

Educational Inequality in an Affluent Setting: An Exploration of Resources and
Opportunity

by

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“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.” –WEB Du Bois

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Dedication

To the families of Rolling Acres, thank you for the insights and the lessons that you provided me while I was inside and outside of the field.

To my parents and family for helping me navigate my own rolling acres.

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Though this dissertation features my name as the sole author, it was undoubtedly a collective work. I first would like to acknowledge my great co-chairs David Cohen and Al Young. David, your persistent questions helped me settle on a site of study and frame the project as it currently reads. From early on in my graduate career your comments have helped shape my inquiry and analysis. Al, you have been much more than a dissertation chair since I stepped on U of M's campus. Your sage advice on research and life has helped me continue to develop in a rich Black sociological tradition. Carla O'Connor and Tony Chen, my other two committee members often operated behind the scenes to make this project come to fruition. Carla, your willingness to take me on a pupil in research having never experienced me in the classroom was kind and brave. Thank you for helping me craft solid work and providing me support in my path to this PhD. Tony, your arrival at Michigan's campus provided a sigh of relief for me. As a young and energetic scholar you continually asked me innovative and demanding questions. All four of my committee members are known as outstanding scholars, but I want to also mark in the record that you are equally amazing mentors.

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Abstract

Educational Inequality in an Affluent Setting: An Exploration of Resources and Opportunity

by

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This dissertation critically engages contemporary theories of educational inequality which argue resource provision is the lynchpin to educational equality. The bulk of previous research on educational inequality has concentrated on comparing students between schools who attended differently resourced and grossly segregated schools which has obscured the role of resources. Thus in school districts where Black and White, rich and poor attend the same schools, the sources of inequality appear unclear. My dissertation explores the role of resources in an affluent setting by exploring the in and out-of-school lives of Black and White families who attend the same schools. Using a resource uptake perspective, I argue that provision of resources, in and of itself, is an insufficient policy tool for the production of equality. Instead, I argue in areas where resources are present inequality is bred in the unequal uptake of school related resources along racial and social class lines. My analysis offers a different articulation of the operations of race and social class in the production of inequality in the post-Civil Rights

era. The data for this dissertation are drawn from in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, archives, and systematic classroom observations of 31 families, teachers, and administrators.

Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation explores the inner working of educational inequality in the Rolling Acres Public Schools (RAPS) among three classrooms. While educational inequality in the United States has long concentrated on “separate” and “unequal” facilities, this study contrastingly investigates the persistence of inequality in three racially and economically heterogeneous classrooms in a well-resourced school system. RAPS provides a unique social setting to explore the distances between resource provision and resource utilization amongst students, parents, and teachers. I argue that while Rolling Acres contains many of the resources that are typically associated with positive student achievement, these resources seldom trickle down to the district’s economic and racial minorities. Through multiple mechanisms (e.g. social networks, school to home communication, teacher beliefs, etc.) the resources of Rolling Acres are not only stratified from minorities but leveraged by affluent White families to gain desired educational experiences. Building on and challenging past work on educational inequality, this project advances theories of opportunity as well as theories of urban space.

Research on educational inequality, particularly analyses of the achievement gap, document average differences between groups in school-level resources and then attempted to predict outcome scores. While this is an often accepted knowledge, it overlooks the intervening processes that lie between the observation of resource and the ability of students or families to engage and utilize that resource. While traditional investigations of education have assumed resources to be the lynchpin to equality between groups, my analysis argues that in the post-Civil Rights Era the general provision of resources is an insufficient policy tool. Through an investigation of the of

the role of resources on education as well as social relations in Rolling Acres, I argue the next frontier for educational policy and research is to move beyond a simple resource provision framework, to a resource uptake perspective which is a process oriented discussion of resources and the ways that individuals or groups take them up.

A second contribution of this dissertation is the exploration of small-city dynamics. While attention to race, social class, and gender are consistent themes in the study of educational inequality and urban space, these studies are often limited to large metropolises. In large cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, their gross residential racial and economic segregation rarely allow for the observation of students from different racial and social class backgrounds in the same schools or classrooms. These studies thus miss the interplay and subsequent meanings created when families from different backgrounds interact in the same academic and social spaces.

My dissertation looks at the operation of race, social class, and gender in the small city of Rolling Acres. In this geographic space, the accumulation of capitals (social, cultural and economic) and discourses around inequality by affluent and White families serve to stratify opportunities and information from poor and Black families in the same schools. Through an analysis of Rolling Acres' policy context, social networks, neighborhoods, and classrooms, my project produces a robust picture of how race and social class continue to affect the lives of families in Rolling Acres in the post-Civil Rights Era.

My dissertation is inspired by the current tenor of discussions about educational inequality in sociology and public policy. The language that is often used to discuss the contemporary state of educational inequality is extremely limiting because educational inequality has become synonymous with the achievement gap. While the achievement gap is an important dimension of measuring social inequality, it is limiting for several reasons. First, discussions of the achievement gap utilize aggregated data, which often obscure the heterogeneity of setting and social processes. Schools as organizations are complex bureaucracies (Bidwell 2001), but with aggregated data, readers are often left to assume that all schools operate in a similar fashion or that schools that share certain characteristics share similar cultures, this however is seldom the case. Second, while studying the gap in average scores between groups is useful, most references to the gap

center on the race-based achievement gap. While No Child Left Behind is designed to consider multiple types of achievement gaps, most popular attention gets directed at race-based disparities at the expense of other forms of inequality which are closely tied such as social class-based gaps. Third, the concentration on student achievement outcomes can tell us little about the factors that shape students' behavior in, engagement with, or value for schooling. These factors remain equally important for affecting educational inequality, but they become largely secondary or absent in discussions of the achievement gap. For the above reasons and others, this dissertation is not a study of the achievement gap. Instead, this is a study informed by the achievement gap, but it goes beyond aggregate measures of student performance to discuss the processes inside and outside of school that affect educational inequality.

The families, schools, and staff discussed in this dissertation represent those overlooked in sociology and public policy. While the nation centers its attention on achievement gaps, large cities, and gross inequality between “the haves and have-nots”, cities like Rolling Acres continue to struggle with educational and social inequality. While these cities and districts are well equipped with material resources for education, the actualization of these resources into opportunities continues to elude racial and economic minority families. The bulk of contemporary work in educational inequality has been framed around disparities in resource provision; this concentration has obscured the realities that stand between resources and the lives of the students and families in need. Between these resources and their lives lie complicated social relations organized around racial and social class membership where resource competition determines who receives “the spoils”. As an extension and challenge to past research, I interrogate these relationships with the goal of re-invigorating the dialogue in sociology and educational policy around the suppressed issues of ideas, beliefs and practices.

Opportunity

Contemporary policy debates are often framed around equality of opportunity or equality of outcome. I am most interested in equality of opportunity. While opportunity is often discussed as a singular entity, I see opportunity as an elastic concept composed of multiple dimensions that include provision, access and utilization. Provision involves making resources available to subjects. Access captures individual or groups' perception

and knowledge of a resource. The dimension of utilization taps the individual or groups' ability to partake in the resource in the pursuit of a desired outcome. These three dimensions capture but a few ways that resources may be unequally drawn upon between groups, which can lead to greater understandings of overlooked differences in resources and opportunity.

I explore the engagement of opportunity among Black and White residents in the domains of relationship to resources, valuing of education, and opportunity to learn. My project speaks back to sociological discussions of opportunity and success. The work of Jennifer Hosiold is one such author who I extend from. In her book, Facing Up to the American Dream (1996), Hosiold identifies the different ways that Black and White Americans across class categories come to understand and grapple with the pursuit of the American Dream. Her project broadly explores success in areas such as work, economics, and other areas of contemporary United States life. She uses finite measures of achievement, narratives about social mobility, advertisements and macro and meso level discussions of social progress to produce a general portrait of opportunity and the different ways that Blacks and Whites view opportunity within the United States. Hosiold's work is useful for calibrating understanding of the dimensions of provision and utilization, but her study's design is too large to capture the small-scaled processes that occur in everyday interactions that embed inequality.

To build upon the current research on opportunity, I decided to select a district known for its student achievement, quantifiable resources. These factors have lead people, both local and national, to conject it was a space of great opportunity. To the outsider, Rolling Acres looks like a utopian school district with its diverse student body, high achieving schools, and small size. However, this image is besmirched by the experiences and academic achievement of African-Americans, the district's largest racial/ethnic minority group, who are often described as "underachieving" when compared to their White peers, given the level of resources in the district. Before beginning my field work, I looked upon the performance of Black students with an eye of skepticism and inquisitiveness. Who were the Black students in RAPS? What were their supports for education, both inside and outside of school? What were their barriers to

education, both inside and outside of school? These questions lead me to ultimately ask, what is the distance between resources and opportunity?

Only once I immersed myself in the field via interviews, observations, and archives did I gain a richer understanding of the experiences of these “underachieving” Black students. My initial findings in the field forced me to broaden my inquiry to not only the lives of Black students and their families but to seriously consider their “overachieving” White counterparts. This is an extension beyond the work of scholars like John Ogbu who have researched the experiences of Black students in affluent settings, but not considered their White counterparts’ lives. As a result, my study captures differences in the relationship of individuals and groups across to resources and its implications for opportunity.

Educational research often equates opportunity with resource provision, however I contend that opportunity cannot be “boiled down” to simple measures of quantifiable resources. Instead, resources reflect a part of the material dimensions of opportunity but the processes of engaging these resources also constitute opportunity. For this reason, many studies have been unable to accurately capture how differences in opportunity emerge and operate within heterogeneous communities. While much attention has been paid to computing quantifiable educational resources (e.g. course offerings, per pupil expenditure, etc.), less careful attention has been paid to differences in the abilities of actors to actualize these resources into desired outcomes. To understand how individuals or groups do or do not actualize resources requires careful analysis of ideologies, practices, and the fields in which actors reside is necessary.

To form this portrait of opportunity amongst fourth graders in Rolling Acres I must consider contemporary dynamics, recent history, and the interplay of the two. To address contemporary dynamics I utilize participant observation, interviews, and local policy analysis. To address the role of the past I conduct analysis of changes in the policy outlook and procedures for the district of the last two decades. To address the interplay of the two, I analyze the messages that adults transfer to children regarding opportunity, which are often based on their own past experiences and their perception of the current opportunities that their children have. This results in a portrait of opportunity that takes seriously the lives of children and adults in Rolling Acres Public Schools. I am also

interested in extending dialogue around opportunity to include social processes that are directly related to schooling (e.g. parental school participation, family background, etc.) and social processes that are often overlooked when discussing schooling (parental social networks, participation in non-academic extracurricular activities, etc.). For this reason, my project does not simply center on schools or the lives of youth.

Throughout the dissertation I utilize a heuristic for the analysis of opportunity that I call the three p's: perception, pursuit and prohibition. By looking carefully at perceptions of the openness of the social structure, pursuit of these perceived opportunities, and interrogating the barriers that prohibit actualization of these opportunities, a rounded characterization of opportunity is created. Sometimes the best indicator of the openness of an opportunity structure is an analysis of those who are at the margins of that field. In the case of Rolling Acres, those with marginal access to social gains related to opportunity are racial and economic minorities. Their engagement of and experiences with potential opportunity illuminates some of the spaces where the fruits of prosperity are consumed or denied.

Research Findings

In response to the puzzle of persistent educational inequality in well resourced areas I find inequality is bred amongst families, peer networks, and school relations via inequality in capitals (social, economic, and cultural). I argue that these processes of capital stratification occur largely at the hands of White families who behave in manners that stratify resources from economic and racial minorities as they attempt to achieve the greatest gains for their children. This process is a subtle one that involves the interplay of social networks, perceptions of limited resources, and ideological scripts that operate beneath the level of conscious. Inside classrooms, racial and economic minorities receive less positive feedback and more behavioral corrections, despite the conscious attempts of teachers to treat students equally. These differences in treatment are based in part in implicit biases but also occur under the auspice of culturally sensitive pedagogy and the mis-perception of the backgrounds from which students come. As a result, children and parents of Black and poor students tend to be unable to actualize the capitals that Whites use to gain access to resources present in Rolling Acres Public Schools (RAPS).

My research also extends the current literature on educational inequality by exploring policy at the school district and neighborhood levels. I find that RAPS' educational policies designed to address educational inequality have evolved over the past thirty years from a race-centered framing to race-neutral framing. I argue this race-neutral framing neglects the needs of the low income and Black families in Rolling Acres, while advantaging affluent and White families in the district. The district's move to race-neutral policies shifted their approach to emphasizing all families should receive the same resources, rather than targeting additional resources at the most disadvantaged families. Additionally, through analyses of the out-of-school lives and neighborhoods of Black and White families, I find that the stratification of neighborhoods and social networks heavily influences the access of social and cultural capitals and subsequently affects thoughts on opportunity for adults and children. The mismatch between these policies and the lives of these marginalized families makes the redress of educational inequality all the more unlikely.

