipline be blatant enough that everyone notices it, yet the vast majority of teachers have not thought about solving the problem? Race was Catholic’s secret. Teachers and administrators were in on the secret, but, like good secret-keepers, they do not bring it up in public.

Why is Race a Secret?

Why is race Catholic’s best-kept secret? In her ethnography of Columbus High School in California, Harvard researcher Micah Pollock discovered that race is often discussed colloquially among professional educators, but is ignored in more meaningful settings (Pollock, 2004, 47). The interviews I conducted revealed that race was Catholic’s best-kept secret among teachers because of the baggage it carries for professional educators; the faith that teachers, as “good Americans”, have in individualism; and, because of Catholic High’s need, as a successful business, to maintain enrollment. Each of the following sections begins with a quote from a teacher

at Catholic High that serves as a prototypical response from Catholic's faculty and helps us understand why race remains hidden at Catholic.

“The very topic of race challenges the core of my moral being” [White Male Teacher]

Pollock, in her examination of race talk at a Californian high school, argues that educators avoided talking about race in formal conversations because the very topic challenged the professionalism of educators (Pollock, 2004). In my conversations with alumni and faculty at Catholic it became very clear that students noticed their teachers' avoidance of race talk while teachers themselves discussed the threatening nature of these conversations.

One white male teacher said, “Last year I was called a racist a few times because I caught black students cheating on a test and they had immediately blurted out that I was a racist... I hate it that the students can just say that even though it isn't true” Another teacher and coach said, “I have unfairly been accused of being racist when I make cuts for my team...this is why I have opened up try-outs for parents to see who the best players are.” A third teacher said, “Race is scary stuff. You can say anything that someone could interpret as racist. You simply can't make a public comment on race and our classrooms have become more and more public with recording devices, cell phones, whatnot.” One can easily see why professional educators would want to eliminate discussions of race altogether. When race is brought up, teachers immediately become defensive. One coach even allowed parents to view his try-outs to avoid any race allegations. It was clear that the very topic of race is threatening for educators. Teachers realize that accusations of racism, by default, have the potential to be career threatening.

Mica Pollock also discovered that teachers were afraid of talking about race because they were afraid of being perceived as “racist.” The very utterance of racism is threatening to any educator’s career. Teachers and administrators realize that racism carries serious moral overtones that threaten to destroy the lives of any adult that works in a school building. It is understandable that school employees tread carefully around the race issue. Pollock also found that race was easily used to describe student / student conflict but was never used to describe teacher / student conflict. Pollock found that discussions regarding race were often inextricably linked with talk of conflict; even riots among the student body. Pollock argues that “riot talk became so nonchalantly racial that it somehow served to instruct listeners in the way race was *supposed* to matter at Columbus” (Pollock, 2004, 60). Pollock’s point was not only that these conversations normalize race conflict, but that these conversations are always centered around student / student racial conflict and never on student / adult racial strife. In failing to discuss student / adult racial issues, the administrators and educators may be failing to understand some of the root causes of the racial gap.

In general, the faculty at Catholic High would discuss race as a problem for *other* teachers. Catholic High teachers were wary of discussing race issues in their own classes. The majority of teachers at Catholic admitted that race was an issue in the school. However, these discussions were always in the third person. One white male teacher said, “I just think that some people still have a mentality that they are going to blame a black kid over a white kid if something is stolen or if there is a fight or something...I don’t think the majority of our faculty is that way, but there are some.” A white female teacher said, “It is sad to say but I think there are some teachers that could

have some racial biases...There are at least a few racially biased faculty members here.”

The great majority of teachers believed that there were racist teachers at Catholic, but only one teacher personally admitted having any racial bias. Overall, teachers at Catholic agreed that racism was an issue within the faculty, however, only one teacher discussed personally reflecting on his own racial bias. Ultimately, Catholic High teachers see racism as something *other* teachers do.

Pollock’s work and this project have identified the reluctance of professional educators to both discuss race in a formal setting and acknowledge racial conflict between adults and students, especially when the adult involves the teacher himself or herself.

There is no doubt that my study of Catholic High confirms Pollock’s argument that professional educators are reluctant to discuss race. Catholic High’s faculty’s reluctance to discuss race was noticed by students in the school. Many alumni commented on the absence of race discussion in classes. The following dialogue with Nick, an alumnus of Catholic, illustrates this:

Nick: “Teachers don’t have a problem talking about race but I would say that they see race as kind of juvenile. It’s like there is no need to talk about it.”

Bedell: “Teachers don’t recognize the need to talk about race?”

Nick: “Exactly. Teachers downplay race issues that come up.”

Justin, another alumnus of Catholic, said, “Teachers shy away from race, they don’t want to be bothered. Race isn’t that important to teachers. And if a student wanted to talk about race I guess he could raise his hand and ask, but if students really want to talk

about it they do it with their peers.” Justin and Nick echo the thoughts of many of Catholic’s black alumni: the topic of race was taboo at Catholic High.

“Any student that is hard-working enough can do well at Catholic” [White Male Teacher]

Charles Taylor in *The Ethics of Authenticity* argues that “individualism names what many people would consider the finest achievement of modern civilization” (Taylor, 1991, 2). Taylor shows us that our faith in individualism is intimately tied with our identity as Americans. We believe and cherish the idea that hard-working talented people succeed. Racial disparities challenge this notion in deeply personal and offensive ways. It became very clear that the faculty at Catholic High share this faith in individualism in thinking about their students. At times, this faith in individualism blinded teachers to the inequalities that their students experienced on a day-to-day basis while keeping teachers from confronting issues of race head-on.

Both teachers and students at Catholic believe that a hard working, talented student will succeed regardless of his race, and racism is something ignorant individuals do; it is not a systemic problem.

Almost every interviewee that was interviewed for this project discussed black students’ overrepresentation in detention and underrepresentation in honors classes. This disparity is so blatant at Catholic that it was mentioned by every single teacher and all but two alumnus interviewees. However, when teachers and students discussed why this vast disparity exists in both the discipline system and the academic structure of the school, both teachers and students resoundingly blamed *individuals*. One alumnus, Jeff, after explaining that black students receive more dress code violations than white students said, “No one targets black students. If your shirts un-tucked, you’ll get in trouble.”

Another alumnus, Marty, after discussing the overrepresentation of whites in honors classes, says, “I think everybody gets the grades that they deserve. It is wrong to say that race affects grading...Intelligence and work ethic affect grades, not race.” Teachers and students alike agree that the ultimate predictor of school success is one’s talent and work. Teachers and students will say this moments after explaining the white overrepresentation on the honor roll and the black overrepresentation in the detention room. In other words, disparity is recognized but blame is generally placed on the individual. These interviews revealed a clear reluctance among both students and teachers to systematically analyze race when looking at academic achievement. This phenomenon will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Race scholar Beverly Tatum defines racism as “as system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 2003, 3). Tatum also argues that we are taught to think of race in terms of individual prejudice or bigotry but, in reality, race is a system that is much larger than prejudices people or bigots. Teachers and students at Catholic were reticent to think of race systematically, the way that Tatum says we should. Former students of Catholic, when asked to think of race, would often try to think of racist teachers or students. They tried to identify racist *individuals* to explain how race works. Catholic alumni also had a difficult time thinking systematically. One alumnus, Eric, when asked about racial bias in terms of grading said, “You can’t put racism on that at all.” This sentiment was echoed by the great majority of Eric’s peers as well. In other words, it was simply inappropriate for me to even bring up systemic racial advantages or disadvantages. According to the teachers and former students at Catholic, any racial advantages and

disadvantages were a function of the prejudice of individuals within the school; they were never thought of in systemic terms.

Teachers at Catholic very clearly demonstrated faith in individualism. Teacher after teacher explained that, in the end, work ethic and intelligence are the only real determinants of one's grades. For teachers, discussing racial systemic advantages and disadvantages complicated what is understood as a very simple issue. If one works hard, one succeeds in school. One white female teacher said, "Students that fail simply don't do their work and students that succeed get their work done. I would say work ethic is the biggest factor that determines students' grades."

Ultimately, in comparing the responses of students with those of teachers, this was the issue they agreed on the most. Both teachers and students, after acknowledging weighty disparities in tracking, discipline, and academic success, will not go as far as to declare that Catholic has a systemic race problem. Ultimately, teachers and black students at Catholic believe that, in the end, it is up to the individual to determine where he goes in life.

When teachers and students fail to identify systemic racial advantages and disadvantages, inequality remains justified. When teachers and students resoundingly agree that racial advantages are minimal and ultimately are the result of prejudice bigots, both fail to understand how race works.

"We would be in serious trouble from a marketing standpoint if our race problem became public" [White Male Teacher]

Catholic High, like any private school, is a business. Catholic is highly invested in the ways that it is perceived. Catholic High needs students and a loyal alumni base in

order to survive. Like any good business, Catholic is fully equipped with a marketing department. Catholic needs to be sold as a school worth the nearly \$9,000 investment families make annually. The economic downturn of 2009 was not kind to Catholic. Enrollment dropped and teachers and coaches were laid off. This year, especially, Catholic faces the need to become more and more concerned with its public image. Public image is intimately tied to the health and financial future of the school as well as the job security of the faculty and staff.

One white male teacher, after he was interviewed, said he was surprised that I did not ask him about the school's effort to maintain its racial breakdown. He went on to tell me that there has been a concerted effort by the powers that be in the school to keep the school 60% white, 30% black and 10% Latino. He told me that this demographic has been maintained through the school's recruiting efforts. He went on to add that the school needs to remain 60% white because it is the white students that pay full tuition and keep the school financially secure. In other words, the thinking is that if Catholic admitted more black and Latino students, it would not have enough students paying full tuition to remain fiscally stable.

The other risk that this teacher discussed was the threat of being perceived as a "black school." He went on to say that if Catholic were to be seen as a "black school" it would lose its (mostly white) loyal alumni base and would lose interest from prospective white students. The idea is that the school is "mostly white" now. However, if the demographics shifted to have more black and Latino students, some Catholic employees believe that it would lose many prospective students.

Two faculty members at Catholic acknowledged the stakes of “race talk” in the school. Ultimately, if prospective students of Catholic hear that Catholic has a “race problem” they will certainly be less inclined to enroll. Lower enrollment means more job cuts for teachers, coaches and staff. It became apparent that some teachers at Catholic believe that their job is not secure when the topic of race is brought up because the topic of race calls the school’s reputation into question. Consequently, there are adults that believe that the school’s financial future relies on race remaining a secret.

Consequently, race issues remain Catholic High’s best-kept secret. Interviews with faculty demonstrated that whenever race is brought up, it challenges the professionalism of teachers, its very discussion runs contrary to teachers’ and students’ faith in individualism and the schools financial solvency and future. Race is a highly emotionally charged and dangerously consequential subject for people whose livelihoods and moral fiber are pinned on the belief that race is not a systemic problem at Catholic High. Ultimately, the adults at Catholic feel as though it behooves them to act as loyal secret-keepers and chose not to discuss race.

Race is kept a secret at Catholic. However, when it does come up teachers and students vehemently disagree on how race works in school.

How Do Teachers and Students Think About Race? Is it an “Ongoing Multi-Sited Project” or “Omnipotent Alien Intruder”?

The late John Ogbu argued that race forms a caste system in which whites succeed and blacks struggle. In this way, Ogbu understood race’s relationship with school as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder.” Ogbu demonstrated that this caste system has profound effects on student motivation and contributes to white success and black failure

(Ogbu, 1978). Annegret Staiger, in an ethnography of a California high school argues that race is an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project” that is continuously and locally navigated. In conversations regarding the topic of race at Catholic High, faculty overwhelmingly agree with Ogbu’s understanding of race as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder”, whereas students overwhelmingly agree with Staiger’s understanding of race as an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project.” These opposing conceptions of the role race plays in school make it very difficult for teachers and students to find common ground on which to deal with racial disparities.

“Ongoing Multi-Sited Project”

Annegret Staiger argues that race is much more complicated than simple white dominance versus black subjugation. According to Staiger, this dualistic understanding fails to address the complexities that come with race. She argues that race is constantly formed in highly localized ways. In other words, race domination and subjugation can vary from school to school; race dynamics can even vary in different locations within a school. Staiger demonstrates that race hierarchy in the school yard “challenged and even reversed” the hierarchy found in classrooms (Staiger, 2006, 13). Therefore, Staiger argues that race is shaped everyday in everything that goes on in schools. Race is constantly formed and negotiated in every setting within a school. Consequently, for Staiger, the dynamics of racial disparity in education must be analyzed locally to be understood. Staiger argues that, “Understanding race as an ongoing and multi-sited project requires us to untangle the different domains that coalesce in the institution and setting of the school” (Staiger, 2006, 13).

Alumni of Catholic High overwhelmingly agree with Staiger's argument that race is an ongoing project. This is not to say that alumni see race systemically; it is to say that they see race locally. Alumni agreed with Staiger's contention that race is a fleeting project that can be experienced differently in both time and place within the school.

Alumni of Catholic, in interview after interview, spoke of instances in classes at Catholic when the students and teachers contributed to the race project. Eric, a former student at Catholic said,

When I was a senior I had [white male teacher], who was a really good teacher, but he always got on the topic of college and what he experienced and at one point he said minorities get all the benefits in applying to college. I know there is some truth to that but I don't think it was appropriate considering I'm a minority and there were other minorities in the class.

Race was clearly defined for Eric that day in that classroom. Eric was able to recall this incident several years after it happened. Eric, while describing his English class said, "[White female teacher] is cool. She understands that black kids struggle sometimes and she knows what it is like here for us [black kids]." Race dynamics clearly helped to form a bond between Eric and the second teacher that he described whereas race formed a divide between Eric and the first teacher that he described. For Eric, race was bartered differently in different classroom with different adults in the building. Alumni of Catholic understand race as a continuing project.

Alumni of Catholic also saw race as multi-sited. Alumnus after alumnus at Catholic described classroom racial dynamics very differently than the racial dynamics that took place on the athletic fields. Nick, a Catholic High alumnus, said, "The school sets up a double standard for black students. This school does not expect black students to do well in the classroom... Catholic does expect black students to help the football and

basketball teams.” Alex, another alumnus, said, “This school celebrates black alumni that have been successful athletically but doesn’t acknowledge blacks who have done well in other fields.” More than half of my interviewees shared the sentiment that black athletes are expected to succeed athletically and celebrated when they do, whereas black students are not expected to succeed academically and are not noticed when they do. These interviewees demonstrated that at Catholic racial dynamics are negotiated very differently on the football field than they are in the classroom. Therefore, race cannot be understood in simple dualistic explanation of white dominance and black subjugation. Like Capitol High, the racial project at Catholic High is forged differently in different sites. The complexity and breadth of the racial project at Catholic discredits simple explanations. Therefore, white advantage specifically occurs in certain space. The next chapter will specifically address the ways in which race shapes athletic and academic identities within the school.

Throughout my interviews with Catholic alumni, it became apparent that race dynamics at Catholic were seen by students as an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project.” Teachers, on the other hand, understand race as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder.”

“Omnipotent Alien Intruder”

John Ogbu, in his analysis of educational race disparity, argues that the economic disparity that occurs in the workplace has a profound effect on the ways that race works to advantage whites and disadvantage blacks within the school building. In this way, Ogbu sees race as the “Omnipotent Alien Intruder. Ogbu argues that,

It is assumed that improving black school performance and educational attainment is a prerequisite to increasing effectively their opportunities in society. The present study suggests that the reverse may be the case, so that there is a need to plan the policies and programs dealing with social

and occupational barriers in terms of their effects on black school performance. (Ogbu, 1978, 6)

This argument states that racial dynamics in society are extremely powerful in determining who receives money, privilege and power. Ogbu also sees race as an “intruder,” an un-invited guest in school that makes the job of educating much more difficult for teachers. For Ogbu, reforming schools and ending racial disparity goes way beyond the school doors. He argues that social, political and economic change must occur in society if schools are to change.

Teachers at Catholic believe that race dynamics have the power to affect students in deeply profound ways. They see race as omnipotent; a force with which the school cannot contend with. The teachers at Catholic who acknowledged race was an important issue overwhelmingly agreed that there simply is not much they could do to fix it. Catholic faculty members discussed grammar school backgrounds and home environments as significant variables that advantaged white student while disadvantaging black students. When asked why the black students at Catholic are underrepresented on the honor roll and in honors classes one white male teacher said, “The public schools in a lot of the areas we pull from are average at best. And if you have white students who are more wealthy, their parents can afford to send their kid to a better Catholic school, those students will have major advantages.” Another teacher said, “Students that come from inferior grammar schools, which tends more to be our black kids, experience a shock and a longer period of adjustment when they enter high school. This really makes it tougher for them.” Every single teacher interviewed identified the home environments and grammar schools that black students come from as significant weights on their progress. These explanations conveniently place the burden of change on the backs of parents and

grammar schools. Catholic faculty clearly understand race as an omnipotent force, over which they have no control.

Second, Catholic faculty see race as an alien problem, external to their institution. The vast majority of teachers, when asked if race was a significant problem within the school, said no. Nick, another Catholic alumnus, said, “Teachers here don’t really understand the need to talk about race issues. They see race as juvenile... It’s like there’s no need to bring it up.” For teachers, race exists on the outside of the building. Although some teachers did discuss the racist attitudes of their own colleagues, most teachers denied race’s impact on black or white students *inside* Catholic’s doors. Teachers on the whole denied that race was *created* or *defined* in school. One white male teacher said, “It is a shame but many of our black students come from homes with single mothers where they aren’t supervised as much. This is why you may see that they have lower grades.” In other words, black students are disadvantaged, not because of anything the school does, but because of their home life. If this is true then the school’s hands are tied on the race issue. This explanation justifies major racial disparities in academic achievement while releasing the school itself from the responsibility or moral imperative that comes with that disparity.

Teachers also see race as an “intruder.” Race is not welcome in the school building. Catholic teachers believe that race intrudes, making the lives of the dedicated professionals in the building more difficult. This perspective is diametrically opposed to the students’ notion that race dynamics are forged in the building everyday and in every class.

There was one white male teacher that was one of two faculty members who did not see race as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder.” This teacher recognized race’s role within the school on a regular basis. He discussed teachers at Catholic with racist tendencies. For this teacher, race thrived at Catholic. Race did not come from the outside, it was created and maintained within the school building. This teacher said, “I think some of our teachers do a difficult job concealing prejudices that they have... Some of our behavior issues with black students may be related to our teachers’ prejudice.” For this teacher, Catholic High’s struggle with racial equality was not all a result of deficient grammar schools or sub-standard home lives. He believed that the genesis of racial disparity for Catholic was inside of the school.

Another white male faculty member, an administrator in the school, also acknowledged that race operated inside the school walls. When asked to explain the race achievement gap at Catholic, he said,

We have not consistently studied that. We don’t have any regular pattern of grade analysis that’s broken down demographically but I think that some of the research that we did for a School Improvement Committee touched on that and would show that black students are more likely to get lower grades than white students. You know and again that’s data that’s hard to get at because the fact is that the majority of our black students came from public schools... There also may be issues of lower expectations on the part of the faculty when dealing with black students. There may also be issues of potentially stereotypical grading, but it’s very hard to pin that down.

This teacher seems to recognize both race’s impact from the outside (in acknowledging the grammar schools black students come from) and race’s impact within Catholic (in acknowledging the possibility of lower expectations and stereotypical grading patterns for black students). This teacher was the only faculty member who acknowledged both

of these possibilities. Every other faculty member saw race as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder” with the exception of these two dissenting voices.

The diverging perspectives on race between students and teachers at Catholic causes teachers to approach race casually whereas black students take racial issues very seriously.

Silence Legitimizes Inequality

In Staiger’s ethnography at Capitol High, we learn that whites overwhelmingly believed that race was not a problem while blacks overwhelmingly believed that it was a major problem (Staiger, 2006, 2-3). How can two groups of people with constant daily interaction, such as black and white students of the same school, have such differing views? The same is true of the predominately white faculty and minority black students at Catholic High. Because race is Catholic High’s best-kept secret, teachers and students may not even realize that they have these different understandings of the roles that race play in school.

The Problem With Silence

Race scholar Beverly Tatum argues that racism is a system that works to advantage whites and disadvantage blacks in a myriad of ways. Tatum says that racism, like air, surrounds us. We cannot help but continuously breathe it. Tatum also explains that we can respond to racism in three ways: we can be actively racist, passively racist and anti-racist. When schools fail to acknowledge and address racist messages from society, those messages become legitimate (Tatum, 2006, 7-10). Because race is Catholic’s best-kept secret, racist messages from society become real for both the black and white students in the school. Black students begin to believe that they are inferior

when compared to their white peers. Meanwhile, white students become entitled as their advantages become justified. This is why, when asked what advice he would give a black eighth grader that would be entering Catholic next year, one alumnus said,

I would tell him not to come unless you want to be bothered with the stress of having to deal with racism on a daily basis... If the kid wanted to go to a school with an actual diverse environment with a fair shot for him academically, Catholic is not his place.

For this alumnus not only was race a daily stress for him, he also felt that he had not received a fair shot academically. Meanwhile, all but two faculty members interviewed believed that despite possible disadvantages from home life or disadvantages that come with attending sub-standard grammar schools, black students have an equal shot at success at Catholic. Ultimately, an overwhelmingly white faculty very strongly believed that race was not a problem at Catholic even as black students believe that the school has significant obstacles to racial equality. Only at a school where race is kept secret would these diametrically opposed perspectives cohabit with such ease. One white male teacher, when asked what advice he would give a new teacher at Catholic on dealing with race in the school, responded by saying “Oh my gosh. I never think about suggesting anything for race problems because I don’t think race is a huge issue in this school. But I guess if I had to say something I would say, you know, I have no idea. I really have no idea what I would say.”

Earlier in the interview, this teacher said, “I find that black students don’t take school as serious [sic] as white students here... Black students make up the majority of the C.P. [“College Prep”, the lowest academic track] classes and you rarely see them in the honors classes.” How can this teacher say that black students do not take school as seriously as their white peers, observe that they are disproportionately over represented in

the lowest academic track, *and* maintain that race is not a huge problem in the school?

Whereas every teacher interviewed acknowledged that black students are under-represented in the highest tracks, only three teachers specifically discussed this under-representation as a problem. Therefore the typical race talk among Catholic faculty recognizes disparity in tracking and achievement between black and white students, but does not see the need for school-wide or individual teacher interventions. Catholic High's silence on race accepts black failure as normal and allows it to persist.

As white teachers could not think of blatantly racist hurdles that black students were forced to overcome, black students were extremely frustrated with the school's inaction on the race issue. In Tatum's terms, teachers were pointing to the absence of active racism in the school while black alumni were pointing to the absence of anti-racism in the school. Odds are, both the teachers and the alumni were right. Catholic High was a place where overt active racism is rare and a place where overt anti-racism is rare. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that Dr. Tatum would classify Catholic as a passively racist school. Catholic's inability to confront race issues and messages head on allows the messages that society ascribes to white and black races to flourish. In other words, Catholic's silence on race legitimates distorted images of black people promulgated by society (Tatum, 1998). This will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

Tatum also argues that whites tend not to think in race terms because they are not regularly confronted with race whereas blacks are forced to think about race regularly. This phenomenon seems to be at play at Catholic. Catholic High's predominately white faculty has been blind to racial analysis within the school. Race scholarship

unequivocally agrees that black culture is seen as deficient in various ways (Kochman, 2005; Tatum, 2006; Ogbu, 1976; Staiger, 2006; Valenzuela, 2004; Fordham, 2006). It is clear that Catholic's talent for keeping race a secret frustrates black students because it accepts and maintains these messages of black deficiency. Meanwhile, the majority white faculty is oblivious of these messages.

There was only one teacher that understood that race was a significant weight for black students. This teacher was a white male. He said,

I sorted my grades by race in the first trimester of one year and I noticed that the blacks had the lowest scores in the class and I think I took mental note of that. And I know it changed over time, possibly because I took note of it. And somehow, I can't quantify what I did, but I think I did make some changes to address that.

Bedell: What changes did you make?

[White male teacher]: I don't think it was necessarily a difference in teaching method. I think it was in terms of attention, perhaps giving more attention to black students than what I might have otherwise given. Was I originally not giving them enough attention from my own internal racism? I don't know. I'm not going to rule that out. But it certainly is possible that I said to myself that some of these kids need more attention, and that right there may have made a difference.

First, this teacher has a very different philosophical understanding of how race works at Catholic when compared to his colleagues. While his colleagues see race as an omnipotent alien intruder, he believes that race works actively within the school. He was willing to question his own prejudice in grading which motivated him to look at his grade book using race as an analytical lens. Next, this teacher saw race as a disadvantage for black students that required some kind of intervention. He recognized the race system that Tatum discusses within Catholic High's walls. This teacher's recognition of the race system inspired him to look at his grades. This method of analysis was by far the exception among Catholic High's faculty.

When this teacher found that black students were disproportionately under-performing in his class, his intervention was astoundingly uncomplicated. He simply gave these students more attention. While race is perceived by Catholic faculty as something that is omnipotent, this one teacher found that he could affect racial disparity with the simplest of interventions. He merely paid more attention to his struggling black students. This small effort was apparently effective in overcoming the black students' over-representation at the bottom of the class. Therefore this teachers' experience with black students seems to provide an empirical contradiction of the Catholic faculty's belief that race is an omnipotent force that invades the school.

Ultimately, scholars have shown that when race remains untouched, distorted images of blacks become real. Therefore because race remains Catholic High's best-kept secret, the images and identity that society ascribes to blackness and whiteness becomes real for Catholic students. If the Catholic faculty do not change their understanding of race as an "Omnipotent Alien Intruder", they will feel powerless to tackling the issue of race and disparities in academic achievement will undoubtedly remain.

This chapter has demonstrated that race has remained taboo at Catholic High because it challenges teachers' professionalism, teachers' philosophical faith in individualism, and the fiscal health and future of the school. As race has remained Catholic High's best-kept secret, conflicting perspectives on race's role in school have cohabitated with ease. Whereas the predominately white faculty have seen race as an "Omnipotent Alien Intruder", black students have shared race scholar Annegret Staiger's view of race as an "Ongoing Multi-sited Project." These perspectives coupled with

Catholic's inability to confront racial issues have legitimated racial disparity allowing an academic race gap to form and grow over time. This is how race works at Catholic High.

CHAPTER FOUR:

IDENTITY: VISIBLY AND INVISIBLY FORMED AND MAINTAINED

Despite Catholic High's avoidance of the topic of race has played a significant role in forming identities for black and white students both inside and outside of the school. Paradoxically, Catholic High, in using "colorblind" race neutral approaches to policies, has clearly defined black and white identity. This chapter argues that the places that black and white students are visible and invisible in the high school has shaped their identity. Faculty interviews demonstrated that the adults in the school building are completely oblivious to this system of visibility and invisibility. The language used to describe how Catholic High works has been instrumental to maintaining the guise of race neutrality in school policy. This chapter will demonstrate that race has been instrumental to identity formation and maintenance at Catholic High in the school's history, alumni, Mother's Club and Father's Club, academic tracking system, athletic program, and discipline system.

"Fitting In" and Identity Formation

During interviews, three different adults discussed how difficult it was to fit in with the school community at Catholic High. One well respected white male teacher, said, "I don't think everyone is aware of how hard it is to break into this community that we have here, the traditional community that goes way back with fathers, grandfathers, and so on. There were times when I first came here where I felt like a foreigner."

This teacher, an adult held in high esteem by both his students and colleagues, clearly felt like a foreigner at Catholic High. Another well respected faculty member said, “I feel extremely uncomfortable going to Catholic High functions. I avoid going to the ‘Day at the Races’ or the Golf Outing because I feel like I don’t fit in. I go to the [school’s major fundraiser] because feel like I have to but I avoid all of the other events.” These were two examples of well respected adults candidly discussing how difficult it was for them to fit in at Catholic High events. The first teacher later said, “I am just thinking about this now but I’m just trying to imagine what it is like for a fourteen year-old black non-Catholic who has a different family life than a lot of other kids and I can see how that would be extremely difficult... It has got to be tough for those kids to feel like they fit in.” If adults that work at Catholic High have feelings of not fitting in at events because they did not attend the school themselves, or because they are not Catholic, these feelings of exclusion must be all the more real for teenagers. Catholic High’s rich tradition seems to form a very strong identity that makes it difficult to feel like a part of the school. Although the school celebrates diversity in its marketing, the alumni of this school agree that the school’s identity *feels* very white. This feeling is so pervasive; it has even affected the adults in the building.

Every single interview with Catholic High alumni eventually hit on the topic of identity and every single black alumnus confided that they perceived Catholic High in one way or another to be a “white school.” This chapter will discuss the various ways that Catholic High, while maintaining a black student population of twenty to thirty percent, maintains a white identity.

Sociologist Stuart Hall argues that,

Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside,' abjected... So the unities which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality, but of the naturalized , overdetermined process of 'closure.' (Hall, 1004, 5)

Clearly, Catholic's High's strong identity has worked to define who belongs and who does not belong. Hall's contention that group identity works insofar as it excludes, helps to explain how Catholic High's strong identity has worked for both the teachers and the students of Catholic. One of the phrases that Catholic High uses to describe students and graduates of the school is "Men of Catholic." During my interviews with black alumni, I asked them to describe what a "Man of Catholic" was. I was shocked when more than half of the alumni interviewed said that they really did not know what it meant to be a "Man of Catholic." A school that seemed to have such a strong identity has alumni that, when asked what it means to be a part of the school and to have gone to the school, faltered. All of these alumni also said they believed that the school had a "strong identity." How could Catholic High alumni believe that the school has a strong identity, while at the same time, fail to explain what that identity was? It seems that Catholic High's identity did more to exclude and define who the "outsiders" were than anything else. Not only did identity at Catholic High separate Catholic High students from students of other schools, identity at Catholic separated students within the school into those who were a part of the "Catholic High family" and those who were not. Black alumni almost unanimously explained that lines of identity and acceptance broke racially. Although black alumni could not explain what the identity specifically was, they unquestionably knew that it was not black.

Entering this research, I anticipated hearing stories from alumni of exclusion on the basis of race and I did hear a good number of these stories. However, I never expected to hear personal stories of exclusion from faculty members. The faculty stories of feeling excluded, even more than the stories that came from the alumni, show that identity works, like Stuart Hall argues, as a means of exclusion. Identity at Catholic has drawn a very clear line in the sand, showing unmistakably who belongs and who does not belong. This chapter will demonstrate the specific ways that white students have connected with Catholic High in ways that black students have not identified with the Catholic High community. The school's identity has worked as a powerful means of including whites while excluding black students at Catholic High.

Race scholar Beverly Tatum argues that the concept of identity is used by whites to keep blacks subordinated. Tatum argues that identity is formed systematically through distorted images and omissions. Identity works to misrepresent black people as dangerous, unacademic, apathetic, and lazy. Meanwhile, identity has worked to present whites as successful, erudite, hard-working, and motivated. Race has worked as a system controlling our perception and schools have not actively deconstructed racial identity distortions (Tatum, 1998, 21). The perception of others is a strong contributor to identity. Identity is not something that one solely forms by oneself; identity is both ascribed and achieved. Therefore, there is no doubt that students, at least in part, rely on others to shape their identity.

Race scholars have argued that schools' failure to deconstruct the identity ascribed by society has caused tension between black students and schools (Tatum, 1998, Fordham, 1996). Not only does Catholic High fail to deconstruct the images that society

gives its black students, Catholic High unconsciously uses a system of visibility and invisibility to reinforce these images.