In the post-Civil Rights Era the consequences of race have been maintained, though the silences and responses to inequality have shifted. These silences and changes in practice have led to a new crop of barriers between resources and opportunity for racial and economic minority students. In sum, my study explores these barriers – material, discursive, and ideological that minority families face in accessing resources that are often perceived to be abundant and accessible in well-resourced settings. My findings contribute to the lacuna on heterogeneous educational environments, while challenging researchers and practitioners to reconsider the levers necessary for the reduction of educational inequality.

Sociological Conceptions of Race

The meaning of race within sociology remains in flux, but I utilize a social construction perspective in my work (Winant 2004). In this short section, I discuss the ways that sociology has come to understand race, but also address how schools as institutions have come to deal with “the race problem” in a general sense. Sociological debates around the existence, boundaries and meanings of race remain central to investigations of inequality. While early theorists of race posited it as primordial and fixed, more recent work on race has taken a social constructionist perspective. The social

constructionist theory of race that I most align with is the racial formation perspective. Racial formation argues racial categories are outgrowths of the synergies of economics, politics, and history. The meaning within and between these categories are endowed through social interactions between actors and groups. Omi and Winant (1986) state,

Race is indeed a pre-eminently sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expressions by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. (p. 60)

Under the racial formations perspective race is not simply a theoretical construction, but also a lived reality for groups and individuals, regardless of awareness of race as structuring factor. They continue on to discuss the ways that race informs both the everyday lives and identities of all within a given site.

At the micro-level race is a matter of individuality, of the formation. The ways in which we understand ourselves and interact with others, the structuring of our practical activity- work and family, as citizens and thinkers (or “philosophers”)- these are all shaped by racial meaning and racial awareness (pp. 66-67).

From this theoretical orientation, I consider racial categories flexible, yet meaningful to the lives of actors. This is not to suggest that racial or ethnic group membership is static or that racial membership is primordial as earlier theorists have suggested. Instead I subscribe to a view that even though boundaries are flexible, belonging to or being perceived as part of a racial group produces meaning between individuals and groups. These meanings in turn inform the thoughts and actions of actors through ideologies and scripts (Bonilla-Silva 1997). These processes of categorization, identification, and actions occur at the conscious level and beneath the conscious level (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

In this study I inform my definitions and distinctions of racial membership using the Harris and Sim (2002) matrix of race. Considering the internal, external, and expressed dimensions of racial identity, I allow actors’ self-definitions, as well as other perceptions, to inform who is defined as Black, White, Multiracial or other categories. While the bulk of students in my sample identified as a singular race in interviews, in specific contexts they may identify as more than one race. When multiple racial identities were employed, I make special effort to discuss the emergence and utilities of these stacked identities for the social interactions. To compliment this, when actors flatten

individuals' multiple identities to a singular racial category I interpret the reasons for these practices. While I use the above definitions of race for analysis, in creating more simplistic demographic portraits of my population I identify the children with one Black parent as Black, but note the number of multiracial Black-Other children combinations. This is because within Rolling Acres children with one Black parent were often characterized socially as Black (i.e. by adults, through friendship networks, etc.), this was also done in school official records when achievement data was reported.

Sociological conceptions of Social Class

Theories on the meaning and boundaries of social class have been less debated than racial group membership. At its core, social class is rooted in capital, usually economic, but not to the exclusion other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). I draw heavily for Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social class and its constituent components of capital (economic, social, cultural, etc.). The forms of capital, introduced by Bourdieu (1986), and refined by a number social theorists, offer a way to think about the accumulation of advantage amongst groups, particularly social class groups across multiple dimensions. In short, my analysis looks carefully at how the social networks, in which individuals and families are nested, relate to desired educational information and outcomes (social capital), how the cultural norms that individuals and families draw upon to negotiate institutional and individual relationships relate to desired outcomes (cultural capital), and how the socioeconomic resources that individuals and families bring to bear on the pursuit of desirable educational outcomes (economic capital) dovetail to inform social location and action. Access to capital and the ability to utilize these capitals to achieve social gains is mediated by the space, race and social class ideologies, and other intervening social factors. Bourdieu's forms of capital carefully capture not only the components of social class, but how their operations serve to reify social class distinctions.

In my research, social class, much like race is not a static or neat concept. Instead, I attempt to reflect the complex constellation that people often simplify to income levels or slightly more complicated indexes of socioeconomic scores. While I do allow these metrics to inform my analysis, I argue social class is not only understood by

economic distinction but also via the carnal expressions and ideologies that are employed in everyday action. In the bulk of the text, I refer to affluent, working class, and poor families. These labels are heavily influenced by self-reported income, but not limited to these reports. I had each adult that I interviewed in each family select their income on an income range sheet. I elected to have families identify their total household income range on a 9 category income sheet. The values ranged from less than 10,000 to 125,000 or more. In determining one's "class" I relied on income, educational level, and proxies for wealth such as home ownership. Income over 66,000 traditionally fell under the affluent category, with few Black families reaching that mark, but with most of the White families falling beyond this mark. Additionally, I tried to be sensitive to household size and number of children in determining social class classification because higher concentrations of people can serve to affect the distribution of resources. This was particularly important to understanding the ways that Black families' resources were more strained than their White counterparts.

Race, Social Class and the Institution of Education

While social theorists have grappled with the meaning and boundaries of race and social class, the institution of schools has taken a much more practical, albeit reductionist, perspective. In schools, a system of classification akin to the census pentad (e.g. Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, NHOPI) is often used as the method of classifying children. Like issues with the civil right enforcement and multiraciality, under No Child Left Behind, multiracial individuals are often "one-dropped" into singular categories when reporting student achievement statistics. However, the use of singular racial identities far precedes the NCLB act. The rampant de jure segregation that gripped the United States set the backdrop for unequal access to resources between racial groups (Anderson 1988). De jure segregation in schooling eventually shifted to de facto segregation with the legal watershed of Brown decision (1956). The Brown decision served to focus national attention on issues of racial inequality in schools, but not on interpersonal issues, rather the concentration was on gaps in resources between the schools that Blacks and Whites attended. Justice Warren's statement, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" led to court ordered desegregation of public schools. While Brown is often read

as the legal victory over racism, the Supreme Court decision was designed to address the inextricable ties between race, social class, and education.

Social class in schools is often “boiled down” into free or reduced lunch status. Because the schools that children attend are most often determined by where their families live, the economic and residential segregation of areas is reflected in economic and racial segregation of public schools. Additionally the reliance on local tax bases, allows schools located in areas with higher rates of home ownership with higher median housing values to accumulate advantageous financial conditions for schools. Title One of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was the first federal attempt at addressing gaps for economically disadvantaged students in US. Under this act, schools annually collect information on families’ economic backgrounds and determine their percentage poor from the three categories of free lunch, reduced price lunch, or full priced lunch. While Title One served to improve monitoring of poverty in US schools, it has not served to equalize the experiences or achievement of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with their more well-resourced counterparts (Ed Trust 2006).

Schools as institutions have consistently monitored race, social class, and the presence of educational inequality, but still the path to intervention has been unclear. The Coleman Report, published in 1966 argued that family background or family resources were the strongest predictors of academic achievement. Under the lineage of the Coleman Report, scores of studies and policy interventions would argue against school-based interventions and suggest that only once families were changed, would strong shifts in educational inequality occur. By locating academic failure in the homes of students, many advocates of social conservatism were able to eschew the responsibility of educational inequality from the public domain and into the private lives of Black and poor people. As a result, the conditions of schools that Blacks attended continued to precipitously with few unified objections within the public domain, until the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983, which reinvigorated national interest in the condition of US public education.

In the 1990s the role of race in schooling emerged, but this time in non-high poverty spaces as the nation began to grapple with issues of multicultural politics. The

1990s served to challenge suburban and urban schools by asking, “What is to be done with students of color?” and secondarily, “What do students of color mean to White students and schools.” (Moses 2002) Numerous authors have taken up the successes and failures of this period so I intend not to deal with this here, but it is important to recognize that non-high minority schools have acknowledge race and the entrance of minority students into predominantly White schools, though it is difficult to argue these schools were prepared for the needs of entering minority populations.

The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) marked a notable shift in education policy, by mandating that racial disparities be monitored between student subgroups. While the Act remains heavily criticized, many of its provisions can be useful for informing the public on previously hidden inequality, such as the educational performance of minority students in well-resourced areas. National attention has recently been shifted to formally high performing districts with low performing minority groups by the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). Even still, the processes that inform the inequality between students in well-resourced areas are unclear. Through the use of sociological tools, policy analysis, and small-scaled inquiry I begin this process.

Relevant Research

In conceptualizing my approach to the study of Rolling Acres, I was confronted with an expansive literature on educational inequality. Literature on educational inequality is logically dominated by scholars in education, but sociologists and economists have each contributed their own unique insights. In the following pages, I review literatures that are relevant to work on the role of resources on educational opportunity.

The Achievement Gap

A simple query of educational inequality in most search engines nets thousands of “hits” on the achievement gap. This fascination with the differences in average performance between Black and White students is a relatively new occurrence. The degree of difference between the average Black and the average White student was not known until the 1970s when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) collected data. In the early 1970s, the gap between nine year-old African-Americans and

Whites was 43.9 points in reading and 35.0 points in math. By 2004 these gaps had narrowed to 26 and 23 points in reading and math, respectively. These reductions were largely a result of increases in Black students' scores which reduced the gaps between Blacks and Whites (Lee 2002). Black students traditionally represented in the bottom quartiles of academic performance were able to make significant progress in acquiring basic skills. This reduction of the gap overall, however, did not necessarily represent a greater closeness to parity with the average performance of White children. As was the case in other areas where racial comparisons are common such as, income, wealth, and educational attainment, while Blacks at the bottom of the distribution experienced gains, so did the Whites at the top of distribution. In interviews with teachers in RAPS, they consistently discussed the positive effects of the curriculum for Black students, but also noted the performance of White students had also increased. These increases in all students scores based on intervention are known as "rising tide" effects. While promising in terms of basic skills, rising tides maintain educational inequality if not sometimes worsen it (Cook 1975). For areas such as Rolling Acres, these system wide interventions can be particularly contentious and can hold important implications for the persistence of educational gaps.

Even with the gains of the students at the bottom of the distribution, reduction of the gap between Black and White students did not occur consistently. Ronald Ferguson (2001) identified 1988 as a key turning point in gap reduction between Blacks and Whites. Prior to 1988, the Black-White gap in test scores was narrowing slowly, but in 1988 this reduction in the gap stopped and the gap began to re-open. However, this re-widening of the gap was short lived and the latest NAEP reports show the Black-White gap is once again closing. While the 1988 change in the gap has garnered considerable public attention, I am most concerned that scholars have been unable to empirically explain what caused the changes observed in the national test score gap.

The inability to understand changes in the gap is driven by the methodological limitations and theoretical assumptions of quantitative analysis. To date, the bulk of research on the gap has concentrated on the outcomes of student performance and the inputs (school resources, family background, etc.). These input-output studies have developed greater sophistication, but this sophistication has not rectified the issues of

process that lie between input and output. This type of issue is commonly referred to as a “black box issue.” My dissertation responds to some of the black box issues by carefully exploring the processes between resource provision and the use of resources for desired educational ends.

The issues that mire trend data also mire understanding of the gap developmentally. Differences in average student performance between Black and White students as children enter kindergarten have been widely documented (Burkam et al. 2004; Lee and Burkam 2002). These early childhood gaps implicate home background as a major contributor, but social scientists argue that gaps in early childhood are the easiest of the educational gaps over the life course to close. In fact, some recent work by economists Roland Fryer and Steven Levitt (2004a) suggests that the gaps in average reading and math scores at kindergarten can be reduced to non-statistical significance by considering home and early school resources. However, their findings are more methodological accomplishment than empirical insight. Fryer and Levitt use the nationally representative survey called the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort to produce a saturated model with over 40 co-variates to reduce the gap to statistical insignificance. Fryer and Levitt’s work has been showcased in popular press and recently has been heavily cited as evidence of the ability to “remove” the gap between groups, but their investigation is largely atheoretical. While it is unlikely that Fryer and Levitt’s estimations are incorrect, their selected co-variates were unable to reduce the gap in reading and math amongst the same students three years later (Fryer and Levitt 2004). This type of “flagship” quantitative research on educational inequality motivated my desire to study the processes that relate to the production and or reduction of educational inequality. Without a rich understanding of what stands between inputs and outputs, researchers and policy analysts are left with the assumption that resources matter, but not knowing how, when or why they matter for differing groups of people.