“Catholic High is for White Kids” --Jack, Catholic Alumnus

It was clear that Catholic High was seen as a white school among the black alumni. This is despite the fact that black students have consistently made up over between twenty and thirty percent of the student population over the past fifteen years. Sean, one alumnus of the school, said, “When black people ask me what school I went to and I tell them that I went to Catholic, they are like, ‘You went to Catholic?’ And then they laugh and say well ‘What’s the breakdown? Isn’t that a white school?’” Regardless of the school’s racial population, black students believe that Catholic is perceived as a white school. Another alumnus said, “When I tell people that I went to Catholic and then all of the sudden their demeanor changes towards me. They are surprised that I went here.” Because of this, from the very first day of their freshman year, black students sense a strong Catholic High identity, but do not feel a part of it. Black students feel like unwanted guests in their school. These interviewees discussed the perception of Catholic High in the surrounding community. Catholic High’s image as a white school among black communities subverts black students before they enter the building for the first day of their freshman year.

Another alumnus, Kevin, said very frankly, “It’s a school for white boys. Really, they racist up in there.” Kevin, when asked to explain why he thought Catholic was “racist” did not talk about specific racist teachers. He said, “It’s not that people use the ‘n word’, it’s that the school is just made for white boys.” This sentiment was held by the majority of black alumni interviewed. These alumni discussed the concept of identity to

explain how exclusion based on race worked for them. Conversely, when the faculty discussed racism, they tried to think of specific teachers with prejudices. This chapter will demonstrate the specific ways that Catholic's white identity worked racially to exclude the black students from the school's community.

Sean, one Catholic High alumnus, when asked about black identity in his high school, said, "People think black students are dumb, that they have no chance of succeeding. What is he there for? He isn't there to learn." Sean later went on to say,

When Barack Obama won the election the white people were scared to be in this area. So I am like well I don't see how there will be a riot if the black candidate loses. People would never think that way about a white candidate.

Bedell: When you say 'the white people were scared' do you mean the white people in this city, in this country, or do you mean the white people at Catholic High?

Sean: I mean all of the above. Obviously I wasn't at Catholic when Barack won but I'm sure the white people in the school had those feelings.

Clearly our culture's distorted image of black people is alive and well within Catholic High. Sean was confronted with these distorted images so much during his time at Catholic that he confidently predicted what people inside the school were saying about an election while he was not even here. By ignoring race problems, Catholic High has welcomed outside images and distortions of black people into the building and has allowed these images and distortions to contribute to the image of their own black students.

One white male teacher at Catholic High articulated some of the difficulty that black students face when they come to Catholic. He explained that black students are over-represented in the lowest academic track of the school, rarely seen on the honor roll and are "constantly in trouble." He also said,

I think there was a time here not so long ago where we had some coaches who were recruiting, quite frankly, a lot of black kids because that's what he thought we needed to bolster [the team he coached.] It didn't work because what he did was bring in a lot of kids from very weak public school programs who just had a God-awful time adjusting to the realities, academic and behavioral expectations of the high school. They may have been really good players, but you know...

Bedell: What happened to those students?

[White male teacher]: They didn't make it. It's not their fault that they didn't make it. It's the fault of the guy who brought those students here, but he is no longer with us.

This teacher did not place blame on the school for its students' failures. He blamed the person who recruited the black students in the first place. This kind of race talk creates a clear black identity. This teacher, in this interview made it very clear that Catholic High's identity is white and that black students who attempt to succeed can find themselves in over their heads. This teacher does not even blame the students themselves for their failure. Remarkably, he blames the coach who recruited them. This teacher was essentially saying that the coach should have been wise enough to know that Catholic High was a school with a strong white identity with high standards, and to bring black students here is asking for trouble. Although this teacher's perspective was not the norm among the Catholic High faculty, it was present and it does play a significant role in shaping black and white racial identity within the school.

At Catholic High, blackness and whiteness had little to do with skin color. In fact, my research of race talk at Catholic High revealed that one's "race" had more to do with one's academic track and success than it had to do with skin color. There were students with black skin color that were raced "white" and, in rare circumstances, there were students with white skin color that were raced "black." One Catholic High alumnus, Damien, said,

Even within the black community there are differences in the black students where many are deemed not black—they are white, even though their skin color is black. Other black students pretty much been around black people and only black people their entire lives. So it's a culture clash when they get here.

Bedell: Can you say more about what separates the students with black skin that are seen as white and the students with black skin that are seen as black?

Damien: It is how they carry themselves, what classes they are in, how they get along with teachers—it pretty much depends on their attitude.

First, it is significant that Damien said any student who has spent his life immersed in black culture will experience “culture clash” at Catholic High. Damien’s comment reinforces the idea that Catholic High maintains a strong white identity. Second, Damien showed that race talk at Catholic High is not about one’s skin color. What makes some students raced black and other students raced white is a function of “how they carry themselves, what classes they are in, how they get along with teachers” and their “attitude.” The vast majority of students and teachers interviewed identified blackness with deviant behavior, academic mediocrity or failure, and, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, a fractured relationship with the Catholic High faculty. Racial identity at Catholic High has nothing to do with skin color and everything to do with one’s academic track, attitude and behavior.

This understanding of black identity is reinforced by some teachers. One white male teacher said,

I would say that behavior-wise my black students are louder maybe because their dialect is more robust than white students, maybe that’s why I notice them more as problems in class. I would expect that that would affect their achievement because if you are not paying attention you are not getting the information. Generally speaking, I see a lot more non-blacks taking notes in class versus blacks... I honestly feel that school is more of a social time rather than an academic environment for blacks. And I guess that it would be how they are raised—well, I don’t want to

say that, but I guess it's what they've grown accustomed to because if you've never been taught that when you go to school you sit down and you don't say anything, versus, yeah, go to school to have a good time... Black students are not as focused. I don't know if it's just because they are always having a good time and chatting—oh, that sounds bad doesn't it?

This teacher has very clearly established a black identity that is associated with laziness, “having a good time” in school, disrupting the class, and failing to achieve. This identity has nothing to do with the student's skin color and everything to do with the student's behavior and attitude in school. Race at Catholic High has become an identity that is recognized more by behavior than skin by color. A quiet, high achieving black student in Advanced Placement courses would simply not be seen as black by this teacher. This teacher was not alone in this way of thinking about race. This is why this alumnus said that white students can be seen as black and black students can be seen as white. The lynch-pin of race talk at Catholic High was attitude and behavior; it was not one's skin color.

Black Culture Is Forced to be Invisible

The alumni of Catholic High believed that identity formation was reinforced by the school's system of discipline. These young men believed that the school was actively racializing students, in part, by punishing students that failed to “act or look white”. Some alumni of Catholic High perceived the discipline system as a mechanism of ascribing moral weight to racial identity. In other words, the alumni of the school believed that Catholic High was so committed to reinforcing black and white identity that it was morally wrong to act or look “black.” Meanwhile, faculty and administrators failed to recognize the way that identity worked against Catholic High's black students.

Because Catholic High did not establish or welcome a strong black identity in the school, black students had two choices, they could either conform to the school's white norms, becoming white themselves, or they could resist the school's policies altogether. Some black students at Catholic High believed that they were not permitted to act black in a manner of their choosing within the school.

Damien, a Catholic High alumnus, explained that the school dress code for mass was designed to make black students look white. He said,

When I was a student here they changed the mass dress code to require students to wear a black or blue sport coat and a blue or white shirt. On paper, nothing seems wrong with that. But if you look around, if you go to a predominantly black church on Sunday you will notice that there are not just black or blue sport coats in the pews. Many black people wear suits of all colors and different styles. That is just part of black culture. And in my opinion, that sent me a loud and clear message, I could not dress like my culture when I'm at Catholic High. I have different kinds of suits and I have seen black students wear different kinds of suits except for some reason that was not acceptable... I remember seeing the freshman walk around with his red suit and I thought to myself, 'He'll learn, he can't dress like that at this school.' What this meant was that this way of dressing, which I saw black people doing, that we just didn't want to look like that at our masses here. And whether or not it is blatantly put out there, it was clear that the black style was not welcome. Wearing braids in your hair is another example of this. Honestly, I haven't heard any justification for that rule either. The only reason I can think of, is that the black image is simply not wanted at this school. What does that image mean? Does everyone with braids commit a crime? And if that is the justification, that is just ridiculous.

Damien learned that Catholic High did not want him to dress in ways that represented blackness to himself and others. School policies like the dress code created specific regulations for how to dress, act, and conduct oneself. Black alumni of the school agreed that this code was designed to make them look and act like white people. Damien's story shows us that black students learned to dress differently at school than they did with their

own families. According to these researchers, black students are forced between the impossible choices of remaining true to the image of their family, culture and race or adopting a new image in-line with their high school.

School History and the Shaping of Identity

Catholic High is an urban school in a neighborhood that was very white before the ascent of the suburb in the 1950s. Catholic High historically was very white and gradually, as the urban space around the school changed, the student body became more and more diverse. Today, the white majority of the school looks nothing like its surrounding black neighborhood. Naturally, the school's history strongly shapes its identity. The history of the school is displayed throughout its buildings, old and new. In the main hallway in the old building the walls are lined with newspaper articles covering the school's athletic triumphs. Trophy cases in the school display trophies that span the last century. Even the newest buildings on the campus display pictures of the school's past presidents and old photographs of some of the first graduating classes and athletic teams. The history and identity of the school is very impressive for the casual visitor, returning alumnus, or perspective eighth grader. The history of the school is highly visible. However, the history of the school did not impress the black alumni that were interviewed. For these alumni, this history has formed an identity that has shows them that they do not belong.

One alumnus of the school, Eric, said, "I notice that the alumni is mostly white and the hallway is full of pictures of [Catholic's] history... I know the school has more white alumni but it would be nice to put up pictures of diversity. Like, you want to present this school as diverse and your main hallway is full of whites." Eric was

frustrated with Catholic High's promotion of diversity in the marketing literature. Eric recognized the hypocrisy of hanging pictures of white Catholic High students all over the school while talking about diversity as a "gift." The white identity of the school is very visible in its halls. This identity is so visible that every single one of the fifteen alumni of the school that was interviewed commented on the school's distinctly white identity. Whites are highly visible within the school and the blacks remain invisible to the casual visitor.

Another alumnus said, "I'd say that our alumni, like the pictures and stuff, are mostly white. Black people are not necessarily celebrated or recognized at this school." The school's Advancement Office has a "Wall of Fame" with pictures of alumni that have made remarkable contributions to the school displayed. Six of the fifteen alumni interviewed specifically talked about the "Wall of Fame." Dwayne, one alumnus, said,

I remember walking up by the President's Office and a bunch of alumni are hung on that wall. I saw one black person there out of all of those pictures. It was one old guy I think. I know there are a lot of black kids that go here, it's very diverse. But maybe they don't want to be a part of the alumni. Maybe the school doesn't accept black graduates as alumni. I don't really know.

Catholic High's "Wall of Fame," a well-intentioned attempt at recognizing successful alumni, has clearly impacted current students and how they understand themselves and the school. The visibility of the white alumni has sent an unmistakable message to current black students in the school. These white alumni who have undoubtedly made noteworthy contributions to the school serve as a visible reinforcement of the school's white identity for the black students. The "Wall of Fame" is a great example of Catholic High unknowingly contributing to a white school identity.

While the school's white alumni are very visible, the black alumni remain invisible. There is no space within Catholic High that defines or celebrates black identity. As a result, the black identity within Catholic High is partly defined from the outside. When schools fail to confront race head on, dominant visible (and invisible) messages about "blackness" easily become internalized by students of color. Seven out of the fifteen alumni interviewees discussed black culture negatively. Many alumni interviewees and two faculty interviewees criticized black students as being "lazy." For many of these alumni and faculty, blackness was synonymous with laziness.

Mother's Club / Father's Club

Catholic High has a very dedicated Mother's Club and Father's Club that is comprised of any interested mothers and fathers of students at Catholic High. The Mother's Club organizes fundraisers, social events, bake sales, hosts luncheons for the faculty, works the school dances and even organizes a Fashion Show featuring faculty members as models. The Father's Club builds sets for school plays, organizes an Intramural Boxing Tournament, and helps to raise funds for school activities. These clubs are very visible within the Catholic High school community. Faculty and students recognize Mother's Club and Father's Club members because of their dedicated involvement in school events. My interviews revealed that the Mother's Club and Father's Club are white-dominated organizations that contribute to the idea that white parents are highly involved while black parents are apathetic about their sons' education.

Students and faculty members agreed that the Mother's Club and Father's Club was overwhelmingly populated with white parents. One white male teacher said, "Blacks are drastically underrepresented in those organizations... we really need to get more

blacks involved because in some ways it's one part of the power structure in the school."

Catholic High alumnus, Ben said, "The Mother's Club and Father's Club are a huge benefit for the students here. Students may not realize it, but these organizations do a lot for the school." A white female teacher said,

White parents are definitely more involved. One-hundred percent. Whether it's events such as 'Business After-Hours,' the Father-Son Dinner, the Father's Club or the Mother's Club. I think there is no balance. White parents are here more. There is very little participation with the black student population. Of course if white parents are involved more, their students will be involved more in the school... I think it is a matter of priorities. I think that parents that attend these events make their children a priority.

The alumni and faculty's agreement on this demonstrates the visibility of these clubs and the significance of the white majority within the clubs. The image of a white dominant Mother's Club and Father's Club contributes to the perpetuation of the dominant discourse of white and black identity within Catholic High. The Mother's Club and Father's Club make it easier for faculty and students to accept the idea of whiteness as academic success and school involvement while blackness is associated with laziness and passé.

What seemed as indifference on the part of black families within Catholic High was actually an awkward feeling of rejection caused by race. Catholic High alumnus, Derek, said, "The Mother's Club and Father's Club is mostly Caucasian because normally people want to be around people like you. And since those clubs are white, black parents wouldn't want to come out and join." Derek later explained that his parents hadn't joined the Mother's Club or Father's Club for that reason. Another alumnus, Damien, said,

My mom shared an experience with me where she had gone to the Mother's Club Fashion Show and she was on the committee to help out and basically she was ignored or pushed to the side as were two other black moms...It's not as if you can't be in the Mother's Club, it's not as if you can't be in the A.P. classes as a black person, but be prepared to be one of the few. I think that in that way many black parents choose not to get involved in many of those groups because it seems like black people just don't belong.

Damien's mother's experience shows that membership in the Mother's Club and Father's Clubs at Catholic High was not always a simple question of who was more invested in their child's education. Clearly these clubs have an established racial identity that is difficult for students, faculty members, and parents of students to disrupt.

The highly visible Mother's Club and Father's Club have contributed to an image of involved white parents while reinforcing the image of disengaged black parents. These images have affected the ways that students and faculty talk about white and black families in the school. Meanwhile, it has been the racializing discourses of these clubs that have maintained the myth of black apathy at Catholic High. The black alumni of Catholic High have exposed the difficulty of belonging to the Mother's Club and Father's Club as a black parent.

Academic Tracking System

Tracking is a pervasive policy of separating students by ability. A plethora of sociologists of education have been critical of this practice (Oakes 1985, Hallinan, 1988, Ogbu, 1977, Staiger, 2006, Labaree, 1997,). This research project revealed that although tracking and race are rarely discussed in formal consequential meetings among faculty, students, or administrators, the faculty and administration unmistakably agrees that the identity of the school's different academic tracks is intimately tied to race.

Every single faculty member and administrator agreed that the black students are proportionally over-represented in the lowest academic track while proportionally under-represented in the highest academic track. The vast majority of alumni also acknowledged this phenomenon. There were a few dissenting student voices on this that will be discussed later in this chapter. However, there was no doubt that the highly visible tracking system contributes to the coding of success and intelligence as white and associates blackness with incompetence and laziness.