More recent evidence by Douglas Downey and colleagues on the achievement gap between Black and White students further demonstrates the importance of qualitative analyses. In their 2004 piece on gaps in performance and summer learning, they find that the only ethnic-related test score gap that widens during the school year is the Black-

White gap. They write, “While schooling generally reduces gaps in cognitive skills, the black/white gap provides a troubling exception.” They continue on to say,

These results are consistent with the view that disparate non-school environments are not the main source of the growth in the black/white gap during the first two years of schooling. Instead, something about early schooling leads black and white students down different paths. (Downey et al. p.633)

Downey and colleagues beg researchers interrogate the everyday contributors, both inside and outside of school, to educational inequality. While their study is theoretically motivated and carefully executed “black box” issues still limit their ability to identify the processes that lead to their findings. I respond to this gap by crafting an inquiry that considers both the in-school and out-of-school contexts of fourth graders in Rolling Acres. My study concentrates on the experiences of students in fourth grade. While fourth grade is not the beginning of the educational pipeline, it is key time-point in the academic development of students, particularly disadvantaged students (Hirsch 2003). Numerous research studies have identified fourth grade as the time when disparities between children widen, particularly in the area of reading (Chall and Jacobs 2003). Additionally I choose to study fourth grade students because by the age of ten, children are aware of race and social class as socializing agents (Lewis 2003; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). I use the voices and experiences of children and adults to craft a process oriented discussion of the world of Rolling Acres residents.

Ecological Model

As a sociologist the surroundings that people are nested in are equally important to understanding people’s life chances. While there are many models of social world, I lean on ecological models of development to frame my understanding of contemporary educational inequality. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1979) has been highly influential in investigations of social context. While earlier work and large segments of psychology treated the development of humans as largely family-based, Bronfenbrenner developed a model that aids in understanding the interplay of the individual and structure. In the Ecology of Human Development, Bronfenbrenner identified microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems as layers that shape the development of youth. Microsystems are constituted by units such as the family, classroom, etc.

Mesosystems refer to the intersection of two microsystems (e.g. parent teacher conferences at school). Exosystems are generally areas that are beyond direct influence (e.g. social networks that parents maintain, etc.). The macrosystem is composed of larger societal norms and values (e.g. ideologies such as the American Dream, etc.). My research utilizes Bronfenbrenner's heuristic of ecology to look at the relationship between resources and opportunity. To organize initial sets of literature, I have divided them by domains, which is admittedly an artificial categorization since most studies tend to incorporate influences from across domains. Nonetheless this helps identify how influential research has treated the relationship between resources and educational opportunity.

Family

Most popular discussions of racial academic inequality identify family as the greatest contributor and often as the determinant of academic achievement. This common conception is overstated, but not entirely incorrect. The Coleman Report (1966) found that family characteristics were the most important factor in determining student achievement. Many expected Coleman and colleagues to find that differences in school level resources between Black and White schools drove academic achievement disparities. However, Coleman and colleagues found that the "role of [out of home] resources" was overstated and instead the family and peer characteristics contributed the most to student achievement. After these factors teacher characteristics and then school characteristics influenced school achievement. The Coleman Report's findings suggested to many educational researchers that if educational inequality was to be addressed family background was the key area of intervention. While this may be true, the ability of educational policy levers affect family life are extremely limited.

I argue that a careful read and interpretation of the Coleman report also leads to many questions about how resources matter, particularly how the same resources matter in different schooling contexts. Because Coleman's work reflects the already present accumulated differences between schools, his observations silently cover the ways that schools, their cultures, their inhabitants influence the utility of a resource. The structure of his data limits our ability to understand differences in resource uptake, which leaves

ample space for researchers to explore resources (e.g. teachers, student-teacher ratio, etc.), their use and their implications for educational inequality.

Jencks and colleagues work in Inequality (1972) continued to interrogate the meaning of family background on educational outcomes. With their research, Jencks and colleagues challenged the idea that schools had a differential influence on educational outcomes and later life trajectories of youth. Though Coleman and Jencks did not find that schools held differential effects on student academic achievement or on adult outcomes, they did express that schools still played an important role in education. Since Jencks works extends Coleman's in many ways, the same questions about resources remain under-examined into the current day. Both Coleman's and Jencks' work served to place researchers' focus on family differences as sources of inequality for decades to come.

Coleman and Jencks' research were based on decades when schools, resources, and race were distributed differently in schools. More contemporary analyses have responded to and continued to expand their central themes, particularly in the text The Black-White Test Score Gap. Meredith Phillips and colleagues work (1998) attempted to disentangle the role of family characteristics on the vocabulary scores of Black and White five and six-year olds. On most indicators, the average White family outscored their black counterparts in family level resources such as income, educational attainment, etc. Phillips findings surprisingly challenge previous knowledge by arguing that changes in parenting practices could potentially do more to reduce the racial achievement gap between families than increasing family level resources like income and educational attainment for Black children's parents. Phillips' findings further complicate our understanding of the meaning of (family) resources while arguing for the prominence or importance of culture. While Phillips and colleagues attempt to disaggregate culture from resources, in reality they are inextricably tied. Their flat conception of culture, defined by parenting style, however does signal the important relationship between family background, practice, and resources' role on educational inequality.

A richer analysis of the interplay of these three factors early in the life course was conducted by Hart and Risley. Their 1995 study of language provided another in-depth analysis on how family background and resources, child interaction and language

experience relate to early inequality. They followed 42 families during early childhood rearing and found that all groups of parents were attentive to their children, but the quality and length of language experience was not. The study results show large gaps in amount of cumulative language experience exist between professional and poor families. They found that by age three there was a cumulative language gap of approximately 30 million words between advantaged and disadvantaged students. These differences are age three were strongly predictive ($r = .57^1$ and $r = .72^2$) of language skills at age 9 and 10 (my age of study) on a subset of the sample. While this study did not find statistically significant differences by race, the overrepresentation of Black families in poverty suggests there may be an association between race and language experience. These family background related differences suggest the enduring importance of stimulating home environments in early education. In observing ten year old students in my study, I had to be aware that their aptitudes, engagement, and orientations had long been in process. While social science may attempt to present parsimonious portraits of schooling inputs and outputs, the smallest differences early in the life course could be reflected years down the line. This makes the identification of and utility of potential policy levers all the more difficult. While research on the family has suggested the importance of background characteristics, there is still is much room for analysis and contribution. As economists have repeatedly demonstrated, differences in returns to investment (e.g. earnings returns to schooling) often vary by race, this could arguably be the case with family level resources and their relationship schooling.

Neighborhoods

Families remained nested in neighborhoods which may have influence on the educational opportunities of children. The unique contributions of neighborhoods are difficult to attain, but the influence of neighborhoods has been repeatedly demonstrated in diverse studies of urban sociology (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). These studies tend to however concentrate on neighborhoods with concentrated poverty or other low income spaces when considering the influence of neighborhood on educational racial inequality. While over 52 percent of African-Americans dwell in inner-

¹ On the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R)

² On the Test of Language Development-2: Intermediate (TOLD).

cities compared to only 21 percent of Whites (McKinnon 2003), the numbers of African-Americans who have moved to more suburban neighborhoods has increased since the civil rights movement (Hochschild 1995; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). The 2000 census projects that a third of Black children now live in suburbs (Ferguson 2003). In what ways do none high poverty neighborhoods matter for race and social class based educational inequality? This question has only begun to be addressed by social scientists.

Neighborhoods are thought to affect educational outcomes through physical conditions, demographic characteristics, access to economic opportunities, institutional capacities, and social exchange of values (Connell and Halpern-Felsher 1997). These features all represent different dimension of social resources, which are often differentially related to educational outcomes. Most research on the effects of neighborhood on academic achievement have tested epidemic neighborhood models, such as the one advanced by William Julius Wilson (1987). These tests found that academic achievement may be better explained by the absence of resources (affluent neighbors) than by maladaptive behaviors (male joblessness). Ainsworth (2002), using the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), examines the way neighborhood characteristics influence academic achievement and which mechanisms mediate this relationship among adolescents. Ainsworth finds that for impoverished students, a lack of concentrated affluence accounts for one-third of the race-based achievement gap. The affluent characteristics in and of themselves (e.g. concentrations of high incomes, etc.) likely have little influence, however their actualization as resources can result in increased information which may be positively related to academic performance. Unfortunately, this type of work is limited in that it does not allow the observer to understand the nuance of how advantages are transmitted in well resourced spaces, nor does it allow one to see if there are different processes of uptake and actualization along race or social class lines. My research lends me the opportunity to look at these very processes and associated outcomes.

Even with the presence of concentrated affluence, there are still a number of factors that affect the academic achievement of students, especially Black students. To date, very little research has addressed the educational experiences of African-Americans in affluent or suburban areas. Affluent neighborhoods still hold risk factors for African-

Americans such as assimilatory pressures and subtle forms of racism (Tatum 1987). Recent work by Ronald Ferguson (2002) sheds some light on the role of family within affluent communities on academic achievement. Ferguson, in an affluent suburb, analyzes the gap in self-reported grade point average (GPA) of Black and White students between grades seven and eleven. Ferguson finds the gap in GPA is largely related to a skills gap, which is driven by family background characteristics.³ Though African-American students who live in affluent suburbs are better off socioeconomically than African-Americans in inner-cities, they still are, on average, less educated and less affluent than their suburban neighbors. This form of relative deprivation could be a potentially negative influence on families' access to monetary-related schooling resources. The gap in family resources within affluent areas is not only the strongest predictor of the GPA gap between Blacks and Whites, but it also strongly influences achievement differences within the Black student population. This research suggests that a close analysis of the ways family background influences skills acquisition in the early school grades could be key in understanding race-based educational inequality in later years. In chapter six, I deliver a case study comparing a middle class Black boy and White to begin to parse out this relationship. My analysis looks at the close ties between family background, neighborhood characteristics, and conceptions of opportunity amongst youth. This results in a careful demarcation of some of the out-of-school sources of inequality and how they may relate to in-school engagement and orientations.

School Characteristics

School Racial Composition

School racial composition has been a central policy concern since *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954). Current evidence about the relationship between school racial composition and academic achievement is mixed (Braddock and Eitle 2004; Schofield 2001). Most evidence suggests school desegregation does not *decrease* White or Black achievement. However there is no consensus that school desegregation results in achievement gains for African-Americans. Cook (1984) concluded that desegregation brought about small positive effects in reading, but no effect on math achievement. The

³ In this paper, Ferguson constructs a SES measure, but his analyses lack financial measures such as income, wealth, etc. This likely underestimates the role of SES and the role of financial resource divergence in affluent setting akin to Rolling Acres.

majority of examinations of school racial composition and academic achievement do not investigate how race operates, thus they do not provide insight into what forms of desegregation may lead to improved student achievement or whether racial desegregation or resource access drives the relationship between school racial composition and student achievement (Raudenbush, Fotiu, and Cheong 1998).

Despite a lack of consistent social scientific evidence on the role of desegregation on student achievement, school desegregation is often discussed as an educational policy intervention to reduce educational inequality. This belief is largely maintained as an outgrowth of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which birthed cross-district busing, which eventually eroded (Orfield, Eaton, and Harvard Project on School Desegregation 1996). The legal mandate of *Brown* shifted over time and questions over what was legally permissible emerged. With limited knowledge about the “effects” of desegregation and limited methods of achieving racial balance, school desegregation became a heavily contested policy lever. In chapter three, I analyze Rolling Acres’ framing of school redistricting and the role of school racial balance on educational inequality. Understanding a district’s history of dealing with issues of inequality and their subsequent policy responses provides an additional layer of meaning for the exploration of the operations of race and social class.

While there has been considerable attention dedicated to desegregation and test scores, I am more concerned with the social processes that occur within schools between actors from different backgrounds. A few key studies look closely at the process of school desegregation and the resulting relationships that emerge from it. Wells and Crain (1997), Ogbu (2003), and Lewis (2003) have tackled the lives of Blacks in predominantly White schools or racially heterogeneous schools. Wells and Crain, in *Stepping Over the Color Line*, analyze race relations in the wake of St. Louis school desegregation. Their project is strong at outlining the emergence of desegregation from a policy perspective, but their interpretation of their qualitative data and study design weaken the research project’s ability to capture the subtle ways in which race operates inside schools or in the everyday lives of students. Their interpretation of Black respondents’ knowledge about and attitudes towards education often come from a deficit model perspective, which robs

the respondents of a non-biased voice.⁴ Since Wells and Crain interview transfer students into desegregating schools, we are also unable to infer if race and class would operate differently for Black students born and raised in the St. Louis suburbs.

Ogbu, in Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb, makes a contribution by exploring Black students' ideologies and practices towards schooling. Ogbu finds that African-American youth in Shaker Heights, Ohio academically “disengage” due to their need to feel connected to other Blacks. Ogbu's work has garnered considerable attention but is limited, in my eyes, by his data interpretation and design. Unfortunately, Ogbu appears to interpret and then **force** his data to fit his Cultural Ecological Model.⁵ Ogbu's design also limits his work. He interviews Black students and parents exclusively, so he cannot correctly infer if the values and practices held by Blacks in his sample are not also present in White students or parents.

One of the most insightful accounts of the operation of race at the elementary school level is provided by Amanda Lewis in Race in the Schoolyard (2003). Lewis utilized ethnography to explore the role of race at three elementary schools. At the most affluent school, she found differences in racial treatment were evident, but were rarely discussed or addressed at the school. Both parents and school personnel employed a “color-blind ideology” in which the significance of race was consistently questioned and downplayed. Through interviews and observations, Lewis found when parents and school personnel did address race issues they viewed them as concerns of racial minorities, not as issues that everyone in the community participated in forming and addressing. Staff and parents of White students, in particular, were hesitant to acknowledge that White students received subtle advantages relative to students of color. Lewis' study suffers from a lack of discussion of in-classroom experiences and discussion of implementation of policies at the school and classroom levels. However, she does eloquently demonstrate that acknowledgement of race as a factor in school composition does not mean that steps will be taken to address race based issues in schools.

⁴ For an example, see Chapter 6 in the book where the authors discount the students' and parents' perception of discrimination by suggesting that students who transferred back into public schools were likely experiencing a mismatch in habitus, rather than being driven out by poor treatment as they indicated.

⁵ For an example, see Chapter Six's discussion of leveling. Throughout the chapter he outlines the structural barriers to Black students enrolling in advanced classes but in his summary of the chapter he quickly reverts to suggesting that “self-elimination” played a key role in under representation of Blacks in advanced tracks, though the evidence presented in the chapter runs counter to this claim.

In response to Wells and Crain, Ogbu, and Lewis I designed my dissertation to utilize the voices of both Black and White families. I rely on evidence from youth as well as adults to deepen understanding around the meanings of race and social class and their relation to opportunities in the district of Rolling Acres. This allows for accurate comparisons about orientation, outlooks, and behaviors. While my site is most akin to the aforementioned scholars, Rolling Acres contains its own unique characteristics as a small-city, which allows me to also explore the divergences and convergences with earlier works. Additionally, because of the diversity within my sample, I am able to theory build, (e.g. my discussion of envisioned futures in chapter six), by exploiting the uniqueness of my sample.

Teachers

While large scaled analyses often neglect street-level bureaucrats, serious discussion of educational inequality must look closely at teachers. After all, educational policy and its implementation are ultimately mediated by teachers (Cohen and Loewenberg Ball 1990). Within classrooms, teachers' characteristics matter for the academic achievement gap. Ferguson (1998) found that teachers with lower test scores could deprive students of educational growth.⁶ Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that having highly effective teachers from grades three through five could lead a student to a 50 percentile point higher achievement score than a student who received lowly ineffective teachers in grades three through five. Teacher background characteristics are not the only ways in which teachers may advantage or disadvantage students. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) Pygmalion experiment provided evidence teacher expectations' influenced student achievement. Rosenthal and Jacobson provided teachers with misinformation about students' intellectual blooming potential and then 8 months later examined the scores of students. The experimental group outscored the control group by .30 of a standard deviation at administration of the second intelligence tests. Teachers' characterizations of students' behavior also differed. Teachers characterized students who were identified as having high intellectual potential as better adjusted and assessed them more positively than students identified as having low potential. The results suggest

⁶ In 1986 Texas tested all teachers in their public school system by administering the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers (TECAT).

teachers' expectations appear to affect student achievement, though the results of this study do not allow us to understand the mechanisms that produced these differentials.

Brophy and Good (1974) through a review of attempted replications further explored the role of teacher expectations on student achievement. Brophy (1985) argued that teacher expectations did affect student achievement, but teachers generally assessed student ability and potential accurately. The body of Brophy's work suggests teachers constantly re-evaluate their perceptions of students and their potential; and that only when these evaluations are rigid and unchanging do teacher expectations truly affect student achievement. While a number of methodological issues limited the validity of initial claims that teacher expectations affected student achievement, teacher expectations' relationship to student treatment remains an important area of study (Downey and Pribesh 2004; Ferguson 1998b). Rather than concentrate on student achievement as an outcome, in chapter seven, I explore student-teacher interaction among academic and social/behavioral contacts and its relation to educational inequality. Additionally in that chapter I am able to discuss the ways that teachers rely on their own social class and racial backgrounds to mediate their responses to students' academic performance and behaviors. By utilizing a modification of the Brophy-Good scale and in-depth in-class observations my multi-method approach uncovers how teachers unintentionally disadvantage Black and poor Whites while advantaging affluent Whites.

Curriculum

The importance of academic curriculum to the racial achievement gap has recently come into focus through research on opportunity to learn (OTL). Opportunity to learn research was pioneered by the Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) in the late 1970s and early 1980s (McDonell 1995). Opportunity to learn is usually analyzed along four dimensions: 1) content coverage- if students were able to cover the core curriculum in a subject areas, 2) content exposure- if there is sufficient time-on-task, 3) content emphasis- which topics in the curriculum receive more emphasis, and 4) quality of instructional delivery- how well the material is presented to students (Stevens, Grymes, and National Center for Education Statistics 1993). Since not all school systems taught the same materials, it could be expected that differences in student achievement would be present because a common testing instrument was used. OTL was thus initially

a concern of differences in achievement scores between nations, but more recently OTL has emerged as a domestic policy concern. Goals 2000 and a number of other policy initiatives attempted to establish “school delivery” standards for US public schools, in order to assure equal access to education. Despite these attempts, differences in opportunity to learn within the United States often fall along race and class lines, with poor and high minority schools receiving the lowest exposure to curriculum and other opportunity to learn variables (Hallinan 2001; Oakes 1985). If certain students, particularly economically disadvantaged and minority students, are not exposed to the same sets of educational materials, then these students will likely under-perform relative to their exposed peers.

In Rolling Acres, by the fourth grade the district practices ability grouping in Language Arts classes. Ability grouping in the elementary grades has undergone considerable study and like the work on ability grouping at other grade levels, the findings have been mixed (Slavin 1987). Recent work by Condrón (2007) suggests that ability grouping among youth still involves consideration of race and social class, despite being predominantly determined by student skill. Looking at differences in exposure to curriculum as well as teacher treatment by the same teacher provides a sort of “natural experiment” for opportunity to learn and teacher expectancies. My research project allows me to achieve this while looking across the race and social class spectrum.

Race Theory

This review of education achievement disparities between African-Americans and Whites suggests that race remains a central organizing feature in contemporary US society. While the race and educational achievement literature demonstrates race’s ongoing salience, sociological understandings of race and racial classification are seldom incorporated in educational inequality research. In most social scientific research, race is now accepted as a social construction.⁷ As a social construction, race does not reflect natural division, but the categories that people identify as races do represent differences in power between these groupings. Omi and Winant’s (1986) influential theory of racial formation argues that social, political and economic forces create racial categories, and

⁷ While publications such as *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1998) have reintroduced the linkages between genetics and race, there is still little evidence that social understandings of race translate into biologically coherent racial groups.

then these categories are endowed with meaning. These meanings often involve and result in the subordination of one or multiple groups and the reward of one or multiple superordinate groups. Through racial projects, the process of reorganizing racial dynamics, the boundaries and meanings of these categories may shift, depending upon the social, economic, and political climate of a given area. For my research, Omi and Winant's identification of race as a relational and temporarily bound phenomenon provides an interesting theoretical entry point for research on race and education.

David Harris and Jeremiah Sim's (2002) matrix of race captures the multidimensionality of racial identity. Harris argues that three perspectives: internal, external, and expressed inform the racial identity. The internal perspective represents how an individual sees one's self. The external refers to the ways that other view the racial or ethnic identity of a target person. The expressed perspective reflects the actions and words that convey meaning about racial group membership. This constellation of perspectives captures the alignment and disconnections around perceived races of individuals. This mixing of individual and group as well as internal and external is especially meaningful in a racially heterogeneous setting such as Rolling Acres.

For example, Harris and Sim (2002) observe that multiracial youth sometimes change their racial identification dependent upon their social context (i.e. identify differently at home than they do at school). Approximately 5 percent of the students attending Rolling Acres Public Schools (RAPS) are multiracial children. Most education research simply utilizes the designated racial categories and assumes that the variation in identification is inconsequential. However it is possible that these shifts in racial identification impact the everyday experiences of students but are not reflected in aggregate academic outcome data.

While these children may rely on a singular racial identity while at school, their official district level racial classification, as well as home identification may vary. Children's in-school racial identity can affect their peer groups and possible teacher treatment. Such fluctuations in social identification are important when considering discrimination as well as socialization messages. Children and adults' understandings of the meanings and boundaries of race often collide to create inequalities of racial understanding. In part this occurs because children and adults react to public scripts

which suggest race is unimportant, despite its prevalence in their lives. I use these differences in understandings and scripts to deliver a conversation about race that involves the experiences and voices of marginalized economic and racial minorities and privileged Whites.

My analysis of the operation of race in this dissertation is grounded in whiteness studies. Whiteness studies concentrate on making the “invisible” and “normative” privileges associated with membership in the White racial group visible (Frankenberg 1993). While race theory for years concentrated on understanding the negro problem (McKee 1993), little work interrogated the pathways through which Whites gained advantages and maintained their social position atop the American hierarchy. Theorists introduced the term “white privilege” to mark the historically unmarked advantages that Whites enjoy in the United States. While white privilege is a useful theoretical concept, for my investigation I find it too amorphous. White privilege, in many ways, runs the risk of classifying too wide an array of experiences and processes that could be analytically distinguished. Rothenberg (2003) states, “... the very meaning of whiteness is part of an elaborately constructed mosaic of social and cultural meanings. Each of us is born with a particular collection of physical attributes, but it is society that teaches use which ones to value and which ones to deplore. (p. 3)” In my study I attempt to locate whiteness in specific domains related to thoughts about and practices towards education. Through this exploration I can locate “invisible” mechanisms that maintain the status position of Whites in Rolling Acres. Also, while whiteness has been the subject of study among adults, there is little work that tackles socialization of whiteness between adults and children. This leaves significant space for contributions to this burgeoning literature.

Theories of Racism

The bulk of contemporary evidence on educational inequality concentrates on differences in outcomes. Traditionally these differences in outcomes or residual were labeled as discrimination or some form of racism(Quillian 2006). As most social scientists now acknowledge, the observation of gaps in average performance tells us little the processes or mechanisms that produced these differences. While all gaps are not based on racism, it is useful to pull upon the sociological literature to gain a deeper understanding for potential ideologies or actions that may inform disparities. My review

of these theories is designed to provide a survey that demonstrates my perspective on racism that maintains consideration of macro social forces and micro individual actions. I begin with a review of theories of prejudice and discrimination, then a few select theories of racism.

Gordon Allport in 1954 defined prejudice as, “aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group.” This ideational conception has endured to contemporary discussions of prejudice. Many have extended Allport’s conception to reflect irrational biases or subscription to beliefs in the inherent inferiority of groups and the superiority of others, but this extension is not always true. Blumer’s (1958) social psychological research on prejudice was the first to acknowledge the active and often irrational dislike of minorities was not the only source of prejudice. Blumer argued for a model of prejudice that considered the maintenance of social position as central. In this model, actors may maintain or enact prejudiced views because of the perception of threat associated with a subordinate group’s gains.

Blumer’s presentation of socially grounded perspective of prejudice is particularly important when attempting to make sense of the ideational when often only the observable is available to social analysts. For this reason, it is difficult for observers to distinguish between prejudices that are conscious and those that are beneath the conscious. Recent advances in theories of prejudices such as implicit racial prejudice theory attempt to quantify the ways that actors may unknowingly subscribe to prejudicial attitudes(Quillian 2006).