Catholic High's disproportionate tracking system is not unique. Other research has also discovered that tracking has segregated races within schools. In *Learning Differences: Race and Schooling in the Multiracial Metropolis*, Annegret Staiger argues that, "The organization of Roosevelt High School and its labeling of students illustrates that color-blind labels such as "gifted" and "at-risk" function as code words for race" (Staiger, 2006, 4). Tracking at Roosevelt High was done under the guise of "colorblindness." Administrators and educators alike place great stake in standardized test scores and their ability to measure "intelligence." Staiger's research reveals that tracking is a system wherein half of the students in the honors program are white in a school in which whites merely make up one-fifth of the student population (Staiger, 2006, 37). The disproportional representation that Staiger uncovered is not unique to Roosevelt High School. Dozens of sociologists have also uncovered racial disparities in tracking systems. Only people that believe black students are inherently less intelligent than their white peers across the board can accept this insidious practice.

Black Students Faced With Impossible Choices

Other race and education researchers have found that when black identity is coded negatively, as it is at Catholic High, black students have been forced to confront the impossible choice of choosing peer acceptance or academic success (Tatum, 1998, Fordham, 1996). The following conversations with Catholic High alumni demonstrate that black students at Catholic High are confronted with this same impossible choice. The first interview is with a recent alumnus who was a black honors student.

Bedell: Would you say that a black student and a white student, of equal academic abilities, have an equal shot at success at Catholic?

Eric: Not really. I don't know. I guess. It's complicated.

Bedell: What makes it complicated?

Eric: Well, for one thing, I don't think anybody ever makes it through high school on their own. If you need to call somebody for help or homework or something, generally you don't ask the teachers because you feel threatened by teachers—maybe that's just me, I'd rather ask a friend than a teacher. And until senior year the only people that I had to ask were people from my own race. I couldn't do this as a black person in honors classes. Freshman and sophomore year I just did everything on my own. When I was a junior I started getting A's in my honors classes and the black students in the school didn't talk to me because they saw me as a 'sellout.'

Bedell: Why?

Eric: They felt like I was a 'sellout' to them because as a black student I was not supposed to be in honors classes, much less get A's in honors classes. So I had to basically change my whole group of friends and my identity. Senior year, I asked my white classmates for help on homework all the time and they became my friends. I had to change who I was. Now I listen to more white music and wear white style clothes... When I started doing well at Catholic it killed my social life. Black kids didn't approve of me hanging out with white kids. I think they really didn't approve of me taking honors classes, to be honest. I chose to become like the white kids and succeed academically. But I mean basically that is not how high school should be where you have to rely on people within your race and then be seen as a 'sellout.'

This conversation with Eric shows the intimate connection between identity and tracking. As a black student in honors classes, Eric was lost. He was forced to make the decision

to either stay in honors and “become white” or to leave honors and continue to socialize with his black friends. This is an impossible choice for an adolescent to make.

Damien, another black alumnus that was in honors courses described this same phenomenon. Damien said,

Looking back I think I see an assimilation process that started freshman year. You put a kid who had never had white friends before high school and you put him in a class where twenty-five of his classmates are white, there’s going to be serious assimilation that’s going to happen. From freshman year I can testify as many of my black friends rebelled against the school. Because I was in honors I was seen as a white kid by my old black friends and seen as the black kid by my white classmates. That was hard.

Damien and Eric openly discussed the identity crises that they faced as black students in honors classes. Both were forced to abandon their black friends and make new white friends that were in their classes. Both also discussed how much time it took for this to happen. Damien and Eric spent the majority of their high school years without a strong group of friends while struggling with their identity. Damien and Eric’s stories reveal the strong white identity that comes with the “honors” track and the strong black identity that comes with the lower “college prep” track. Race at Catholic High seems to be a function of one’s academic ability more than one’s skin color.

Academic success at Catholic High has been coded along racial lines. This coding process is done both by the school and its students. The school codes academic success unconsciously through the existence of its highly visible tracking system. Students code academic success racially by reinforcing the established norm of white success and black failure within their peer groups. Eric and Damien’s stories serve as

good examples of how this coding process works and the powerful effects it has on black students.

Dissent on Tracking

The tracking system at Catholic High, like virtually every other high school, is a very visible component of the school. Students see their peers in their academic track nearly every class of every day. There are three tracks: the college preparatory track (C.P.), the advanced college preparatory track (A.C.P.) and the honors track. Every class is tracked with the exception of theology, physical education, and technology. Therefore, students go throughout the school from class to class with the same track of students almost all day, every day for four years. There is a highly visible link between tracking and one's identity.

Interestingly, there were two black alumni of Catholic High that were more reluctant to accept the connection between identity and tracking while the other interviewees fully acknowledged the connection without hesitation. When these students were asked about the tracking system and race in interviews, these black alumni felt uneasy. They seemed almost offended by the topic. One student, Tyrik, when asked if he had made any observations about Catholic High's tracking system with regards to race said,

Tyrik: Umm, no. What are you getting at? I don't think black students are necessarily the worst students in the school.

Bedell: I didn't say they were. I just want to know if you've noticed any connection between race and tracking at this school.

Tyrik: No.

It is undisputable that there is a strong, highly visible correlation between race and tracking at Catholic High. How could a black student who attended Catholic High for

four years, where there are undoubtedly major racial tracking disparities, not notice those disparities? Tyrik did not want to acknowledge or discuss that connection because he was did not want to accept a black identity that was tied to stupidity, failure, or even mediocrity. Tyrik did not want to acknowledge a black identity that is tied to the lowest academic track. Another alumnus, Marty, expressed his discomfort discussing the tracking – race relationship by maintaining that tracking is based on the individual, never the group. Marty said, “If someone was in honors or A.P. classes it was because of what they knew, not because of their race. I don’t think any race was in any track too much. Race has nothing to do with tracking.” Marty and Tyrik’s reluctance to discuss the overrepresentation of black students in the lowest track and their underrepresentation in the highest track was, in part, a fight to change black identity at Catholic High. Marty and Tyrik did not want to support or perpetuate the idea that black students were less capable than their white peers. Marty and Tyrik, in refusing to acknowledge the racial disparity among the school academic tracks, refused to accept a black identity of academic failure.

Unfortunately, at Catholic High, Marty and Tyrik were fighting an uphill battle. Every single faculty member and administrator interviewed did acknowledge the existence of major racial disparities among the school’s tracks. One white female teacher succinctly summarized the observations of the faculty and administration when she said, “The highest track is predominately white students and the lowest track is predominately black students. In the middle track I would say there is more of a balance among the races of students in the school.” The race talk at Catholic High was clearly linked to

tracking. The honors tracking had a lucid white identity while the college prep track maintained a lucid black identity.

Administrators, faculty and alumni all agreed that there is very little movement among the tracks. For the most part, students remain in the track that they are assigned from their entrance exam score as eighth graders. The stagnation among the tracks has contributed to the strong identity that tracks produce. When students are frozen in tracks for four years, the tracks form these students' identity. The track becomes a convenient way to describe the student. This became apparent when alumni described themselves as "C.P. students" or "Honors students." Education researcher Maureen Hallinan found that lower tracked groups suffer from negative attitudes and behaviors related to the learning process (Hallinan, 1988, 260). This research confirmed Hallinan's contention. Tracks at Catholic High served as significant contributors to students' identity and, in doing so, worked as self-fulfilling prophecies for both the lowest-tracked students and the highest-tracked students.

Track Atmosphere and Recognition

A number of studies have shows how tracking has affected the ways that students understand themselves (Staiger, 2006; Metz, 2001). These studies have also shown how "race neutral" approaches to tracking have ironically led to racially tracked students. The same educational disparity in tracking seems to exist at Catholic High. One alumnus, Jeremy, said,

They (honors students) had better teachers. The A.P and Honors teachers have a rapport with students. They treat students more as friends than teachers of C.P. [lower track] classes. C.P teachers have to be strict and don't get to know the students as well... Honors students get the benefit of the doubt because they are tight with teachers.

Alumni agreed that the tracking system was not merely faster-paced classes. The tracking system, according to the alumni, determined the quality of teachers that you had and the way that those teachers interacted with you. Ironically, some alumni even described the honors classes as more “laid back” environments. One would think that honors classes would be described as fast-paced and rigorous. Clearly tracking was about more than pacing and difficulty. The tracking system at Catholic High determined the quality of relationships that one had with the adults at the school. In this way, tracking contributed to the white identity of belonging and the black identity of disenfranchisement. Chapter 5 will discuss black disenfranchisement at Catholic High in more detail.

The black students in the “college prep” track also suffered from feeling invisible in the school. Many felt that the school was really for the white honors students and that the lower-track black students “did not count.” One Catholic High alumnus, Sean said, “If you’re a black student and you are not a star athlete then you should just forget about it, you are not going to be noticed unless it is for negative things like getting detentions or getting in trouble a lot... Teachers will think, ‘What is he here for? He is not here to learn?’” Unfortunately, Sean was right. One white male teacher, when asked about the differences between our black and white students, said, “School is more of a social time rather than an academic environment for black kids here... When I think of black culture I think of happy-go-lucky playing around type of culture...Whites are more focused and serious about school.” Although this teacher was alone in this understanding of black culture, clearly the school’s highly visible tracking system has played a major role in

defining the identity of the black and white students in Catholic High. While white students sit in “relaxed” classes where they develop close relationships with teachers, black students feel unrecognized by the school and disconnected from their teachers. Race talk at Catholic High unmistakably identified a white identity tied with the honors program and a black identity tied with the college preparatory program. These tracks not only give students qualitatively different experiences of school, they gave them qualitatively different understandings of themselves.

Athletics: Where Black Students are Visible

Race talk at Catholic High showed that black alumni overwhelmingly felt unrecognized and invisible in the school. Black alumni and faculty alike agreed that black students’ anonymity was broken if they were athletes on one of the school’s premier sports teams. The alumni and faculty at Catholic High articulated a black identity that was tied to athletics. In thirteen of the fifteen interviews with alumni, black identity was connected to athletics. Black alumni said that the identity of the black athlete was perpetuated at Catholic High in the black alumni that the school celebrates and in the students that the school chooses to “notice.” Whereas black academic success remained invisible, black athletic success was highly visible.

Catholic High is well known in the area as a sports powerhouse. The athletic program has produced a significant number of players that have gone on to play sports professionally. One of the school’s most famous black alumnus is currently a star in the National Football League. For the sake of preserving the school’s anonymity, I will call this alumnus “John Ford.” John Ford has maintained a strong relationship with Catholic High and the students of Catholic High are very proud to share their alma mater with

John Ford. The recent alumni of the school commented that, although it is nice to have such a famous football player as an alumnus of the school, Catholic High's reverence for this player has only perpetuated the identity of the black man as athlete. Eric, an alumnus of Catholic High, said,

I think it's great that [John Ford] went to Catholic High. I remember when I was a senior and he came to talk to the students. The problem is that this player's achievements are based on sports. The school doesn't promote people that have done other things for careers. In my time at the school, they never brought in the CEO of such and such. But they do it on well, you know, he played football. That is what we are known for. It's not like we are known for someone who came out with something like the iPod. We are just known for sports.

Bedell: When you say 'we' do you mean Catholic High or black people?

Eric: I guess I mean black people at Catholic High.

Clearly bringing John Ford back to speak to the students reinforced a black identity that is tied to athletic achievement. Black students of Catholic High that needed an identity that was not pigeon-holed to athletics were left dissatisfied.

Richard, another alumnus of Catholic High, said, "It's just when you have an atypical black student that is an A.C.P or Honors (the top two academic tracks) that works hard; he is not noticed just because he doesn't play a sport. You will never see a black student recognized for anything except athletic achievements." Another alumnus, Dan, said,

I believe that the adults in the building and maybe even the students look at us [black students] as just athletic and not smart. And if we get out of high school we are probably criminals and locked up... Not all blacks are athletic; but it seems that they are only recognized for their athletic talent. It's like the school just doesn't see black students as smart.

Remarkably, this sentiment was explicitly discussed by all but one alumnus interviewee.

Another alumnus said, "Academically black students don't necessarily thrive but socially

they do. Black athletes are cool with teachers if they are good at their sport. They just kind of fall into the popular category even with the faculty.” Alumni felt that their worth and identity in the school was in their ability to play sports. I noticed a significant difference between the black alumni who played basketball and football with those who did not. The alumni that were athletes had a much more favorable opinion of Catholic High and their time in high school than those who were not football or basketball players. This leads me to believe that, for black students at Catholic High, one’s identity and one’s worth are determined by one’s success on the athletic field. Conversely, white students had the option of establishing worth and identity in the classroom.

It should also be noted that the sport that black athletes play is important. Richard also discussed the differences between his experience and his father’s experience at Catholic High. Richard’s father loved the high school, thriving during his time there. Richard did not have a positive experience. Richard explained the disparity between his disappointment in his time in high school and his father’s positive experience at Catholic High by saying “My dad played football so he was highly revered and got along well with the teachers. I played tennis. Tennis isn’t really recognized at Catholic High... Black students aren’t supposed to play tennis. They will only be recognized if they are good at football.” Catholic High’s black identity did not have room for Richard and consequently left him lost as a black scholar-athlete who was in all Advanced Placement Courses and played on the tennis team.

Anthony, another Catholic High alumnus had a similar experience. He said, “I think the only reason blacks go to Catholic High is because they are good at sports.” Anthony’s comment says a lot about black identity at Catholic High. Anthony believed

that black students that are not on sports team have no value in the school. Anthony went on to say,

I'm a musician and there was nothing there for me. I was not active in the school. I tried [the school's band] but it wasn't stuff that I wanted to do. I mean there weren't a lot of avenues... Realistically, black people go to Catholic High for football. Black kids who don't play football will struggle because the school just isn't made for them.

Alumni agreed that black student-athletes would thrive at Catholic High, whereas high achieving academic students would struggle. Alumni also agreed that Catholic High does not recognize academic achievement in black students. This is evidence of the identity problem at Catholic High. It became obvious that while white identity was tied to academic achievement, black identity was tied to athletic achievement. The school's system of visibility and invisibility has disenfranchised black students that are not members of the basketball or football teams.

As alumni argued that the school itself promoted these identities, faculty of Catholic High believed that it was the students that promoted this identity. Alumni believed that identity was formed through the recognition that students received in the school. Alumni discussed the visibility of white academic success and the invisibility of black academic success. Meanwhile, the few teachers that did discuss black athletic identity argued that it was the students themselves who shaped this identity. One faculty member said, "I know some of our black students really think that they are going to be football players. They may not talk about it but that's really what you can see that they hope to do." Most teachers discussed athletics generically as something that helps black and white students succeed. Generally, faculty of Catholic High did not understand the identity struggle that black students face in high school. Teachers generally believed that

students individually shape their own identity, while students believed that the school and society shaped their racial identity.

Discipline: Turning Black Boys Into White Men

As demonstrated by Damien's dress code vignette earlier this chapter, the discipline system at Catholic High has, at times, forced black students to choose between conforming to the rules and becoming white or resisting the rules and becoming a discipline problem. Signithia Fordham's ethnography of black student culture at "Capital High," a diverse high school in Washington, D.C., led her to argue that the purpose of schooling is to reproduce the dominant culture (Fordham, 1996, 21). Fordham argued that Capital High conducted itself according to white culture and that students coming from different cultures were forced to change. Fordham found that the black students at Capital High, like Catholic High, recognized school as a white-dominated forum.

Fordham argued that in response to white-dominated schools,

African-American resistance took two primary forms: conformity and avoidance. Conformity is interpreted as unqualified acceptance of the ideological claims of the larger society; within the African-American community, it is often perceived as disguised warfare in which the Black Self 'passes' as an Other in order to reclaim an appropriated humanity. In the dominant community, resistance as avoidance is defined by the larger society as failure or incompetence... Within the African-American community, avoidance is construed as willful rejection of whatever will validate the negative claims of the larger society regarding black people's academic abilities. (Fordham, 1996, 39)

Fordham insightfully argues that the dominant culture misinterprets the actions of black students. The white dominant culture incorrectly perceived black academic failure as black incompetence and incorrectly perceived discipline issues among black students as

signs of irresponsibility when, in reality, there were times when both were purposeful rejections of white-dominated policies.