Discrimination is another concept that is closely tied to prejudice in popular discussions of inequality. Whereas prejudice represented the ideational, discrimination captures the carnal. Blood (1955) defined discrimination as, “an overt behavior that deprives groups of equal access to social facilities...(p.114).” Blood in this same piece argues that discrimination can occur in the absence of prejudice. He finds that White employers often discriminate against Black employees based on their own social subordination, not their individual prejudices. Blood’s work and the work of other scholars who have replicated this finding challenge sociologists to carefully examine the processes that lie behind observed differences. If we overlook these processes, the

prescribed path of redress will likely be ineffectual. Additionally, a non-critical analysis of the process and actors will lead to the ascription of incorrect and likely negative label for complicit actors. This is not to suggest these complicit actors are absolved of responsibility, instead accurate analysis of their beliefs and actions will locate the importance of the individual nested within a social order that values some and devalues others.

Most basic definitions of racism incorporate prejudice, discrimination and power (Bonilla-Silva 1997). The context of power is generally endowed via the social structure. In the late 1960s and the 1970s the concept of structural racism, also sometimes referred to as institutional racism, was developed (Ture and Hamilton 1967). Structural racism stresses the embedded nature of racism within the institutions of the United States such as government, education, and healthcare. Structural racism provides a framework for examining institutions, their practices, and their influence on the lives of minorities. The addition of structural racism to the lexicon of sociology extended the bound of racism beyond early individual and group based models. At the same time, a lack of analytic specificity made many models of structural racism devoid of individual contribution and thus limited the usefulness of this approach. I consider structural racism an important addition because it highlights the roles of institutions and the cultural norms contained within them. In this sense, it moves theories of racism from individual basis to the structural, which allows the incorporation of ideological components. However, many structural racism theories often fall flat because of their description of individual's within structure. Instead in my discussion of the structural, it is important to maintain agency amongst actors.

Bonilla-Silva (2001) builds on and expands prior theories of racism by suggesting a racialized social system (RSS) approach. The RSS argues race, though birthed out of other social divisions such as class, takes on its own meaning in contemporary societies at the ideational and institutional levels. Bonilla-Silva argues race is integrated into everyday lives and actions at the individual level by the emergence of racial ideologies or racial scripts that define which groups are socially rewarded and at the institutional level in the practices that allow dominant racial groups access to greater opportunities and

rewards than subordinate groups. The RSS addresses racism at both the ideational and institutional level, while allowing patterns of racism to vary by time and space.

Another important dimension of the RSS is that Bonilla-Silva provides a theory that allows everyday actions not to contain racial animus but still have racial effects on the distribution of social rewards. In discussions of race and educational policy the question of racial animus often becomes central in questions of access. Mickelson in a 2003 piece in Sociology of Education explores the links between racial animus and discrimination. She concludes that racial animus need not present to result in racial disparities or unintentional discrimination. This however is not the case in the fields of law and policy.

While sociology has concerned itself with developing nuanced discussion of race and racism. Legal and policy analysts have centered on impacting observed differences. As a result of Brown decision and other key civil rights legislation contemporary legal discussions of racism center on the question of discrimination, not racism. Legally based definitions of discrimination rely on different tenets and criterion for evaluation than sociological definitions of discrimination. While sociology has become comfortable with the absence of racial animus in actions that result in discrimination, legal definitions mandate the presence of animus to constitute discrimination (Blank et al. 2004). While I do not agree with this legal definition of discrimination, it is important to maintain this definition when considering the legal and policy environment within Rolling Acres Public Schools operate. The pressures of legal retribution for discriminating are often key to escalating or deescalating momentum on policies targeted at social equity (Bell 1995).

Theories of Social Class

Just as the educational inequality literature reviewed above did not pay sufficient attention to race, this literature also failed to sufficiently theorize class. This is likely due to an over focus on student achievement, rather than the everyday experiences of students and teachers. In achievement focused studies social class is measured by the proxy of free or reduced lunch or a composite of socioeconomic indicators of a given family, neighborhood, or school. While this may be sufficient for directly measuring the role of financial resources on average academic achievement, the subtle operations of class in the everyday experiences of students are missed.

Many current discussions on the deleterious effects of household and neighborhood poverty view low-income communities as powerless in affecting their condition. Recent research on the forms of capital clarifies the mechanisms that may produce low outcomes and also notes ways in which communities can be active agents in the countering these transmitted inequalities (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999) . Although definitions of social and cultural capital vary greatly, I utilize Bourdieu's definition of social capital for my dissertation project. Bourdieu defines social capital as the sum of potential or actual resources that an individual can bring to bear on a given situation through actualization of a network of people (Bourdieu 1986). In Coleman's (1988) estimation, individuals do not possess social capital; instead individuals are linked to networks with high amounts of social capital which contribute to the individual's and social network's ability to achieve a desired end. Though a subtle variation, the question of who holds social capital, individuals (Bourdieu) or social networks (Coleman) could significantly impact how we understand the transmission and reduction of class inequality. In chapter five, I examine the possession and uses of social capital among parents in Rolling Acres and its role on stratifying the educational process.

Cultural capital refers to coherent endowments of social norms and values that are advantageous within a given social structure. Bourdieu names three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Transmission of cultural capital occurs through socialization that is generally linked to the class strata in which one is reared. Thus, cultural capital, in its embodied state, is a learned, and not easily teachable, phenomenon. For example, knowing the appropriate time to ask to exit a class and go to the bathroom while a class is in progress would be an embodied form of cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital is displayed through possession and/or knowledge of material objects. A typical form among young school aged children would be knowledge of popular internet sites such as search engines, wiki-pages, etc. Institutionalized cultural capital forms are systems of credentials that can be compared and that standardize cultural distinctions. Typical forms of institutional cultural capital are academic credentials or in the case of the youth in my study are test scores or report card grades. Social and cultural capitals are central in the creation of human capital.

Human capital is defined as the set of skills and abilities that an individual possesses to engage and complete tasks (Becker 1964). Human capital is traditionally important in the labor market where completion of tasks is the desired outcome. These forms of capital all link to economic capital in different ways. Examining the forms of capital is one way to understand the reasons why, on average, African-American and other disadvantaged groups do not attain as much schooling, income, or employment as their White and affluent counterparts.

The forms of capital provide an important framework for examination of the Black-White achievement gap. To “get ahead” in the United States often takes more than raw skill (human capital); it is important to understand the way systems operate and gain the ability to negotiate these systems. Social networks (social capital) and the ability to navigate different systems (cultural capital) shape achievement ideologies and practices in youth. For marginalized groups of students, the accumulation of social and cultural capital is all the more important in overcoming barriers to opportunity (MacLeod 1995).

I use the lenses of social and cultural capital in particular to explore the transmission of advantage and disadvantage. Though social and cultural capitals are common in the vocabularies of sociologists and in some policy circles, there remain a number of under-explored relationships between these theories and educational inequality. Often, it is assumed that families with sufficient financial capital are also endowed with high amounts of social capital. However, close readings of Coleman’s and Bourdieu’s theories of capital suggest that social capital is not reducible to financial capital. Instead, mechanisms such as intergenerational closure can jeopardize whether advantages translate into achievement gains. Unfortunately, many accounts of the role of social capital and cultural capital assume that the presence of networks or the seeming absence of them will translate directly to achievement gains or consequences (Rury 2004). My data suggests that being in the presence of stocks of capital does not net equal results for all. In part, this may be due to issues of social reproduction.

Capital theory has been applied to a number of qualitative studies in education that were non-achievement centered. These works suggest that the reproduction of social inequality within schools is common (MacLeod 1986, Willis 1981). Some of these studies go as far to suggest the purpose of schooling is to reproduce the stratification

already in place in the social structure(Bowles and Gintis 1976; Bowles and Gintis 2002). These works argue that schools are not equalizing forces; rather, they provide the greatest opportunity to the most advantaged students, while allowing disadvantaged students to fall further behind. If mechanisms that reproduce and even exacerbate inequality are systematic (i.e. not random incidents), as this literature suggests, then they are often subtle and “hidden” within everyday experiences. Through examination of student and guardian narratives, systematic classroom observations, and ethnographic data I look for these hidden mechanisms.

Culture, Social Class, Race, and Educational Inequality

To perform a strong analysis of the meaning of resources a strong theoretical lens for cultural study is needed. My perspective is most informed by Swidler’s (1986) work. Swidler argues culture is a tool kit of symbols, worldviews, etc. that can be used to develop strategies for action. Swidler’s work runs contrary to prior work which considered culture a monolithic ideological orientation that ascribed action. In my work, I argue that actors draw upon their cultural tool kit to make sense of their current social location, think about their desired social location, and inform their everyday interactions with the individuals and institution with which they interact. This is particularly important for the study of educational inequality because deficit models have long been used to explain African-American underperformance. Employing a different cultural lens allows me to view the processes that result in enduring inequality and to then unpack them.

I situate my research to be in direct conversation with one of the leading cultural scholars of educational inequality Annette Lareau. Lareau’s work has recentered the importance of culture in the study of social inequality, but her work neglects the intersection of racial and social class identities. In both Home Advantage and Unequal Childhoods, Lareau deals well with the meaning of social class, but her treatment of race is not nearly as nuanced.⁸ In both texts and her published articles, Lareau’s work falls prey to a class-based explanation of race-based differences in educational achievement (Winant 2000). Her later work (2002; (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003) does

⁸ In fact, Home Advantage did not consider race, only social class. She makes amends for this with her second book manuscript, but still many issues in her conceptualization of the meaning of race remain.

consider race, but fails to look at the intersection of race, habitus and institutional reception. The result is a skewed portrait which provides an overly social class based description of the processes that influence educational inequality. This mis-specification stands to potentially misinform educational interventions, which could potentially serve to further disadvantage marginalized populations.

Lareau's work, in combination with other studies, serve as strong informants to my work as well as places of departure. With the standing knowledge we have surrounding educational inequality a number of puzzles remain. How does gross observable inequality persist in areas where resources appear abundant? How do children of different backgrounds come together and make sense of their world and potential opportunities? What are the levers available to policy makers, teachers, and families for engaging equality in the post-Civil Rights Era? My dissertation begins to answer these puzzles while posing new challenges to research on educational inequality.

The chapters that follow illuminate the relationship between race, social class, resources and opportunity. The second chapter of this dissertation explores the methodology of this study and the implication of the investigator's social identities on the research process and analysis. The third chapter gives richer context to the environment of Rolling Acres through a description of the resources available in the district to families. The remaining empirical chapters of this dissertation each grapple with a different site of inquiry. I move between multiple sites and across actors to demonstrate the pervasive, yet unique ways, that race and social class in Rolling Acres allow some actors to accumulate advantage and opportunity. Chapter four, delves into the policy decisions made by the school district regarding race-based differences in academic performance. I deliver a case study of the educational context of Rolling Acres. I use four cases (two school redistricting initiatives, two student achievement initiatives) to create a portrait of the political context that surrounds educational inequality in the city of Rolling Acres. In chapter five, I look carefully at the use of social networks in stratifying access to information. I discuss the variation in the reception and processing of information amongst families from different racial and social class categories, and its implications for parental engagement at schools. I also provide a case study of how these cleavages in information affect access to "good" teachers and other desirable social goods. In chapter

six, I look closely at the roles of the out-of-school context of neighborhoods and families on youths' understanding of opportunity and their future. I deliver a case study between two boys, one White and one Black, and introduce the concept of envisioned futures to advance sociological discussion of conceptions of future opportunities grounded in social location. In chapter seven, I travel from outside of schools to inside the classroom. While inside the classroom, I investigate student-teacher interaction in language arts student feedback and behavioral contacts. Chapter eight closes this dissertation with a discussion of the enduring inequality observed in Rolling Acres and its implication for future work on educational policy and research.

Conclusion

While there is considerable literature on the differences in performance between Blacks and Whites, much less of this literature captures how these disparities actually take form and how they may be address. The goal of my inquiry into the lives of residents in Rolling Acres is to uncover the everyday interactions and spaces that inform the disparities that are commonly observed. While my study does not center on outcomes such as student achievement, it does look at resources and opportunity, two key factors in educational inequality. While the bulk of educational research on Black and White student populations has been conducted among highly racially and economically segregated schools and school systems, my research is unique because of its economic and racial variation. Determining the complex relations of social class and race in a diverse setting can identify what “we know” and “do not know” about intransigent educational inequality.

At the core of the project lies the pursuit of opportunity by Rolling Acres residents'. My documenting the ways that opportunity is engaged successfully and unsuccessfully in RAPS' advances sociological and policy knowledge on the processes and factors which lie inside of the “black box.” While the “black box” is often mentioned, few explorations seriously delve into the processes embedded within the achievement gap. This documentation however is only the beginning of a dialogue that is necessary for discussions of the redress of educational inequality. The current tenor of discussion simply centers on inequality of outcome, assumes relative equality of inputs in non-poor areas, and does little to interrogate the everyday processes that lie between

these phenomenon. Because of this assumption, the uptake of resources has gone under-explored and access to opportunity for racial and economic minorities has gone unresolved.

The concentration on inputs and outputs is logical considering the past attempts at equalizing public education such as *Brown. v. Topeka* and its lineage, but the results of these interventions have fallen far from equality. In the post-Civil Rights Era there is the additional challenge of obfuscation of the role of race in schooling. While social class remains an acceptable lever for change, many have come to assume race is passé or can simply be proxied for by using other demographic variables. This de-emphasis on the influence of race poses yet another challenge to the successful address of inequality. I find that Rolling Acres has fallen prey to this very issue. While committed to reducing equality, they are unsure of the tools that will produce desired results. They have in turn turned to experimenting with diverse policies levers but most of these policy interventions still lack the infrastructure necessary to aid process of resource uptake for minority families.

Resource uptake as an area of study allows us to continue to fill in our knowledge around educational inequality, but still beyond the material dimensions of resources lays the issues of ideas, beliefs, and practices. Past bodies of research as well as social convention have lead actors both inside and outside of schools to carry ideas, beliefs, and practices that undermine the pursuit of equality in American public schools. Until we can fully address resources as well as ideas, beliefs, and practices the same conundrums of schooling will remain.

Chapter Two

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe and explore the undertaking of my three classroom study and the implications of my methodology for the study's overall findings. As a student of sociology and public policy deciding upon a methodological orientation for understanding educational inequality was particularly challenging. Sociological research on educational inequality has centered on exploring the achievement gap between Black and White students. While the achievement gap remains a frame that districts and public discussions embrace to discuss inequality, I am interested in interrogating the fabric of educational inequality, not simply inequalities that are quantifiable artifacts. The best approach to capture these micro-processes is qualitative inquiry.

In the past educational inequality by studying the inputs, policy interventions, and outputs quantitatively have provided us with broad strokes of knowledge about *what* affects educational inequality. But what these broad strokes cannot tell us are the questions of *why*, *how*, and *when* do these factors matter. Why do the factors like family background, poverty, etc matter for educational inequality? How do these factors interact with each other to affect the lives of youth both inside and out of school? Are there times when social class matters more than racial identity? These are the questions that will advance knowledge on educational inequality and thus the type of questions that I want to answer.

Ultimately producing insights about differences in processes is best achieved through qualitative inquiry. In selecting this method of inquiry I am uniquely positioned to explore the dimensions of culture, process, and behavior among a small but rich set of data. To best capture how educational inequality exists, promulgates or is combated I decided to triangulate my approach. I use interviews, participant observation (both

fieldnotes and systematic), and archival research to produce data with the potential to explicate some causal processes among educational inequality in a well-resourced.

Methods Collection

Sampling Schools

Once I identified Rolling Acres and their public schools as candidates for research, I applied to RAPS with a formal research proposal in the late summer of 2005. The proposal outlined the study's methodology, research justification and the investigator's qualifications for conducting research in schools. Within two months, I was provisionally approved to conduct research by the RAPS. One administrator identified my provisional approval as "a license to hunt" for schools. I was responsible for identification and recruitment of schools, principals, teachers, and classrooms into my study. The provisional approval was conditional on approval of the individual school, the building principals, and individual teachers. Prior to the winter break, I contacted 5 schools that I thought demographically fit my needs (my desired schools contained at least 12 percent Black student population, as well as at least 9 percent free or reduced lunch, and documented achievement disparities between White and Black students on the state-wide assessment). The schools were each demographically similar, so I hoped to gain a richer understanding of how variations in leadership and school culture mattered for educational inequality. Out of the five schools, three agreed to meet with me and a RAPS representative to discuss their potential involvement in my study. Following this meeting, I was successfully granted admission to each of the schools in attendance and was given the right to contact their individual teachers to recruit classrooms in the study.

Sampling Classrooms

My goal for the study was to conduct ethnographies in one classroom in each of the three schools. While each of the three schools met my demographic targets, from preliminary conversations with teachers and administrators at each school I could see there was considerable variation in their approaches to dealing with educational inequality. Two of the schools had White male principals and one had an African-American female principal. While each school expressed interest, the willingness to approach teachers within their building for the study was varied. To deal with these

issues, I provided each school with a letter of introduction for the study and asked the principal to distribute the letters to his fourth grade classroom teachers. On average each school contained approximately 3 fourth grade classrooms.

Teachers who were willing to talk about my project or possibly accept me into their classroom were then asked to provide their name to me via email or telephone. I received contact from seven classroom teachers. I followed up on the initial teacher contacts via email and arranged an in-person or on the phone short interview with each teacher. In the interview, I asked about the teachers' years of experience, age, gender, racial and ethnic background, and classroom racial and special needs demographics. I also offered the teachers a chance to ask me about my project and suggest their thoughts on educational inequality. This proved to be particularly advantageous because I was able to gain some "insider perspective" on suspected sites of inequality as well as get an idea of the teacher's pedagogical approach, particularly to students of differing backgrounds.

After the short interviews, I requested official classroom demographics from the RAPS to cross-reference them with teachers' accounts of student demographics. I first eliminated classrooms that had small numbers of Black students (less than four) and then I turned my attention to teacher demographics. Because the majority of elementary teachers in the nation are White women, I sought to have a classroom taught by at least one White woman. I then sought a classroom that contained an African-American teacher. I thought the selection of one Black teacher would be interesting considering the ongoing debate in the research literature about the role of Black teachers on the education of African-Americans (Ferguson 1998). While I am aware by selecting one African-American teacher I cannot extrapolate about the pedagogy of other African-American teachers, but a single case does allow me to identify some of the areas where racial identities come into play between teacher and student in the educational experience. After identifying a White woman and a Black woman as potential classroom teachers, I wanted to have a male teacher in my sample. Based on the information I had, I selected teachers with varying degrees of classroom experience, racial backgrounds, and genders from three schools, Prairie Elementary, River Elementary, and Cherry Elementary.

Prairie Elementary

In recruiting Prairie Elementary into my study I was encouraged by its large representations of minority students as well as impoverished students. Unfortunately, only one classroom was interested in hosting my study. The other classrooms indicated that they were utilizing student teachers and hosting another visitor in the class was overwhelming. I was invited to conduct research in team-taught multi-age classroom. After meeting with the teachers of the classroom, two White women, I was ready to begin work in their class. I came in and observed a few sessions but soon found out that the teachers had elected to use student teachers for approximately three months of the remaining school year. Because of the multi-age mixture as well as the use of student teachers, I decided that Prairie Elementary did not fit my needs as a research site. I was forced to drop the third classroom of Prairie elementary from my study, though the initial conversations with administrators and teachers did aid in helping me reformulate my interview inventories.

River Elementary

As with any study, the anticipated process of entering and exiting the field must yield to the needs of the actors within it. My first interactions with River Elementary were informal but very important for my eventual access to the schools a site of study. I first gained contact with River Elementary from social ties to an employee of the school. The employee was able to provide me with a short time to meet with two fourth grade teachers to get their impression of my research project and provide me with their insights on my question of study. After these meetings, I continued the formal process of inquiry through the RAPS and the principal of the school forwarded my letter of introduction and project explanation to the entire faculty and made it an agenda item at a faculty meeting. I was not invited to attend the meeting, but was later provided a list of four teachers who were willing to continue conversation with me about the project.

From this list of four, I then contacted them and conducted the aforementioned small interview. I identified a classroom headed by a white male teacher as one site for my study. Mr. Marks was the most difficult recruit into my study. Though he contacted me as being interested in the study, he quickly informed me, "If it wasn't for Mr. Tyler [school principal], I wouldn't be doing this [study]." Mr. Marks' lack of enthusiasm at having a stranger sit in his classroom multiple times a week and perpetually ask question

about his students and their families was logical. A former military man, Mr. Marks had been teaching for over twenty years and had seen administrators, students, teachers, and parents come and go. He saw himself as one of the few stable elements in the district and school. He was neither impressed nor hopeful that my inquiry into educational inequality would have much meaning, but nonetheless he allowed me access to his classroom.

As I mentioned above, I began work in all three school concurrently and my loss of Prairie elementary left a “hole” in my data. The most reasonable solution was to identify a classroom within one of the schools that I already had access. The initial meeting that I had with the two fourth grade teachers gave me contact with a White female teacher, Mrs. Reno. Though initially I found that Mrs. Reno did not fit the needs of my study, since I had already selected a classroom with a White woman teacher as well as a teacher from River Elementary, I was forced to re-contact her for another conversation. When I approached Reno to invite her participation in the study, she informed me that she would have to talk to her co-teacher, Mrs. Smith, and see if she was interested in participating. I was very excited about the potential of having a team-taught class again in the sample, but these hopes were quickly dashed when her partner expressed no interest in the study. As a result, I decided to observe classroom sessions only on the days that Mrs. Reno taught. While I seldom observed Mrs. Smith teaching, I did on several occasions get to see her interact with students on field trips, assemblies, etc. Additionally, I was able to interview Mrs. Smith like the other teachers in my study and frequently had students comment on the differences between Mrs. Reno and Mrs. Smith, which tended to be differences in classroom management styles. This resulted in me observing two classrooms in River elementary, one with a White male teacher Mr. Marks and another with two White female teachers Mrs. Reno and Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Reno fit the goals of the study well because she had been teaching in the district for nearly 10 years and actively talked about educational inequality in our initial interview. When I asked her about the explanation for these observed differences she said,

I mean I can tell you all the clichés I hear but I don't know. It's puzzling because you know as soon as you say well I think this is what causes it, then someone goes yeah but over here that worked and we have those same kids you know. So I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if it coming from home or from the classroom or if it is something cultural or you know. I hate to speculate 'cause there is so much out there but I don't know.

Her willingness to have me and suggestion that she was unclear about the sources of inequality made her classroom ripe for study.

Cherry Elementary

My third school of choice was located in an economically diverse setting across towns. The principal from Cherry elementary attended the initial meeting and expressed her interest in my research. Principal Bell, an African-American woman, informed me that she was particularly interested in the experiences of African-American boys in her school. Bell invited me to present my research project at a faculty meeting. I attended the faculty meeting and presented my research project to the faculty. After the meeting, I was greeted by two teachers who expressed strong interest in my research; unfortunately neither of these teachers were fourth grade teachers. Principal Bell later informed me that half of the fourth grade teachers were absent on that day from the meeting. Discouraged by the lack of fourth grade teachers and lack of response I was initially nervous about the administrative excitement towards the project, but lack of interest amongst teachers. Shortly after a follow up conversation with Principal Bell I received a list of interested fourth grade teachers and conducted the short interviews.

After interviewing teachers, the best fit for my overall study was a classroom lead by an African-American woman, Mrs. Jackson. Mrs. Jackson was relatively new to Cherry elementary, but had done her student teaching with another building teacher. In the previous year, she worked as a teacher at another school within Rolling Acres with a large African-American population, for the district. When I asked her what her largest regret was about teaching at Cherry Elementary instead of her last school she responded,

I think there would be a student disadvantage because [previous school] went from having... I would say maybe three or four black classroom teachers to now, I think they have one or two maybe. I thought it was a big loss because it has a higher African American population and I felt they need more African American teachers. That is the only [disadvantage]... if I had a choice to make I would probably choose [previous school].

Jackson's allegiance to servicing African-American students suggested that my goal of observing unique spaces where racial identity mattered for student and parents would be possible. Unfortunately, these types of interactions were not as common as I anticipated. Nevertheless, her presence in the sample was important for informing my discussions of racial identity, social class identity, and home school connections.

Recruiting Families

The recruitment of families into the study began immediately following identification of classrooms. In January, I mailed a letter of project introduction to families that was provided to me by the RAPS central office. The mailing included two letters of introductions one addressed to the guardians, the other addressed to the child, and informed consent forms. Families mailed the informed consent forms directly back to me, per request of the IRB. For each school and classroom I conducted an information session on the project which occurred in the evening time. In the case of Cherry elementary school I conducted an additional informational at a housing facility which contained a large number of low-income and African-American families.⁹ The IRB's approval of my study made all participation in my study voluntary and mandated that my only contact with families occur via initial mailing and only allowed for phone or in person contact after. This outlined process of recruitment strongly affected who opted into my sample in the early stages of research.