Faculty interviews revealed that this was exactly what happened at Catholic High. The majority of faculty at Catholic High believed black students to be mediocre to incompetent students and generally understood blacks as trouble makers, not because of their race, but because of their grammar school background. One white male teacher said, “Our black students struggle with our discipline system and academically because they just don’t come here with the same preparation as our white students.” Although the teachers may be correct in their belief that black students do not come to high school with the same preparation as their white peers, teachers and administrators were not able to recognize the resistance / conformity dilemma that black students faced. For many black students, succeeding in school meant conforming to the white standard and, therefore, abandoning their cultural and familial identity.

For black students, discipline issues at times were simply the result of an identity crisis. Contrary to what the faculty believed, black students thought about Catholic High’s discipline policies seriously. These policies were highly consequential for the black students. Their very identity was at stake. Damien’s dress code vignette showed us that black students, at times, rebelled against the discipline system in order to avoid “becoming white.” To explain the black resistance to Catholic High’s discipline system as simple “irresponsibility” or “poor grammar school training” fails to see the full picture. One cannot talk about the discipline issues that black students face without taking Signithia Fordham’s resistance / conformity dilemma into account. Damien showed that black students confront this dilemma at Catholic High.

Despite the avoidance of race by the adults at Catholic High, race still works to form very specific identities at Catholic High. There is a system of visibility and invisibility firmly entrenched in the school that recognizes white academic achievement and black athletic achievement. Catholic High's race system works through the school's failure to address society's racist images, the pictures displayed in the school hallways, the alumni that the school chooses to recognize, the Mother's Club and Father's Club, the academic tracking system, and the school's discipline system. These images are perpetuated under the nose of an oblivious faculty. The image of black and white people at Catholic High has significantly disadvantaged black students in their pursuit of academic success. An unnamed and unnoticed system of invisibility and visibility promotes a white identity associated with academic success and hard work and a black identity associated with athletic success and academic mediocrity. In this way, identity at Catholic High has worked to exclude and degrade black students during the most formative years of their lives.

CHAPTER FIVE:

AUTHORITY AND MENTORING: REASONS TO CHOOSE INVISIBILITY

In an all-male Catholic high school in an urban setting, understanding authority is paramount to understanding how the school works. Authority is used to control, motivate, and relate to students. Authority defines the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student. Authority also defines the fundamental relationship between the student and the school. At Catholic High, the way that authority is understood represents a significant way that demarcations are constructed between black and white student populations. This project showed that faculty members understand authority as fictive and beneficial, whereas black students approach authority incredulously, wary of danger. This chapter will demonstrate that race at Catholic High has created a divide between teachers and students that has led black students to avoid relationships with adults while paradoxically feeling targeted and unnoticed at the same time. For black students at Catholic High, authority has made their deficiencies visible while making their successes invisible. This conceptualization of authority has led to frustration and failure among the black student population in the school. Catholic High's authority structure has also caused black students to *seek* invisibility in order to avoid trouble. This chapter will also demonstrate that the practice of seeking invisibility has been misclassified as "apathy" and "laziness" by a faculty unaware of the obstacles that black students face.

Shock as Freshman and “Getting Used to It”

Every single alumnus that was interviewed in this study commented on the fact that the overwhelming majority of teachers at Catholic High were white. Meanwhile, only two of eleven teachers or administrators commented on this phenomenon. Unmistakably, the absence of black faculty members is a major problem for black students while the white faculty barely identifies it.

Black alumni of Catholic High discussed the skin color of the faculty as a shock to them when they entered the school. One black alumnus, Anthony, said,

We [black students] used to joke about it all of the time. We would go to school functions like mass and ask each other, ‘Where are the black teachers?’ I guess there is a disproportionate number of blacks in professional environments so it makes sense that there wouldn’t be as many at school. We used to joke about it freshman year.

The lack of black teachers at Catholic High sends a highly visible message to the student body as they enter the school as freshman. Students of color see that difference when they begin their high school career. The significance of Catholic High’s overwhelmingly white faculty does not gradually disenfranchise black students. Black students agreed that the racial disparity within the faculty affects them from their first day of school.

Chris, another black alumnus of Catholic High, said,

There are not a lot of black teachers at Catholic at all. There are no black male teachers, when I was here they brought in a black male coach and counselor, but he isn’t a teacher... When you first get here you talk about how there aren’t any black teachers. If they hire a new black teacher, we [black students] notice right away.

Other alumni talked about the race of the teachers as one of the first observations that they made of Catholic High when they began as freshman. Black students entering Catholic High were hard pressed to find adults in the building with their skin color.

Meanwhile, for the most part, the faculty itself at Catholic High was oblivious to what it looked like. When discussing some of the struggles of the black student population in the school, only two of eleven teachers even mentioned the racial demographics of the school teachers and administrators. This is significant because it demonstrates how disconnected the majority white faculty is from the perspectives of the black students in the school. The faculty of Catholic High clearly has difficulty seeing the school through the eyes of its black students.

The vast majority of black alumni also said that the overwhelmingly white faculty was something that they “got used to” during their high school years. This is because the messages that a disproportionately white faculty sends a black student are messages that the black student either learned and accepted, or fought, in his time in high school. For example, black students said that they “got used to” the fact that black culture was not welcome in Catholic High’s walls. Black students “got used to” the difficulties that come with trying to relate to an adult from a different race and different culture. Black students “got used to” feeling like foreigners in school. These students never said that they were “comfortable” with an overwhelmingly white faculty. They merely said that they were “used to” the awkwardness that comes with being a black student in a school of white teachers. Chris, who was very vocal about his shock as a freshman confronted with a white faculty said, “After a while we didn’t really talk about the racial make-up of the teachers. It just became normal for us. We got used to it... I wouldn’t say that black students didn’t suffer because teachers were mostly white. I would say that we learned to deal with it.” Chris’s feelings were shared by his peers. Black students at Catholic High

learned to deal with the issues inherent in coming from a different racial background than that of their teachers.

Some students discussed the white faculty at Catholic High as good preparation for the real world. One alumnus, Justin, said, “My dad always tells me that my time at Catholic High will prepare me for the rest of my life because all my life I will have to learn how to relate to whites and take orders from white people. I guess it can be good to have white teachers.” Other students expressed this same sentiment. This could be why they were so quick to “get used to” an overwhelmingly white faculty. With a disproportionately white faculty in relation to the racial composition of the student body, Catholic High was teaching some of its black students to accept the white majority. In a very basic way, students were learning to “get used to” a world dominated by whites. As race scholar Beverly Tatum argues, school is not the only place that black students learn to accept white domination. However, it seems that the highly visible white faculty serves to ready students for a world controlled by whites.

Trouble Relating to White Teachers

Despite claims that they “got used to” the overwhelmingly white faculty, black alumni also reported having difficulty relating to their white teachers. This difficulty led to qualitative differences in their experience of high school. Every single black alumnus interviewed expressed some feelings of frustration about his relationship with his high school teachers. These alumni also agreed that the frustrations that they experienced were due to their race. One black alumnus, Eric, discussed how difficult it was relating to his white teachers in high school. He talked about how in his four years at Catholic High, he only had one black teacher and that was for half of his freshman year. Eric said,

Black students don't have somebody who can relate to them. Black students need to have someone that they can open up to and talk about stuff with... Black students wouldn't necessarily think a white teacher would understand what they are going through but you would expect a black teacher to know what you are going through.

Catholic High is referred to by faculty, students and parents as having a "family atmosphere." This quality of the school is identified by many families as a significant factor that drew them to the school. Unfortunately, race has left black students dissatisfied with their relationships. They have felt left out of the "family."

Another alumnus, Dan, said,

I heard racial jokes said by teachers. [White male teacher] was like, Damien, you should brush your nappy head. Some black kids viewed that as racial. I didn't because [White male teacher] gets on everybody. He makes fun of all of his students in a funny way but I know that Damien was pissed off. Damien wanted to transfer out of the class but it was too late, it was already like over half way through the term.

This interview demonstrates some of the difficulties white teachers encounter in attempting to relate to black students. This vignette hints at just how difficult it can be for white teachers and black students to have strong mentoring relationships.

Eric, another alumnus, said,

I know my black friends, we would like to see more black men in the school. I know we have some women but there isn't a lot, it's a small group. But it would be nice to see some diversity with the faculty. And I know, like, it would be easier to relate. I notice that with my teachers, like [white male teacher] and [white female teacher], a lot of them we can't relate to at all, like with culture and everything there is no common ground. They just don't get where I come from.

Bedell: Does race change your relationship with teachers?

Eric: Yeah. I have a much better relationship with [black female teacher] and [black female teacher] than I had with any other teacher because they were one of the few black teachers and they understood where I was coming from.

It is clear that the alumni believed that the racial make-up of Catholic High's faculty made it more difficult for them to forge strong mentoring relationships.

Despite almost every single black alumnus discussing the difficulty that he had in relating to white teachers, not one faculty member discussed the difficulty that he or she had in relating to black students. Again, this demonstrates just how difficult it is for teachers to understand the struggles that black students face in school. Ultimately, the faculty's silence on their ability or inability to connect with black students demonstrates, in part, that the majority white faculty simply does not comprehend the divide between themselves and their black students. The struggle of black students to develop relationships with teachers is not recognized by the school.

Race scholar Beverly Tatum argues that white people have a difficult time understanding the systemic advantages that race grants whites and denies blacks in schools and society (Tatum, 1998, 6). This seems to be what has occurred at Catholic High. It seems that the black alumni are acutely aware of the lack of mentoring that goes on between the majority white faculty and the black student population. Meanwhile, the white teachers have been oblivious. Catholic High alumnus, Derek, said, "I noticed in class that it was the white students that have their hands up and the black students that are disengaged. The black students didn't really care to contribute. Teachers probably thought the black students were lazy or something but I just think they didn't like the teacher like white students did." Derek believes that black students are misunderstood as lazy because white teachers fail to forge a connection with them and then fail to recognize the divide between themselves and the black students. Failing to recognize the

lost connection with black students has led to major educational deficiencies for black students. Moreover, teachers have failed to understand the causes of these deficiencies.

Black alumni discussed their relationships with the few black members of the faculty at great length. One alumnus, Charles, said,

I remember we talked about the fact that there were no black teachers working in the school one summer in football camp. We were talking about how all of the black students tend to hang out in [black female teacher's] room after school. We were laughing about how all of the black students sort of gravitate to her room. It must be because she is black. Black students at Catholic are just more comfortable with black teachers I guess.

Charles was not alone in his observation that black students at Catholic High flock to the black teachers. Several other alumni interviewees mentioned this same phenomenon. It is clear that black students have a need to form connections with teachers and these connections are much easier to form with teachers of their own race than with white teachers.

Anonymity of Authority Figures

Due to the lack of connections with adult figures in the building, black students see authority in threatening, impersonal ways. Black alumni described authority figures at Catholic High anonymously. Catholic High alumnus, Chris, said,

By my senior year the kids that I sat with at lunch, we didn't like the authority, we didn't have time for it, it was pointless to talk to them. You getting a dress code is not saying anything and not teaching you a lesson. We didn't get along with the authority.

Later in the interview, when I asked this alumnus who "the authority" was, he told me that he was referring one of the school's administrators. This alumnus knew this administrator's name, but he refused to discuss this person by name. He saw the

authority in the school anonymously, as something with which he had to deal. Chris did not see the authority figure as someone that could help him. Chris could not refer to this person in any personal way. This demonstrates the divide that black alumni of Catholic perceive between themselves and the school power-structure.

The following dialogue with another alumnus, Richard, demonstrates this same phenomenon.

Bedell: If you were to give advice to a black eighth grader and a white eighth grader on how to succeed at Catholic High, would you give them the same advice?

Richard: No.

Bedell: What would you tell the white eighth grader?

Richard: Make sure your hair is cut. Stay around the office. Make sure authority figures see your face, and then just go about your business.

Bedell: What would you tell the black eighth grader?

Richard: Don't do anything that's going to draw attention to you, anything at all. Make sure you have the right shoes. Stay out of trouble. Don't be loud. I wouldn't say associate yourself with bad people, but just be careful and stay away from the office. Be quiet.

Richard understood all authority figures as people not to be trusted. Richard did not see any benefit in knowing authority figures. In fact, he would advise a black eighth-grader to avoid the adults in the school as much as he could. Richard was not alone in this assessment. As a group, black alumni understood people in authority positions, like teachers, as people to be avoided because they will unfairly cause trouble for students. Obviously, there are serious educational issues with students believing that they must avoid teachers in order to survive high school. Beyond that, Richard's comment speaks to how black students felt that they were perceived by adults at Catholic High. Richard

believed that anytime a black student was noticed, he could be in trouble. Sadly, black alumni of Catholic High believed that they had to remain invisible to be successful in high school. Not only are authority figures anonymous to black alumni, they are “dangerous.” Richard’s comments also underscore the system of visibility and invisibility that Chapter Four outlines.

Black Standards and White Standards

The black alumni of Catholic High believed that there were two standards at the school, black standards and white standards. Alumni agreed that there were different standards in both behavior and academic performance. Blacks believed that, paradoxically, they were held to higher behavioral standards when compared to their white peers and lower academic standards when compared to their white peers. The black alumni agreed that the administrators and teachers, the authorities of the school, worked to enforce these double standards regularly.

Black alumni overwhelmingly agreed that they were targeted for behavior issues.

One alumnus, Scotty, said,

I remember a lot of discipline issues happening for no reason at all. Like it could go from ‘Pull up your pants’ to ‘you don’t need to be in this school if you dress like that.’ Why does a teacher need to comment on black kids even coming to this school because of where they wear their pants?

Black alumni believe that small problems, like the height of their pants, point to bigger issues, like whether or not they should attend Catholic High. Alumni felt that they were targeted for removal from the school because of their race. Alumni agreed that for white students, authority works very differently. Alumni believed that although white students may be corrected for dress code infractions, those infractions would never lead to

comments on their very existence in the school. Another alumnus, Dwayne said, “Black students get away with less because they are expected to be bad. Teachers look for them [black students] to screw up. They check their dress code more... White kids got away with a lot at Catholic.” Dwayne’s classmate, Anthony, said,

I would like to think that it is fair but it isn’t really because a lot of the things white kids did and got away with, black kids got in trouble for. We would be sitting in class and the white kid would be joking around and screwing around and would get like ten warnings. Once the black kid said one thing, he would be written up.

Alumni agreed that the relationship between authority figures and black students was strained as black students were targeted for behavior issues.

Many of my interviews with teachers confirmed the suspicions of the black alumni. Some teachers admitted to their own racial bias. One white male teacher said,

I don’t consider myself a blatant racist but I have to be honest, do I have some racial attitudes in my mind? Sure I do. Yeah, these attitudes probably have affected my interactions with black students on many levels. I don’t think that is necessarily my fault. It is the environment that I’ve grown up in. It’s living in America in the 21st century. When you turn on the t.v. to watch the news and a crime story’s lead and you can’t help but notice most of the criminals are black. Children out of wedlock are mostly blacks. You can’t help but notice these things and they affect your thinking. And I find myself sometimes having to fight these attitudes in my mind.

This teacher’s very candid response shows that he does see black students differently and that he has contributed to a double standard. It is reasonable to assume that this teacher has had different standards and interactions with black students when compared to white students. While this teacher admits that he struggles with this double standard, he also talked about his “fight” against this and his effort to change. Another white male faculty member said, “I was from an all white suburb and went to white schools with white

students. There were no black people anywhere...As an educator I have had to guard against acting differently with a black student that is insubordinate because of the reality of racism.” Both of these teachers discussed their interior battle against double standards.

Other teachers spoke about the double standards that *other* teachers had when dealing with white and black students. Ultimately, the alumni and the faculty agreed that double standards existed at Catholic High. It was clear that black students faced more skepticism regarding discipline issues. This double standard made black students highly cynical in their thinking about authority in the school.