During my first round of data collection, in each classroom, upper income White families were the first to respond.¹⁰ The upper income families mailed back the consent forms quickly. Middle income families, both Black and White were next among my first respondents. This type of selecting in issue is logical considering the issues that survey research has long had obtaining respondents from low-income and racial minority backgrounds. Thankfully I was eventually able to bolster my sample to include more voices of low-income and African-American families.

The most difficult segments to reach in my sample were low-income families, which were predominantly Black, as well as upper-income Black families. My greatest success for contacting low-income families occurred through meeting with students' parents at school related events or through parent referrals. For example, at Cherry elementary, in the spring the class hosted a poetry café to which parents were invited.

⁹ Unfortunately this information session was poorly attended and the community center at the housing development was never even unlocked for me to conduct the session.

¹⁰ I became aware of their income status because during my first few interviews they listed their combined incomes at the end of my scale of income categories. As I recruited more families into the sample, fewer families were at the end of my scale.

During the café three of the four African-American students' parents arrived to the café.¹¹ As I sat observing the students' poetry Michael's grandfather walked out of the class during the session. I quickly exited behind him and introduced myself. I reminded him that I had sent materials to his house. He responded, "Oh yeah, I got them. I didn't understand them. But yeah, I got them." I then explained the project to him quickly and he offered me his phone number and told me that we could later set up an interview. This type of interaction was common and represents the way I recruited the families into the sample. Michael's grandfather's indication that he had received my letters, but did not understand them reflects a common narrative that I received from low income families. I take up this issue of communication and stratification of information by race and class in chapter five.

The process of recruitment was iterative and bumpy but the diversity of my resulting sample is strong. In total, I recruited thirty one families. These families represented a range of social class, race, and family structure configurations.

Data Collection

The project utilizes four types of data: 1) interviews, 2) participant observation, 3) systematic in-class observation, and 4) archival evidence. My goal was to gather as much information as possible on selected dimensions of educational inequality from multiple perspectives to produce a crafted study of educational inequality in a well-resourced setting. Because the study of educational inequality in affluent settings is a relatively new undertaking, I had a relatively small body of research to build upon and speak to, so the study also incorporates many theories of considerations linked to urban schooling, though Rolling Acres is more suburban than urban, in my eyes. I now provide more information on my modes of inquiry.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide valuable information about the ways that people understand themselves and their surroundings ((Weiss 1994). Interviews allow the researcher to develop detailed portraits of adults' and children's lives, explore the

¹¹ Throughout the analysis of this dissertation I refer to parents instead of guardians because all but one of my subject's children had a guardian who was not a parent

processes related to schools, as well as gain greater emic understanding about the contexts within which people are contextualized.

Interviews were conducted with guardians (maximum of two) and students throughout the course of the school year. The interview protocols allowed for structured discussion around schooling, values, and practices. Because I utilized semi-structured interviews I was able incorporate the insights and questions offered from respondents in their initial interviews to later interview protocols. By most dimensions, I was an outsider to Rolling Acres schooling. I have never been a teacher, nor student, nor parent in the district of Rolling Acres. While this may aid in traditional perceptions of “objectivity”, it provided a limited view, which I realized when I began to have in-depth interviews with parents, students, and staff. During interviews and at the close of interviews respondents were invited to contribute thoughts on my questions or indicate other topics that were sparked in their mind by my questions, which yielded some important information about the gaps in my study as well as potential site of inequality. One such case occurred during an interview with River Elementary parent. The parent, an African-American father, instructed me to ask other parents and school staff about the length of Individualize Education Plans (IEP) consultations and how parents were notified that they were attending an IEP meeting. His suggestion proved invaluable for locating a source of inequality that I had not considered. The processes of remediation, while designed to be equality inducing, can sometimes drive wedges between low income families and the schools that their children attended. Because of suggestions like these, my interview protocol and sometimes my questions of study evolved dynamically to the landscape of the field.

These alterations in the study were further complimented by follow up interviews which were conducted with students and the identified primary care giver during the summer vacation of 2006. The interviews centered on summer activities, particularly education related practices during the summer months, and asked children and families to go more in-depth on selected issues related to education identified in their first interviews. I began interviewing at the end of July and collected until the close of the summer vacation period in early September. While much of these data are not analyzed in this dissertation, they will be at a later time.

In-class Observations

My study's design allowed me the unique opportunity to observe class sessions. I began my observations of classrooms informally by attending classroom meetings in two of my three classrooms. At these classroom meetings, I was introduced to students and got to describe my project. Classroom meetings were a great location to begin observations because this was the space designated in each classroom to deal with related to school and was one of the few times that all students were together in a collaborative environment. At the close of classroom meetings, students generally felt energized to participate, though participation was ultimately decided by their parents.

After introduction in classroom meetings I began observation of classroom instruction. During these preliminary observations, I limited my jotting of on-site field notes. As I suspected, when I began to jot notes students began to circle my seat in the classroom to what I was writing. Eventually this curiosity subsided and the students became comfortable with the presence in the classroom. While they were comfortable with my presence, I am certain that my presence was not meaningless. They tended to speak to me during breaks and wave to me while returning books. These types of interactions typically occurred among students who I had recently interviewed in their homes and as well as from students who expressed interest in the study but their parents had denied participation. Soon after entering the field I narrowed my observations mainly to language arts instruction, but still managed to observe other times of day such as recess, before and after school.

In addition to general classroom observations, I conducted systematic classroom observations. I utilized the Brophy-Good Dyadic Interaction Scale to observe language arts instruction (reading workshop and writing workshop). The BGDIS has been used to capture differences in interaction between students and teachers. The instrument in 1970 was a methodological innovation because it allowed the capture of intraclass differences in treatment. Widely popularized by Pygmalion effects research, its metrics have withstood time, though I modified my use of the instrument to fit my needs when in the field.

In each classroom, I attempted ten BGDIS observations. Due to scheduling issues and instructional variation, I was unable to have complete coverage of 10 observations in

each classroom. While I had great expectations for the systematic data in my analysis, the field heavily mediated its utility. As I observed classrooms prior to beginning BGDIS observation I soon realized that whole class instruction in language arts rarely occurred under the RAPS curriculum. RAPS utilized a modified version of the Literacy Collaborative which was developed at a northeastern University. The RAPS curriculum was then tailored to the needs and resources of the RAPS public schools for financial reasons.¹² The RAPS curriculum was not very different from the Literacy Collaborative's standard curriculum and the same resource materials were used for benchmarking students. The Literacy Collaborative Curriculum concentrates on ability grouped directed reading and guided question asking. Because the curriculum was based on ability grouping, observations about differences in student teacher interaction based on whole class instruction were less common and thus in my estimation less reliable than earlier works using the BGDIS, so they are eliminated from my full reporting. Despite the issues of lack of whole class instruction and fewer than desired observations, the BGDIS does provide some promising empirical evidence about policy implementation as well as differences in treatment between students. Both of these issues are explored in greater depth in chapter six.

Out-of-School Observation

Observation of the out-of-school environment can be just as important as in-school observations. A month following initial interviews with families, I selected a sample of boys from each classroom to shadow. From Mr. Marks' classroom I selected five boys. From Mrs. Reno's classroom I selected four boys. From Mrs. Jackson's classroom I selected two boys. The selection of the boys was based on their beliefs (as expressed by their and their parents' interviews), their family background, as well as initial classroom observations. I selected a subset of students to shadow to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which the in-school and out-of-school worlds of Black and White boys were similar and different. On weekends and evenings, I arranged visits with the families to extracurricular activities or other gatherings to observe. While I was able to spend more time with some families than others, I attempted to distribute my time as

¹² Mr. Marks' claimed the program was modified for fiscal reasons, though the district representative discussed the program as customized, but listed no financial incentive for the formal switch from the university's system.

equally as possible between my selected boys. In addition to participant observation outside of school, I also closely observed my selected boys during the course of their academic day. These observations occurred in academic classes (writing workshop, reading workshop, math, science and social studies) and specials (art, computer, library time, and physical education).

In addition to the sample of boys that I followed I also attended school-wide events for general observation. These events included school open houses, carnivals, talent shows, and fieldtrips. During these observations I alternated between observing specific students and observing general patterns of interactions between students and families. Attending these events also served to build a rapport with the parents and staff of RAPS. During these after school community activities participants were willing to offer candid commentary on the evenings events or general issues that faced children or the school at large.

Lastly, an important source of participant observation occurred as I interviewed families in their homes. The bulk of my interviews occurred in families homes, which caused me to travel to respondents houses generally two to three times before completion of my data collection. While at their homes, I was given the opportunity to experience the physical spaces to which children went home. These differences in the space and their feeling provided some of the most interesting contrasts between families from the same classrooms and schools. While I did jot field notes about homes and their feeling, it still proves difficult to adequately describe each house and neighborhood, since this was not the focus of my study and I had limited time. Nonetheless, my observations of out-of-school life enrich understanding of the connections between home and school.

Ethnography and Me

The use of ethnography in the exploration of race in schools has recently become more common place (Lewis 2003; Noguera 2003; Ogbu 2003). The exploration of the conditions within schools provides insight into the realities that students face in contemporary schooling. My project most closely aligns with the work of Amanda Lewis' on the process of racialization in schools through in-depth observations. Lewis grappled with the role of her own racial identity, being a White woman, in the study of

race in predominantly minority communities. However, as a White woman working with populations of color, her intentions and ideology were less likely questioned.

Throughout the conceptualization and execution of this research project, I was sure to classify it as a project on race *and* class inequality. However, each time I mentioned race and class, parents, school staff, and district personnel were quick to ask my thoughts on the Black-White achievement gap. In discussing educational inequality, most people in the district seemed to take the “class” portion of my study as a proxy for racial status. This is likely a result of the attention that the Black-White achievement gap has received locally via newspapers and community meetings, as well as the national attention it has garnered since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This political context provides for a very different conversation about the roles of race and class in education in Rolling Acres. Throughout the process of observing and interviewing, parents, teacher, and principals would offer me newspaper clippings about the Black-White achievement gap, as well as quiz me about my beliefs on the “causes” or “the problem” of unequal student achievement. To respond to these questions I would respond with numerous factors that had been found to be related to student achievement, but then follow up by telling them I was doing the study to gain a better understanding of what was happening with their children in school.¹³ This often satiated inquiry and allowed me enough space to continue researching while maintaining positive social relations, particularly with school staffs.

Where is the discussion of achievement?

The use of qualitative inquiry in education is not universally accepted. The current policy of the land, NCLB, dictates schools as well as districts must be accountable for the achievement of all students. This concentration on achievement can lead districts to only consider quantitative analyses that provide explanations of achievement disparities as useful.¹⁴ Though quantitative methods are often limited in

¹³ Mr. Tyler, the principal at River elementary school, requested that I share some of my research with the staff towards the end of the school year. He mentioned that the staff was very interested in what I was finding. I obliged his request and presented briefly about parents’ knowledge about academic coursework at the opening session of a teacher in-service day. The presentation, which I designed to be vague, was well received and sparked a lively conversation about methods to get information about academic curriculum to parents, particularly low-income families.

¹⁴ In the early stages of conceptualizing this project, I approached a large urban district and suggested a comparative analysis between the racial inequality in urban and suburban schools. The head of the research

their ability to make causal claims, they are often interpreted causally. While this limitation is seldom acknowledged, I think it is important to recognize that both quantitative and qualitative methods are limited in the ability to truly “explain” social occurrences. Throughout the course of my fieldwork I was asked by parents as well as school staff, if I was going to use their comments and run statistics on them. While the process of qualitative inquiry may involve quantitative dimensions, the goals of my project are not to explain achievement or even explain achievement disparities. My goal is to enrich understanding of the processes that occur in elementary school that may contribute to educational inequality.

While attempting to gain a greater understanding about the processes that underlie contemporary educational racial inequality, I secured most participants’ academic records. This was in part due to my positivist leanings early in my research design in the hopes of discovering the causes of changes in achievement over the course of the year. Instead during the course of data collection and a large portion of the analysis, I did not have access to student’s academic records. Because of this delay, I was able to objectively watch students, had I received their grades my observations likely would have been conditioned. This was particularly important because over time I began to see the similarities and dissimilarities between students among and between students, which I later learned were from similar achievement levels. Ultimately the inability to tie my data to school achievement data in a predictive fashion was not a limitation.