Alumni also agreed that teachers used a double standard to assess black and white students academically. Alumni believed that white students were expected to succeed whereas black students were expected to fail. Another Catholic High alumnus, Justin, said, “Teachers treated black and white students differently. I think they expected more out of the white kids.” Nick, another alumnus, said, “Black students are academically given a different standard than whites. They will harp on the white kids for not handing in their homework, but when a black kids doesn’t turn it in, it is like ‘o.k., why remind him? It’s not like he’ll do it anyway.’” The vast majority of black alumni agreed that black students at Catholic High were expected to fail. As a result, alumni agreed that black students received much less academic attention than their white peers. As discussed in Chapter 4, black academic success was invisible. These interviews demonstrate that black misbehavior is highly visible at Catholic High.

Teachers did acknowledge a race achievement gap in academic success and overwhelmingly agreed that the race achievement gap was the result of the different grammar schools that the black and white students attended. Teachers agreed that the

schools that black students came from did not prepare them for success in high school as compared to the grammar schools from which white students came. Teachers did not admit to or discuss a double standard for white and black students academically.

Regardless of whether or not teachers promote an academic double-standard or not, it is clear that the perception of a double-standard academically would de-motivate black students and cause them to see the authority in the school differently. Black students did not see authority figures like teachers as helpful. Mike, one alumnus, said, “I wouldn’t ask a teacher for help.” The student perception of a double-standard in both behavior and academics has fractured the relationship between black students and the faculty at Catholic High. Black students expressed a definite hesitancy to approach authority figures in the school.

What is Authority?

University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Mary Metz studied the varying ways schools and students understand authority. She argued that maintaining order is the first job of every school. In an ethnography of two schools in Canton, Ohio, Metz found that students and faculties of both schools had opposing philosophies of authority. While one school saw authority as something shared between teacher and students, the other school saw authority as something belonging solely to the instructor. Metz argued that,

Canton teachers entered their classrooms with diverse ideas of the educational goal they should pursue there. These goals, which constitute the moral order justifying their relationship of authority with students, were associated with diverse ideas of appropriate roles both students and teachers should play in the classroom. (Metz, 1978, 17)

Metz demonstrated that the students’ and faculty’s conceptions of authority shapes the way that the school runs on a daily basis.

This project discovered that the black alumni of Catholic High saw authority working very differently for Catholic's black students than it appears to work for Catholic's white students. Specifically, alumni believed that for white students, authority was shared with the teachers, whereas for black students, authority was controlled entirely by the teachers. Therefore, within the same school, black alumni believe that authority worked in different ways for different students. The vast majority of teachers at Catholic High assumed that authority worked in the same way for all students regardless of race.

The differences in approaches to authority were understood in the different academic tracks at Catholic High. As discussed in Chapter 4, the highest academic tracks at Catholic High are raced white whereas the lowest academic tracks are raced black. Therefore, when alumni discuss differences in approaches and understandings of authority among tracks, they are also discussing experienced differences in approaches and understanding of authority between white and black raced students.

One alumnus of Catholic High, Johnny, said, "The students in honors classes have an affinity with the teachers that A.C.P. and C.P. students don't experience. Honors teachers treat their honors classes almost like peers. C.P. teachers treat their students almost like prisoners." Other alumni commented on the difference in teaching methods in the lower-track classes as compared to the honors tracks. One alumnus, Justin, said,

C.P. teachers ask their students to sit quietly and do their work. Honors students are asked to debate with the teacher more. I think this is why many of my black friends didn't really get along with the teachers at Catholic High. Teachers never really asked them for their opinion on stuff. My experience was different because I was in the honors classes with white kids but I know my black friends didn't really like school...

Those teachers in C.P. never really trusted the students. It was all about keeping the class under control.

Just as the schools in Canton, Ohio represented qualitatively different understandings of authority in Metz's study, the raced tracks at Catholic High represented qualitatively different ways of enforcing authority at Catholic High. Thirteen of the fifteen black alumni that were interviewed specifically mentioned the qualitative differences in the authority structures of lower-track and higher-track classes. In a school full of white faculty and a disenfranchised black student body, the differences in authority among the school's academic tracks contributes to the larger rift between black students and white teachers.

Choosing Invisibility

Black students at Catholic High seek out invisibility as a result of their fractured relationships with school authority figures. Black students see their own relationships with school authority as "run-ins" whereas they see white students' relationships with school authority as beneficial or educationally formative.

One alumnus, Chris, explained a "run-in" with authority in which he felt unfairly targeted. He said,

One time when I was a junior I got in trouble for no reason. [Male teacher] does this thing where if your whole lunch table isn't cleaned up you get a JUG [Saturday detention]. The whole table gets a JUG. Our table is virtually spotless and the table before me hands me a rag to clean the table and I proceed to wipe off the table and there is a small mess left from this other kid. [Male teacher] asked the whole table of kids, who happened to all be black kids, to come up to the front of the lunch in front of everyone. He yelled at us in front of everyone and gave us all JUGs, which is not in the handbook. When I asked him why we got JUGs he told me that I was 'talking back' and that's not what I was supposed to do. So then I didn't get loud or ignorant or call him names. I talked to him in a very normal tone and he proceeded to yell at me for no reason... Why

did something so stupid like cleaning our lunch table have to lead to Saturday JUGs? I mean, the rules in our handbook don't even say that happens.

Chris' feeling of injustice represents dozens of these kinds of stories that black alumni told of their high school years. This story reflects strong feelings of distrust of authority. Thirteen of the fifteen black alumni that were interviewed told stories of run-ins with authority in which they felt mistreated in some way. All of these stories reflect instances in which the students felt that the school authority figures were targeting them inappropriately. All thirteen interviewees, when asked, believed that "run-ins" with authority were something that black students alone had to deal with. Chris' classmate, Kevin, said,

[White male teacher] said some real racial remarks that I couldn't believe when I went here. I don't care what the meaning was behind it. I was not comfortable. He told me I was going to be a black man out on the streets. He said that if I continued my attitude I would be a confused black man on the streets. Why did he have to say black man? Couldn't he have gotten his point across by saying, 'You won't be successful with that attitude.'? Bedell: How did you respond to that?

Kevin: I don't remember what I said but I do remember that I had an attitude. I didn't look at him when he spoke to me because what he was saying wasn't important to me and I felt that I shouldn't give him the respect of looking at him when he spoke... I know teachers want respect and everything but they need to show respect to black students to get respect.

Interactions between white faculty and black students at Catholic High carry the burden of years of racial injustice. Black students at Catholic High told stories of intentional disrespectful behavior to authority figures. As Kevin indicates, these disrespectful instances are a deliberate rejection of what they believe to be an authority system that treats them unfairly.

Black students at Catholic High learn to become invisible. Black alumni explained that their invisibility was their only way to stay out of trouble. One alumnus, Justin, said, “When I went here I just tried not to be noticed. I put my head down, went to classes, went about my business. My friends really did the same thing because we realized that as black students whenever we were loud or stood out, we got into trouble. After a while we just learned to shut up and get our work done to get out.” Five other alumni, when asked to give a black eighth-grader entering Catholic High advice, all separately recommended that the eighth grader try to remain unnoticed by the authority in the school.

Catholic High faculty interviewee responses supported the existence of the black invisibility phenomenon in two different ways. While some teachers said that black students tend to cause a great majority of the trouble in the school, other teachers said that black students remain withdrawn. Although these responses seem contradictory, they actually harmonize well. If Catholic High faculty perceive black students to be the cause of the majority of the trouble in the school, it seems logical that these authority figures would respond quicker and harsher to black students’ misbehavior contributing to both the double-standard that the black students perceived, and the black students’ desire to become invisible.

Many teachers noticed the effort of black students to remain invisible and commented on it during interviews. One white male teacher said, “I notice that black students, more than our white students, remain withdrawn in class. It is difficult to pin down the cause of their detachment to one factor, but it certainly doesn’t help these kids to succeed academically.” Another teacher commented that “Black students seem not to

care because they aren't engaged during school time." These comments by faculty show that the effort on the part of black students to remain invisible to avoid getting into trouble contributes to the faculty's perception that they are "lazy" and "unengaged." Faculty do not recognize the *purposeful* effort on the part of black students to remain invisible because they believe that their visibility can only lead to trouble. Efforts on the part of black students to stay out of trouble are perceived as flaws by an unaware faculty.

Another white male teacher, when asked about white and black students and their relationship with authority, said, "I think that white students get away with more in this school. Black students are often targeted because of their skin color and maybe even because of the racism inherent in some of our teachers." Another white male teacher said, "There is a difference in black and white culture that causes black students to act more boisterous, more loud. Black students may be noticed more by teachers for behavior issues because they are louder. It's not the teachers' fault, really." Although these teachers would disagree about whether Catholic High teachers are fair in their treatment of black students, these two teachers would certainly agree that black students are noticed more for negative behavior. Because of this, these teachers are good samples of the cross-section of faculty responses on the issue of targeting black students. Whereas Catholic High faculty disagreed on whether black students were targeted because of their misbehavior, noise, or the racism of teachers, all faculty agreed that black students were targeted by the school's authority figures.

After listening to the faculty and the alumni talk about authority, it seemed logical that black students sought invisibility. Black students seemed to learn throughout their time at Catholic High both the importance of invisibility and techniques to effectively

remain invisible. One alumnus even explained that “putting his head down in class” was a good way to calm himself down when he became frustrated with authority. Black students at Catholic High seek to remain unnoticed because they believe that it is the only way to stay out of trouble.

The question of how authority is maintained in schools is highly consequential. Authority structures teach students how to behave and how to think of both adults and themselves. They create the very structure that allows the school to function. This chapter has argued that a majority white faculty at Catholic High has created an authority structure that has made it extremely difficult for black students to relate to persons in positions of authority. Moreover, the experienced authority structure for black students seems fundamentally different than the experienced authority structure for white students. This discrepancy has caused the black students at Catholic High to seek invisibility because they have learned that recognition inevitably leads to dire consequences. Therefore, the authority structure at Catholic High gives black students a qualitatively different experience of school that disadvantages them when compared to their white peers and, as such, authority serves as another subtle mechanism of disadvantage for black students.

CHAPTER SIX:
HEGEMONY AND “COLORBLIND” CONFUSION:
TEACHING BLACK BOYS TO THINK LIKE WHITE MEN

Chapter Three argued that whereas students understand race as an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project,” the faculty at Catholic High understand race as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder.” This chapter will demonstrate that alumni back off from their conception of “Ongoing Multi-sited Project” when they assess their own academic performance. This chapter will argue that the philosophical shift the alumni made is a result of racial hegemonic forces. This chapter will demonstrate that in certain scenarios both students and teachers alike agree that race is not a significant predictor of academic success in high school. As discussed in Chapter 3, a strong faith in individualism causes many students and faculty to deny educational advantages for white students and disadvantages for black students. This chapter will also demonstrate that, ultimately, the concept of “colorblindness” serves as a strong indicator of how confused and disparate students and faculty are on the topic of race. This chapter will ultimately argue that the potential for “colorblind” approaches to race to support a racial hegemonic system of advantage for white students.

Why Is There a Race Gap?

The question of why black students find themselves in lower-tracked classes with lower grades when compared to their white peers is possibly one of the most important

questions our education system should be asking right now. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Three, this is a question that politicians, teachers, administrators, and parents avoid. These interviews also demonstrated that this is a question that students themselves ignore. The academic tracking system, which claims to be a function of innate ability, is unquestionably a cause of segregation within the school. Although this segregation is ignored in formal discussions within the school, it was acknowledged by the overwhelming majority of teachers, administrators and students in interviews for this project. This chapter will deal specifically with what teachers and students said about the race achievement gap.

Teachers and alumni explained the race achievement gap somewhat differently at Catholic High. Teachers, consistent with their “Omnipotent Alien Intruder” understanding of race’s relationship with school, explained the race achievement gap by focusing on students’ family situations and grammar schools. Students, on the other hand, focused on the innate intelligence and work ethic of individuals. The alumni of Catholic, when discussing achievement disparity, backed off of their understanding of race as an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project.” Alumni did not want to say that grades and achievement were a function of racial bias. For the alumni interviewees, the “Ongoing Multi-sited Project” of race ultimately did not affect the grades of black students.

One alumnus, Derek, commented that white students “tend to be more successful.” When I asked him why black students are not as successful as their white peers, he said,

It comes down to a lot of things. Certain students are lazy. But for the most part I guess black students just don’t work as hard as white students. I think, in the end it comes down to initiative and work ethic... Students that work hard do well. Lazy students don’t do well. I think that students

that fail classes and have poor grades have no one to blame but themselves.

Although he acknowledges that black students do not realize the same success as their white peers, Derek, when thinking about the race gap, does not identify systemic race issues at Catholic High. He simply blames the work ethic of students who are not successful. Derek never asks *why* black students are less motivated to succeed.

Leroy, another alumnus, said, “I think that teachers expected more out of the white kids, but I think that is our [black students] fault because we gave them that leeway, that opportunity.” Leroy blames the black student body for lowering teachers’ expectations. Notice that Leroy does not discuss the effects of lower expectations of teachers on black students themselves. Leroy actually blames the students for the fact that teachers expect less out of them. Therefore, according to Derek and Leroy, the ultimate cause of the race achievement gap is “lazy black students.”

Derek and Leroy are good representatives of the voice of Catholic High’s black alumni. Most black alumni agreed that the race gap is no fault of the school’s but is the result of “lazy individuals.” Black alumni failed to ask why black students tended to be less motivated at Catholic High. In this way, black alumni backed off from their earlier analysis of race as an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project” when discussing grades.

Black alumni of Catholic High simply accepted the notion that black students tended to be lazier. These interviews demonstrated that students and alumni remain strong supporters of a system that blames individuals, even when it means degrading their own race. Columbia University scholar Nancy Lesko argues that,

Racial individualism is both reflected and fostered in most secondary schools. Studies of schooling present pictures of the organizational features that support individualism as well as revealing the absence of

practices that foster a more social view of life...Almost without exception, classrooms assume that learning occurs by and for individuals. (Lesko, 1988, 13)

Lesko argues that students learn to be individualists in school. My research at Catholic High certainly confirms this contention. Alumni of Catholic refused to think of racial success or achievement collectively. Success in school was purely a function of individual hard work and intelligence. Lesko goes on to demonstrate the impact of this thinking on society. Lesko maintains that students learn to think individually about success and failure. This method of thinking inhibits a critical lens through which to see the social world. In other words, schools have taught students to blindly accept individualism even when doing so is insulting or simply wrong. Lesko also argues that “radical individualism is connected with an unrelenting emphasis on skills and academics which goes hand-in-hand with individual competition (Lesko, 1988, 13). The dialogue around schools focuses centrally on skills and academic rigor. This emphasis has only grown since Lesko’s work in the late 1980s. *No Child Left Behind*’s reliance on test scores has augmented the individualist approaches of schools. Catholic High alumni Derek and Leroy demonstrated that the focus on individualism is not lost on today’s black students. Many other race and education scholars have also researched and identified American faith in individualism as a significant road block to critical racial analysis (Bourdieu, 2000; Fordham, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Metz, 1978; Ogbu, 1977; Staiger, 2006; Valencia, 1999; Willis, 1977).

Some Catholic High faculty members also discussed the lack of motivation in black students. However, faculty, when explaining the race gap, overwhelmingly focused on the lack of adequate preparation that black students receive in grammar

school and the parental involvement in school. The faculty, when thinking about achievement, maintain their conception of race as an “Omnipotent Alien Intruder.” One white female teacher, when asked about the achievement gap, said,

A lot of it comes down to parents. Parents of white students tend to be more educated and emphasize education more than, say, parents of minorities do... Our black students also tend to come from public schools and a lot of the public schools are below average. Many of our white students come from wealthier backgrounds where their parents were able to send them to higher quality Catholic grammar schools. So you have white kids going to academically better grade schools and black and Hispanic students going to inferior grammar schools.

Faculty members generally saw black students as significantly disadvantaged from the day they enter high school. Another white male teacher said,

Our minority students come from inferior public schools where I don't think the curriculum is as rigorous as the schools our white students come from. I don't think the preparation is as rigorous. A lot of our minority kids come from single-parent homes where the stress on education is not as high as homes with two parents. And another huge factor is that honors kids have more highly educated parents that are successful. Most honors kids have parents with college degrees and white-collar jobs.

The notion that students are predestined for success or failure based on their parents and their grammar school flourished among Catholic High faculty members. The achievement gap at Catholic High is justified by theories of predestination. Ultimately, these explanations take the onus off of the teacher and place it on the parents. Therefore, when looking to bridge the race achievement gap, one should simply fix the deficient grammar schools of black students or find a way to engage parents that are “less involved” in their son's education. According to this explanation, Catholic High itself plays no real role in the academic race achievement gap. This analysis denies the existence of variables within schools that allow some students to succeed while others fail.

Chapter Four showed significant evidence that parents of black students are not involved in Catholic High as much as parents of white students because they do not feel welcome at school functions. Recall Damien's story from Chapter Four when he said,

My mom shared an experience with me where she had gone to the Mother's Club Fashion Show and she was on the committee to help out and basically she was ignored or pushed to the side as were two other black moms...It's not as if you can't be in the Mother's Club, it's not as if you can't be in the A.P. classes as a black person, but be prepared to be one of the few. I think that in that way many black parents choose not to get involved in many of those groups because it seems like black people just don't belong.

The faculty's perspective that black parents are "apathetic" or "uninvolved" in their son's education seems misguided. My guess is that there many other stories like Damien's that illustrate that many dedicated parents are misrecognized and mistakenly viewed as "detrimental" to their son's education/

According to alumni, black students under-perform because of their laziness and according to teachers, black students underperform because of their inferior backgrounds. Both explanations fail to identify any culpability on the part of Catholic High itself for racial achievement disparities.

Teachers and students of Catholic High simultaneously attempt to maintain two fundamentally opposing arguments regarding the cause of the school's race achievement gap. As teachers point to inferior parenting and inferior grammar schools, black students point to the laziness of unsuccessful students. Both teachers and students fail to examine the *causes* of parental "neglect," inferior preparation for high school, and student "apathy." Both teacher and student explanations of the race achievement gap remain superficial. This chapter argues that the superficial analysis of students is a direct result of hegemonic forces, while the superficial analysis of teachers, although contributing to

the hegemonic project, additionally works as an attempt to keep the racial equity onus off of them.

Race Gap Explanations as Hegemony

Both the student and teacher explanations of the race-gap serve to reproduce the norms of the white dominant culture. It is in the race-gap explanations that one can see racial hegemonic forces at work. Political scientist Antonio Gramsci penned the notion of hegemony in the early twentieth century to explain the capitalist class' ability to control the thinking of the proletariat. For Gramsci, domination of the working class was founded on the bourgeoisie's capacity to manipulate the thinking and dialogue concerning inequality. Gramsci taught us that oppressed groups' explanations of inequality can be used as an effective method of control (Gramsci, 1971). Historically, there is no doubt that whites have controlled the thinking and dialogue regarding inequality. For generations, whites perpetuated the belief that blacks were less intelligent, and, in many cases, justified this contention using "scientific methods" of analysis (Gould, 1996). Racial hegemony has been used to teach black people that they did not have the inherent ability of their white classmates. Despite our progress beyond this notion, my research demonstrated that racial hegemony is alive and well at Catholic High.

Race scholar Signithia Fordham argues that whites, in their refusal to recognize black culture, have made Gramsci's notion of hegemony real for blacks today. Fordham argues that the inability of whites to recognize black culture negates any real concept of the "Black Self" (Fordham, 1996, 22). According to Fordham, blacks learn to see themselves as whites see them. This seems to be exactly what has happened at Catholic

High. Black alumni in interviews, at times, referred to themselves as “lazy.” Black alumni also blamed their black peers for lowering the expectations of teachers toward the black student population in the school. These are concrete examples of blacks examining their own oppression through the analytic lens of a white person. Hegemonic forces cause black alumni, when discussing achievement, to back off of their understanding of race as an “Ongoing Multi-sited Project.” Black alumni have learned to analyze achievement the way that the dominant, white, oppressive race analyzes achievement. As a result, blacks simply refuse to analyze school assessment through a racial lens.

Scholars disagree on the ways that students absorb hegemonic forces. Some believe that these forces are a function of American society’s unique faith in individualism as modern civilization’s “finest achievement” (Taylor, 1991, 2). Other race scholars argue that hegemonic forces are learned in schools (Fordham, 1996, 22). Others believe hegemonic means of analysis are absorbed from society (Tatum, 1998). Although this project can only speculate the causes of hegemonic forces, this project can say definitively that hegemonic forces are at play in the way black students think about grades.

Anthony, an alumnus of Catholic High, when asked whether there was a race achievement gap at Catholic High, said,

Sure there is, but I don’t think that any race should be treated differently than another race. Schools shouldn’t comfort one race over another because when you get into the real world nobody is going to comfort you. I think everyone should be treated the same. I don’t think we should put success onto race. I think everyone is on an equal ground and it all depends on how hard you work. That’s how I like to judge other people, it’s how hard you work, not your race. Especially with Barack Obama being elected President now.

Anthony's explanation of the race gap shows us that hegemony continues to function at Catholic High. Anthony blames black students for their academic failures. Anthony asks that schools prepare students for the harsh reality of life outside of school. Anthony's focus on individualism as the singular rubric for evaluating success and looking at achievement demonstrates racial hegemonic forces that dominate our racial dialogue. Anthony has learned to analyze the grading of he and his black peers as a white person would. Anthony has learned not to apply his understanding of race as an "Ongoing Multi-sited Project" to grading.

"Colorblindness" as Microcosm of Race Confusion at Catholic

"I like to consider myself colorblind. I don't see kids for their races, I just see achievement. It doesn't matter if you're a black, white or a Latino student."

[White male teacher]

"Colorblindness as an operating principle blinds the school to the problems of its minority students" [White male teacher]

"People that claim they are colorblind are liars" [White female teacher]

The quotes above demonstrate the disparate opinions regarding "colorblindness" that arose during these interviews. The concept of "colorblindness" arose in the vast majority of my conversations with Catholic High alumni and teachers. It is important to first define what "colorblindness" means for the students and faculty at Catholic High. My interviews showed that the term "colorblindness" was used by teachers and students at Catholic High to refer to the practice of refusing to see race. Teachers and students agreed that "colorblindness" is the practice of ignoring race in an effort to support a meritocratic structure. However, teachers and students did not agree on whether or not

Catholic High was “colorblind,” whether or not “colorblindness” was possible, and whether or not “colorblindness” was a sound policy to adopt. “Colorblindness” was the most difficult data to analyze in this project because of the vast diversity within and between faculty members and alumni. The problem of “colorblindness” can be seen as microcosmic of Catholic High’s race confusion as it demonstrates varying perspectives that exist in the same school with ease because of the school’s failure to address the topic of race.

Most teachers believe that Catholic High provided an equal chance for all students to succeed. For these faculty members at Catholic High, the lynchpin of Catholic High’s meritocracy is the school’s ability to be “colorblind.” However, other faculty members believe that “colorblindness” is detrimental to the school’s black and Latino populations. More than half of the black alumni of Catholic High, like some teachers, maintained that “colorblindness” is essential to giving all students an equal chance to succeed. First, I will examine the teachers and alumni that supported “colorblindness.” Then I will look at the teachers and alumni who disagree with “colorblindness.” Finally, I will discuss why the concept of “colorblindness” can be seen as a microcosm of the difficult question of how to address race and education as it produces highly contentious disparate responses that go unaddressed in formal settings.

One white male teacher said,

Our school’s policies are colorblind. The bottom line is that we set high expectations across the board. I don’t – I can’t honestly say that I ever encountered someone who even says, you know, the black kids this or the Mexicans that.

Bedell: What do you mean by that?

[White male teacher]: I mean I would hope that our teachers are colorblind, that they treat all students the same, equally... I think many of our minority kids are raised in a society where there are different expectations and a different level of respect...I think our policies are very even-handed and not targeted to any specific race. I mean right down to the haircuts and stuff like that the policies are very generic; they apply to every kid equally.

The idea that Catholic High was a “colorblind” institution and that “colorblindness” was to the credit of the school and the benefit of the students was prevalent among the faculty. Another white male teacher agreed that “colorblindness” was good for everyone in the school. He, like his colleague quoted above, also agreed that Catholic High is successful in its attempt to be “colorblind.” He said,

We see students as students. Our policies apply to each kid equally. A rule is a rule. It doesn't matter what race you are, if you aren't in dress code, you have to serve the consequence. The problem with our policies has nothing to do with how they are written, the problem is whether or not students buy into them. Does the student accept our policies as a part of his reality? If he does, he will follow them, if he doesn't, he won't. I don't know if this even has to do with race as much as it has to do with the fact that we are dealing with teenagers. I think we need to continue to have one standard that is colorblind and apply that standard to every kid in the school. Doing so will help all of the students, whether they are black, white, or Latino.

Both of these teachers agree that Catholic High is “colorblind” and that the “colorblind” approach is beneficial to the students. Other teachers, like the teacher quoted above, also spoke of the need for “one standard” in the school. Teachers were not comfortable making exceptions to rules. Teachers were strong advocates for one set of rules that applies to each student, regardless of race. For teachers that are faithful believers in “colorblindness”, the idea of following “one standard” is pivotal to their understanding of race in school.

Some black students also agreed that “colorblindness” was important to maintain a “fair” school. One alumnus, Dwayne, when asked to define “colorblindness” said,

It’s when teachers don’t see students’ races at all. They just see them as students.

Bedell: Are Catholic High teachers ‘colorblind?’

Dwayne: No. There are racist teachers at this school. It would have definitely been better if teachers and students were colorblind. If everyone was colorblind than we wouldn’t have had to worry about discrimination or anything like that.

For Dwayne, “colorblindness” meant the absence of blatant discrimination based on race. Many alumni agreed with this understanding of “colorblindness.” Consequently, many alumni agreed that “colorblindness” was positive as it meant the absence of discrimination. Dwayne’s argument for “colorblind” policies was rooted in his hope to eliminate racial discrimination. Throughout his interview, Dwayne detailed instances with teachers in which he or his black friends were treated unfairly due to their race. Dwayne’s faith in “colorblind” policies comes from his desire to end those instances of racial discrimination. This demonstrates that at Catholic High, Dwayne never experienced race positively. Dwayne’s blackness was something that was fundamentally detrimental to his development. This experience has led Dwayne to argue that race should be forgotten. For Dwayne, anytime race was an issue, it was to his black peers’ detriment. Dwayne does not ask that blackness be understood differently, he simply asks that race be forgotten. This is why he seeks “colorblind” perspectives from the school’s faculty.

Another alumnus, Nick, also argued that Catholic High should be “colorblind,” but he had a very different reason for supporting “colorblindness.” He said,

I don't think it's right to comfort one race over the other because when you get into the real world nobody is going to comfort you. I think everyone should be treated the same. I'm the type of person that really doesn't want to put anything on race. I'm the type of person that says everyone is on equal ground and it all depends on how hard you work. That's how I'd like to judge others—it's how hard you work, not your race.

Bedell: What do you mean when you say you're the 'type of person' that doesn't like to put anything on race? Can you explain the 'type of person' that does like to talk about race in these terms?

Nick: Yeah. People that talk about race can be giving excuses. They can be complainers. It's like, you justify your own failing by blaming it on race.

For Nick, to even talk about race classifies the very "type of person" one is. In other words, Nick feels that if he or someone else complains about race; that serves an indicator of a character flaw. Consequently, one reason Nick was a proponent of "colorblindness" was to avoid the flaw of being a "complainer." Both Dwayne and Nick have very different reasons for seeking "colorblindness" in their alma mater. Whereas Dwayne wants to end the blatant discrimination that he experienced as a black student at Catholic High, Nick wants to end the "complaining" that he believes some minorities use to excuse their failures.

Both Dwayne and Nick learned very different lessons about blackness. Dwayne learned that the world is filled with blatant racists who will discriminate against black people and that discrimination exists in schools. Nick learned that black people unwarrantedly complain about their hardships and use race to excuse their own deficiencies. As Dwayne's argument demonstrates frustration with the reality of Catholic High, Nick's argument can be seen as an example of the internalization of racial hegemony.

Dwayne's argument for "colorblindness" comes from someone who simply cannot imagine a school that positively recognizes blackness. The only recognition of Dwayne's race was negative; therefore, Dwayne thinks that ignoring race will be progress when compared to discriminating against black students. Nick's argument for "colorblindness" is hegemonic because he reflects the opinion of the dominant race. Nick criticizes people who complain about racial injustice; stereotyping these people, essentially, as lazy black people attempting to "excuse" their "failing." Nick's perspective reflects an effective hegemonic project by whites to maintain power. Nick has learned to criticize examiners of the racial project. Nick is accurately and effectively reflecting the dominant white perspective. Nick was not alone in his criticism of race analysis. Many of Nick's peers also classified any discussion of racial injustice as black people "complaining." Others also agreed with Nick's notion that talk of racial injustice is essentially blacks "excusing" their own failures. Race analysis was clearly not acceptable at Catholic High.

Is Catholic High "Colorblind"?

The difference between teacher proponents of "colorblindness" and student proponents of "colorblindness" was that teachers believed that Catholic High was "colorblind", whereas most alumni believed that Catholic High had to *become* "colorblind." The majority of teachers spoke about Catholic High's "colorblindness" as one of the school's attributes. Teachers believed that the school's "colorblindness" was evidence of its racial equality. Alumni, on the other hand, believed that Catholic High was not "colorblind" and should become "colorblind" to better serve minority students. Alumni wanted to reduce the instances in which they believed that they were

discriminated against because of their race. For alumni, “colorblindness” was seen as a progress, because it would mean the elimination of what the alumni believed to be blatant racial prejudice on the part of the school’s faculty and administration.

Ultimately, the disagreement on “colorblindness” is a disagreement on whether or not there is racial discrimination at Catholic High. Teachers that praised Catholic High’s “colorblind” approach to race also denied the existence of racial discrimination. Alumni that suggested that the school become more “colorblind” believed that black students experienced significant racial discrimination.

Some teachers believed that “colorblindness” was detrimental to black students.

One white male teacher said,

I think that ‘colorblindness’ is like a toddler who sees race but doesn’t necessarily think anything of it. Obviously a child notices the difference between the look of a black person and the look of a white person, but that kid won’t think the white is smarter. In that sense, ‘colorblindness’ is positive. However, I think the term has been damaging because if the school is ‘colorblind’ we will not recognize the positive aspects of different cultures. It can be like pretending differences don’t exist.

This teacher identified the pitfalls of a school’s “colorblind” policies. Unlike some of his colleagues, this teacher was able to recognize the need to value different races and cultures within the school building.

There were several alumni that, like the teacher quoted above, pointed out the problems with a “colorblind” approach to race. These alumni believed that “colorblindness” was a fallacy. They argued that “colorblindness” was a term that the school uses to justify its policies. One alumnus, Eric, who was uncomfortable with “colorblindness” said,

I just don’t think ‘colorblindness’ is a term that can describe anyone because everyone has a stereotype about race... I have stereotypes about

race. It's nothing I can even help. People that say they don't see race are just lying.

Chris, another Catholic High alumnus agreed. When asked about "colorblindness", Chris said,

I don't believe 'colorblindness' is possible because when you look at someone it's the first thing you see. It's not necessarily, 'Oh, he's a nice person,' it's his race. And from culture and media, you have a certain assumption that goes along with their race. That's automatic. There's nothing we can do about it. If you say you're colorblind you are denying those messages that we all get from media. That's why I think colorblindness is a lie.

Both Eric and Chris, along with other alumni, agreed that "colorblindness" was impossible. Chris argues that we cannot help but think about race because we live in a society that gives us racial distortions.

This is exactly the argument of race scholar Beverly Tatum. Tatum argues that race distortions are all around us and that we cannot help but to absorb them (Tatum, 1998, 7). Tatum also argues that attempts to ignore race or approach race from a "colorblind" perspective exacerbates the disadvantage of people of color. The vast majority of race and education scholarship agrees on the problems of "colorblind" policies in school (Fordham, 1996, Jensen, 2005, Kochman, 1981, Sullivan, 2006, Tatum, 1998, Valenzuela, 1999.). It seems that "colorblind" approaches to race would only dismiss race conversations, ignoring the system of visibility and invisibility that shapes racial identity (discussed in Chapter 4) and the differing raced approaches to authority (discussed in Chapter 5). It seems that "colorblind" approaches to race would merely perpetuate the race system at Catholic High that subtly advantages its white students.

Catholic High has proven itself a place where society's race distortions are not directly confronted and, as a result, black students have internalized them. Catholic High alumni believe that the school, on its best days, ignores race. These alumni believe that

on its worst days the school palpably discriminates against its students of color.

Meanwhile, astoundingly, after discussing racial injustices in the school the alumni blame black students themselves for their academic failures.

One student who was able to articulate the problems associated with colorblindness said,

It's interesting to me because Supreme Court Justice Blackman once said sometimes to treat people equally we have to treat them differently. And I think Catholic High represents a group of people that come from different backgrounds. Even if you put all the white students together they all come from different backgrounds. We come from different races and different socioeconomic classes. There is a good mix at this school, but just because we're all together doesn't mean that we are all able to do the same things and that we all in a sense should be treated equally. I think Catholic High should take different perspectives into account when dealing with different students. Maybe Catholic High should look at the disparity between white and black kids in honors classes and address it in some way. If Catholic High just continues with what maybe you would call 'colorblind' policies, black students will continue to fail.

Damien might agree with Eric and Chris that "colorblindness" is impossible. But, more importantly, Damien says that "colorblindness" justifies the school's disregard of the issue of race entirely. For Damien, "colorblindness" has operated as the school's excuse to neglect the blatant racial disparities between white and black s

"Colorblind" Confusion and Race-Talk Silence: A Lethal Combination

Race neutrality has served as the guardian of meritocracy at Catholic High. Catholic High's attempt to protect a "fair" environment in which all students have an "equal" chance has come at a high price. Catholic High has mortgaged the success of its black students on the precarious belief that blacks do come to school with disadvantages, but, there is little that Catholic High or its teachers can do to rectify those inequities. The alumni interviewed in this project have demonstrated that this mortgage has defaulted.

Faculty have maintained their disengagement successfully by avoiding race conversations in formal, consequential settings. In this way, Catholic High has supported other research that argues that schools are places where students and teachers learn to avoid the race topic (Tatum, 1998, Pollack, 2006).

To think from a “colorblind” perspective is racially hegemonic. The students and faculty of Catholic High agreed that “colorblindness” is the practice of refusing to see race. Race scholarship agrees that when one refuses to see race, one sees the world as the dominant race, more specifically, the white race (Fordham, 1996, Jensen, 2005, Kochman, 1981, Sullivan, 2006, Tatum, 1998, Valenzuela, 1999.) This is what has happened at Catholic High. The well-intentioned teachers and alumni that sought “colorblind” perspectives were unknowingly seeking a “white” approach to race. Black alumni that sought “colorblindness” were reacting to a negative experience of their race while in high school. These alumni wanted to eliminate the discrimination that they experienced and, in asking for “colorblindness,” were asking to be seen as white people. These alumni were asking for their racial “difference” to be lifted. This perspective is an example of unconscious racial hegemony as it seeks whites to see, judge, interact, teach, and assess black students as if they were white. This is all done under the guise of “fairness” and “equality.” This approach denies the very existence of black culture and, therefore, fundamentally misunderstands black students. Additionally, this approach disallows the possibility of a positive understanding of black culture.

The well-intentioned teachers that sought out “colorblind” perspectives were seeking “fair” policies in schools that, they believed, gave all students an equal chance at success. These teachers do not recognize the need to understand and value black culture.

This works as another subtle mechanism of disadvantage for black students at Catholic High.

Some teachers and alumni did offer counter-hegemonic ideological perspectives. Some teachers and alumni did articulate the dangers of “colorblindness.” Some teachers and alumni did recognize the need to know and value black culture. Some teachers and alumni even discussed “colorblindness” as inherently advantageous to whites. Although these teachers and alumni did not use the work “hegemony,” they offered a counter-hegemonic perspective in asking that black students not be judged in a “raceless” vacuum.

The scattered opinions regarding “colorblindness” reflect a school that does not formally address the topic of race. Radically dissenting opinions regarding race have easily cohabitated because of Catholic High’s silence on race. This project has illuminated fundamentally varying perspectives between students and teachers that go unnoticed on a day-to-day basis in the school. This unaddressed dissention has contributed to an unhealthy school culture which has ignored race, allowing major disparities to thrive without question. Avoiding the race issue has also allowed a racial hegemonic system to justify vast inequalities in academic achievement under the veil of a meritocracy.

In the end Catholic High is one of many well-intentioned schools that fail to adequately understand and address the race issue. On the whole, adults at Catholic High understand racism as something that *individuals* do. This conception of race has blinded the school to the systemic messages about whiteness and blackness that their students absorb daily. Catholic High teachers have also seen race as an outside entity, unwelcome

in the school building. Doing so has impaired the school from understanding what its black students face. By ignoring race in formal settings, Catholic High has allowed distortions and omissions about black people to become real in the school building. These white and black identity issues have also affected the way black students and a majority-white faculty think about authority. Black students have also, at times, analyzed race from the dominant white perspective. All of these issues have resulted in a justified, unaddressed race achievement gap. Catholic High, like many other schools, explicitly celebrates its diversity while actually doing little to address real racial disparities within the school walls. Doing so has contributed to very subtle and very real disadvantages for the school's black population.

APPENDIX A:
RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

Academic Questions

1. Why are black students under-represented in A.P. and Honors tracked classes at this school?
2. Does the schools' tracking policy disadvantage black students? Explain Why / Why not?
3. Are the academic expectations of black and white students the same?
4. Are black and white students equally successful academically here? If not, explain.

Discipline Questions

5. Why are there more black students in detention and JUG?
6. Does the school's discipline policy disadvantage black students at this school? Explain Why / Why not.
7. Does the dress-code provide advantages for any race? Explain.
8. Does the school's behavior policies or expectations advantage any race of students? Explain.
9. Is any race of students disadvantaged in the ways that our discipline policy is carried out? Explain.
10. Does the school have the same behavioral expectations of white and black students? Explain.

Extra-Curricular Questions

11. Does the school's athletic program advantage any race of students? Explain.
12. Do black and white students have equal opportunities to participate in the school's extra-curricular activities? Explain.

General Questions

13. Why are black alumni under-represented at alumni reunions and functions at this school?

14. What, if any, are the differences between the black student population at this school as compared to the white student population?
15. Is the voice of the black students here heard by the faculty and administration? How? Or Why not?
16. Should black and white student be treated equally? Explain.
17. If you were to give advice to a black eighth grader entering this school what would you say? If you were giving advice to a white eight grader, what would you say?

APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW DATA CODING

Student Responses:

Rigidity of Tracks

- A8, 2,17 (ALUMNUS #8, interview transcription pages 2 and 7)
- A6: 1,2
- A2:2
- A1:1

Tracking is highly consequential for grades, learning

- A1:2

Tracking is code for race

- The beginning of every interview,
- A1:4
- A1:12

Grammar school's affect of tracking

- A9, 1-2, 16
- A9, 1
- A6: 1
- A2:2
- A5:1,4
- A1:2

Grammar schools was less strict

- A15:9

Tracks = status

- A10: 1

Stakes of test

- A10:1

Wants color-blindness:

- A6:9
- A15:12
- A5:14
- A13:3,13

“It's How Hard you work”

- A6:9

Blame individuals for discipline / grades

- A3: 2
- A4:1,2
- A12:1

- A15:1
- A1:1

Neighborhoods Affect Tracking

- A6: 1

Teacher – Student Divide

- A9: 2,6,10
- A8, 13
- A10:2,3
- A7:6
- A12:2,3
- A11:3,7,8,13
- A14:2,6,7
- A15:5,6
- A5:2,3
- A13:4,5
- A13:8
- A1:6

All white teachers:

- A6: 4

Blacks Kicked-Out

- A2:2
- A14:6
- A5:7,11,15

Defining “Blackness”

- A3: 6
- A10:8,9
- A11:3,4,5,17
- A7:1,2,10
- A14:1,2
- A15:3
- A5:8, 11
- A13:6, 11

Blacks Becoming White Here:

- A6: 5
- A14:4,3
- A5:5
- A1:3,4,13,14

Class

- A11:4
- A5:6

Stereotypical Black Kid

- A9: 4

Stories of Discipline Run-Ins

- A9: 4
- A8: 6,7,8
- A12:2
- A11:1,2

Blacks are targeted:

- A6:6, 8
- A1:5

White entitlement:

- A6:7,10
- A5:10

Try to not be noticed:

- A6: 7, 14
- A11:5,6,16
- A7:8

Blacks are Athletes

- A9: 5,6,11-12, 14
- A8: 7-8, 14, 15
- A6:13
- A10:4,5
- A12:6
- A15:8
- A11:10
- A7:11,12
- A14:9
- A5:2,13,17,19
- A13:6

Recognition

- A9: 5,13
- A3: 9,10,11
- A11:5
- A7:13
- A5:9

Social Price of Success

- A9: 7-8, 14, 17

“becoming white”

- A9: 9
- A12:8
- A14:3

Not belonging at Mother’s Club, Father’s Club

- A9, 13
- A2: 1
- A1:8

Hatred of School

- A9, 15

Color-Blindness is a Fallacy

- A9,17
- A8,16
- A2:4-5
- A6:9
- A1:9

How race works

- A9, 18
- A8, 2, 13,18
- A11:14
- A7:7,10
- A14:3
- A15:4
- A5:18
- A13:8
- A1:7
- A1:10

No Tension Between Races

- A8, 3
- A4:3
- A12:3
- A15:11

Dress Code is for blacks

- A8, 3-4,10
- A7:4

- A15:10
- A1:7

Authority

- A8, 4, 7,9,15
- A6:3
- A11:2
- A14:4

Blacks and whites have different standards

- A8: 8
- A10:6
- A14:8
- A15:3,4
- A5:9

Noticed

- A8: 11,12

Alumni

- A8:14-15
- A10:4
- A7:9
- A15:7
- A5:16,17,19

MC Identity is white

- A8,18
- A6:11
- A6:13
- A10:6,7
- A12:4,5,7
- A11:8
- A13:11,12
- A1:8, 12, 13

Whites “Get Away With” Behavior

- A6:3

White = success

- A6:12
- A4:4
- A5:8

Black students are to blame for tracking, grades, lazy

- A2:3
- A14:8
- A5:4

Leadership / acceptance

- A3:5,11

Freshman issues with race

- A4:6,7
- A5:15
- A13:10

Fines—race motivated

- A10:2
- A11:16
- A7:3

“Don’t go here”

- A11:9

Masculinity

- A11:12
- A1:10

Segregated lunch

- A11:12
- A7:5
- A13:3

Curriculum

- A7:7

TEACHER RESPONSES:

Tracking is based on grammar school

- T4:2
- T2:1,2,6
- T6:1
- T5:1

Tracking is equal

- T3:1

Don’t know why blacks aren’t in honors / never thought about it:

- T4:2

White parents are more involved, more educated

- T4:2
- T2:3
- T1:1
- T6:1
- T6:2
- T6:2

When he consciously thought about race—blacks did better

- T5:2,3

Tracking has nothing to do with race

- T3:6

Parental involvement affects discipline

- T6:2

Blacks have advantage with dress-code

- T3:2

Home-life is deficient:

- T9:3

Work and intelligence determine success:

- T9:3

No tracking disparity / very little

- T4:2

Cultural deficiency

- T4:2
- T9:11
- T8:4
- T7:1,2,3,9
- T6:2,8

Blacks don't care

- T7:3

Black parents are involved

- T4:2

Mother's father's club = white

- T4:3
- T5:15

White = hard work, success

- T7:1

Equal in behavior:

- T4:4
- T5:8

Different behavior:

- T4:4,5

Notice blacks in jug, detention:

- T4:4

Black culture = louder

- T4:5
- T8:3
- T7:1
- T5:8

Fines aren't fair / fines talk in general

- T4:5
- T8:2
- T7:5

Parenting styles:

- T4:6

Colorblindness = not helpful

- T4:7
- T9:10

Different learning styles

- T7:8,12

Admits racial bias:

- T4:8,9
- T2:4

Raised by single-mother

- T4:10
- T2:2,6
- T1:1
- T3:4

Lack motivation

- T2:2

When he thinks of specifics, backs down on race comments:

- T2:2

c.p. / black struggle

- T2:3
- T3:5

Race is excuse

- T2:5,6,9

Teacher-student divide

- T2:5,6
- T9:8

MC is colorblind

- T2:7,8

Blacks don't buy-in

- T2:7

Disagrees with color-blindness

- T2:7

Blacks don't belong here

- T2:10

Progress on race of teachers, should hire best teacher, not race:

- T2:11,12

Easier now for blacks

- T2:13

One standard

- T1:2,3
- T8:5

Authority / respect

- T1:2

Scary to discuss / how race works

- T1:3
- T9:6

Blacks need to become white “conform”

- T1:3

Advantage of Athletes

- T1:4
- T9:4
- T3:3,7
- T6:12

Athletics = for career for blacks

- T7:4

Whites get away with more

- T3:3

Color-blindness is fallacy

- T1:5
- T5:13

Belief in color-blindness (goes with ‘one standard’)

- T8:6
- T6:9

School is white, effort to maintain

- T6:12

Race discussion in class

- T8:7

Accused of being racist

- T8:7,8
- T7:8,9
- T6:5

School tries with race issue:

- T8:8

Progress on tracking

- T8:1

Black masculinity is different

- T1:6,7

- T9:7
- T8:5
- T6:10

Haven't thought of race issue:

- T8:2

Segregated lunch:

- T6:7

Black alumni are involved:

- T8:9

Race is "non-issue"

- T9:1
- T7:9

Discipline is harder on blacks

- T9:5

Stakes are higher for black kids

- T9:9

Become white

- T9:11

School targets to and appeases wealthy

- T7:11

Racism in other teachers

- T3:4
- T6:8
- T5:4,5,7,11

Settle conflict violently:

- T7:9

Hard to belong at MC because of strong identity

- T5:5

Religion provides code words for race

- T5:6,7

Effort to keep mc white:

- T5:11,16

Blacks learn to become quiet

- T5:9

Blacks are targeted and get in trouble more

- T5:9

Sad story of a smart black kid that didn't do well at MC because of race

- T5:10

Definition of racism:

T5:13

ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSES:

Tracking is function of schooling

- A1:1

- A3:1

Tracks are a function of class

- A2:1

Illusion that tracking is fluid

- A3:2

Negative environment of c.p, classes

- A3:2

Movement among tracks based on parent recommendations, not often

- A1:1
- A2:2

Motivation and involvement observations:

- A2:2

Athletes

- A2:2

“white school”

- A2:2

Different culture = different discipline

- A2:3,6

Suspects teacher-bias in grading

- A1:2
- A3:3,4

Teacher bias in discipline

- A1:3,8

Catholic / non-Catholic

- A1:2,4
- A2:4

Dress code = white “uniform”

- A2:4,6
- A3:6

Blacks and authority

- A2:5

Effort to become color-blind as a school in discipline

- A3:7

Kick out more blacks---explanation

- A1:3

How race works

- A1:3
- A2:5,6
- A3:1,4,11

Self-fulfilling prophecy

- A1:4

Mother’s father’s club –white environments

- A1:5

Black parents are very involved

- A1:5

How race works

- A1:5,7

Difficulty of C.P,

- A3:8

Detention = race, tracking, class

- A3:5

- A3:6

Blacks “don’t like to pay fines”

- A2:6

Color-blind is bad

- A2:9

Power of parents, we feel helpless

- A2:11

Single mother

- A2:12

Fitting in at MC, issues with fitting in

- A2:12

Reluctant to speak on race:

- A3:10

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