Researcher Effects

The question of insider vs. outsider ethnography is one that has been debated repeatedly. While wading through the literature on differences in perspectives and positionality I became endeared to critical ethnography. Though I cannot suggest that I identify myself as a critical ethnographer, largely because aligning myself with a singular theoretical and practical school of thought can be limiting, I am attracted to critical ethnographies’ candid discussion of the role of one’s social identity and social position within the research process. Being African-American and being male while studying

department informed me that if I was not going to “improve student achievement” they were not interested in my proposed research. After repeatedly attempting to demonstrate the merits of my work for understanding educational inequality, the district denied me access to their schools largely due to my lack of concentration on student achievement.

families in an affluent setting offers its own unique set of issues from interviewing and interpretation to conclusions. I explore these issues more in-depth below.

As an African-American male in his mid-twenties with dreadlocks, it is very likely that my physical appearance impacted the conversations that I had with my respondents. My choice of expressed identity did not go without question during the process of data collection. Respondents asked questions such as, “Are you a Rasta?” and “Do you smoke weed?” These comments often came from White respondents in my sample. While their questions may have been laughable, what they represented is important. Their questions on my physical appearance demonstrated to me that they did read me as *different*. The question of how this difference relates to my data is still a more complex issue. I break the discussion of my field identity along four dimensions: age, social class, race, and gender in the following section.

Field Identity

As a researcher, I have always maintained what I call a *field identity*. My field identity, for the most part, is the professional researcher image that I seek to project to respondents. While it would be ridiculous to assume that my social identities, race, class, gender, etc. were not implicated in my research process, I still find it important to make deliberate choices about my dress and communication. This identity is expressed most often in my dress. On most days that I am not in the field I can be found in baggy jeans, a tee shirt and sneakers. This stands in contrast to my “field identity” where I typically dressed in khaki slacks and a button down or polo shirt. My goal was to appear professional yet casual. Whenever I anticipated interacting with respondents, interviews, observations, or attending school functions, I made sure to be dressed in this manner. For the most part, this dress served to place me as neatly attired, but not overdressed.

A second dimension of my field identity is the manner that I communicate. As an African-American studying educational inequality, each correspondence, presentation, and communication fell under some form of scrutiny. My first contact with families was via postal mail. As I mentioned earlier, these letters netted mostly affluent families. Eventually I was able to secure phone numbers for potential families and begin calling to invite them into the sample. This recruitment would involve phone conversations about basic information and scheduling. When I arrived for one interview a White father in the

sample commented, “Ah, you’re the young man who speaks so well. Is that because you’re from Connecticut?” Comments like these were not very common, but they indicated that my field identity resonated with some respondents, arguably to my advantage.

Age

I managed my field identity in different way when it came to interacting with students in the field. Though my dress was not overly formal, my age and attire made me resemble the teachers in the building. To the students I was an adult, but I wanted to assure that they felt comfortable talking to me and establish a friendly rapport, more so than an authoritative relationship like they had with other adults in the building. I achieved this in two ways; first, I requested that they all refer to me by my first name instead of Mr. Lewis. Second, I made sure during non-class time to joke with them or occasionally participate in an activity like pick-up basketball. As time went on, students, whether in my sample or not, felt comfortable talking casually around me.

A second issue was age while in the field was that I was in my mid 20s. While most of the respondents were in the mid-to-late thirties, they often read my age and education as an accomplishment. Comments such as, “You’re really young to be getting a PhD,” were usually followed with an approving smile. My age seldom was an issue, even when I interviewed guardians who were within a year or two of my age range, this only aided in building rapport to talk about the issues of child rearing at a young age.

Social Class

One of the most influential dimensions in the field was my social class identity. Conducting a study amongst families in Rolling Acres meant that I would travel throughout the city into new secluded housing subdivisions, dilapidated low-income housing, semi-rural locations, as well as tucked away neighborhoods. Each neighborhood had its own character, but the one constant was that I was an outsider to them. The majority of the interviews that I conducted with parents occurred at their homes. As I traveled among the cul-de-sac’s and roads of Rolling Acres and exited my car, I would often receive inquisitive looks from neighbors. The majority of my White respondents were located in predominantly White neighborhoods. My small black late 90’s coupe stood out among the imported sports utility vehicles, mini-vans, and luxury sedans of

these communities. Affluent neighborhood lawns were littered with signs that warned “slow children at play.” The signs were not standard city-issue, rather they were neon green figures that were purchased by families from toy stores. Families’ garage doors were often propped open revealing a host of sports fixtures such as goals, ramps, and basketball hoops in driveways. While in lower income neighborhoods my car did not net many looks of surprise, though residents tended to watch my car because of its lack familiarity. As I entered and exited neighborhoods my car was followed by eyes in both affluent and low income neighborhoods because of its lack of familiarity.

Race: Interracial

Interviewing across the color-line about race related issues can be challenging. Though my phenotype made me an outsider the perception of my social class helped me mediate my outsider status. My dress for the most part operated to my advantage, with parents treating me professionally. This perception was particularly important in aiding the capture of racial attitudes. On multiple occasions White male fathers in the sample would reference “minorities taking jobs” and sometimes these comments would be quickly qualified by auxiliary statements like, “I mean unqualified minorities, you know what I mean?” This type of post-hoc justification added confirmation to me that White men tended to express their sentiments around race in a honest manner, though I am certain that they would have been more unfettered with a White male interviewer. I attribute this “partial honesty” largely to their perception of my social class as well as my gender. These men often commented on my educational attainment which was higher than all but a few respondents.¹⁵

My dress did not draw much attention, but sometimes small accessories would. During the course of the fieldwork, I made the decision to remove my earring while observing in schools. On one particular day I forgot to remove my earring. I did not think of it until two Black male students in Mr. Marks’ classroom approached me and said, “Hey, you got an earring.” I told them that I usually wear an earring and one boy grabbed on my arm and said, “Let me see it.” I told him it “It’s just an earring.” He then stopped hanging on my arm and returned to his seat. As he returned to his seat, I could see him

¹⁵ These same respondents who had previously expressed issues with affirmative action policies somehow interpreted my educational attainment as outside of the bounds of the social programs they detested.

talking to the other Black student who had walked up with him to talk to me. For me an earring was a fashion choice that I made years before and I decided not to wear an earring into school to err on the side of caution. However among students in Rolling Acres earrings were racialized. When I asked Kerry Roberts, a White mother, if she noticed her children noting differences between races as they got older she responded.

Both my boys will say things like, “well, he’s a Black kid.” Whereas that didn’t used to be and... you know, it wasn’t like, um, well “he has... his ears are pierced because he’s a Black kid.” And I said, “well, I don’t think one has anything to do with the other.” But they... they identify certain, whatever, um...you know. De rigeur fashion, whatever, with race.

I had not thought of earrings as racialized until that point. When I surveyed the students in the three classrooms that I was involved in, I could not find a single White male student who wore his ears pierced. The only earrings I observed among male students were Black students. The interpretation of earrings as “Black” demonstrates the subtle ways in which racial meaning becomes attached to personal expression or culture (Omi and Winant 1994). As a researcher, a number of the ways in which people and materials were racialized was beyond my individual site, but with the aid of study participants I was able to better understand their worldviews.

Intra-racial

While the insider-outsider debate is often along racial lines, even among the African-American community I found my appearance, identity and politics in question. Mr. Clarke a Black male in his early fifties during our interview asked, “Do you date White women?” After responding to him he replied, “Well I didn’t know, because you’re all [he motioned to create fist and thrust it into the air to emulate a black power fist and then motioned down his head like he had a long head of dreadlocks]...”. In a few short gestures, Mr. Clarke interrogated the relationship between my internal identity and my expressed identity (Harris and Sim 2002). Because dreadlocks have become associated with pro-Blackness, Mr. Clarke was not sure of my political leanings. He interpreted my hairstyle as potentially being anti-White. I responded to his question and allayed his fears. Moments later he said, “ well man, I date ‘em [women of all races] all” and continued the interview. These types of comments were not very common, but they

reflect that my appearance signaled my political beliefs to a number of my Black respondents.

At other times, my racial identity allowed me closer access to unfettered talk about the role of race. Black parents would casually discuss their experiences with racism and how their children would come home and they would discuss racial incidents that they as adults had experience or issues of race at school. This casualness with which conversations around issues of race and inequality flowed created a difficult methodological issue. African-American respondents when discussing issues of race would commonly trail off in explanations and say things like “you know” or provide me with looks across the table that were designed to connote understanding without statement. In most cases, I was able to probe them to verbally confirm their informal cues about meaning, but I often attempted to do this in an objective fashion by not indicating support or repudiation of their statement.

Gender

My gender as a male also mattered for the data I received from respondents. The majority of my adult interviews were conducted with mothers of the children. Mothers were the primary care givers and I was often able to schedule to interview them in the evening or during the day if they were “stay at home” moms. The majority of the mothers invited me to interview them at their house for convenience. The interviews tended to be the longest interviews of all respondent types. The interviews contained rich accounts of information regarding home educational activities, knowledge of in-school happenings, and everyday processes involved in educational edification.

After completing the mother interviews, I would then request that a time to sit down with the male guardian from the house. The fathers from affluent families proved to be the most difficult to schedule for interviews. Attempts at scheduling via phone and email were not always successful. When I was able to capture the fathers’ for interviews, they would often ask me about the length of the interview before we began. This lead-in was typically followed by an indication that they had another appointment or another activity planned immediately following our interview. For each respondent, I informed them the interview would take approximately one hour. Despite this concern about timing, most fathers completed the full interview inventory. The interviews I completed

with fathers, on average, were shorter in length. This was in part due to short responses as well as limited knowledge for questions that related to academic materials. They typically said this was due to working and not being around when their children did their homework. This type of limited knowledge amongst men regarding educational happenings aligns with traditional gender roles. Despite this gross difference, both men and women suggested the labor regarding the children's academic and social development was equally distributed.

Coding and Analysis

Interview coding

After receiving data from 31 families and multiple staff members, the task of coding took on serious meaning. I describe my data coding as informed by grounded theory rather than a grounded theory approach because Strauss over the past thirty years has developed extensive methodological texts that further explicate their ideas initially presented in The Discovery of Grounded Theory. While these extensions are important, I found that as I coded and re-coded my data, I developed strategies that were best suited for my data, rather than step-by-step procedures outlined in grounded theory guides.

I coded my data using AtlasTi. My initial codes centered on my three central areas of study: relationship to resources, valuing of education, and opportunity to learn. In addition to these large general codes, I also included basic demographic characteristics so that my data would be easily sortable for later stages of analysis. Coming from a quantitative background, I thought it would be also important to utilize inductive codes based on known "co-variates". While I recognize this stands at odds with traditional qualitative coding justification, it was nonetheless the manner that thought through coding. I found that my initial codes based on prior knowledge were useful for calibrating my subsequent coding and analysis.

When coding transcripts I utilized line-by-line coding. These line-by-line codes identified themes within my three areas of interest. These themes were too broad and my code list ballooned to over 100 codes. Following these line-by-line codes, I began to consolidate and reduce my coding to move from loose codes to more precise themes. The process was iterative and I found that some of the initial themes that I saw emerging did not maintain when my data was put under greater analytic scrutiny. From these deductive

codes, I created axial codes to develop sub-categories that emerged within the larger themes initially created. In addition to axial coding, I used *invivo* codes to identify themes that had particular meaning to the residents of Rolling Acres such as “diversity.”

Analysis

The analysis strategy used in this dissertation varied by the particular question pursued in each the chapter. I consistently used data display matrices to think and work through my coded data (Miles and Huberman 1994). I most frequently employed role-ordered matrices to aid in understanding how race and class influenced outlooks. For example, in chapter five, I look at the ways that information about school events and resources was received and processed by parents. I began with simple overlays of strategies that displayed the ways that parents received information and then extended these matrices to account for racial categories and then social class standing.

In addition to data display matrices, I used memoing, both inside and outside of AtlasTi, to connect conversations between individuals. Since my study was classroom based, there were a number of incidents that occurred while I was in the field or prior to the field that unrelated respondents would comment on. By linking common conversations I was able to gain greater understanding oh how social position influenced the description of common events. This was particularly useful for analyzing discussions of incidents within schools and neighborhoods that involved race and authority. In these cases, the position of the observer was crucial. Individuals, or in some cases, groups of individuals would provide narratives where the meaning of actions was interpreted differently by each actor or group.

Field observations

I had the opportunity to accumulate field hours both inside and outside of the classrooms of study. While my study was school based, I thought it was equally important to gain a sense of the out-of-school lives of my subjects. I followed Emerson and colleagues (1995) prescriptive advice on field note jotting and the development of initial field notes into ethnographic notes. The majority of time that I observed classrooms I kept a notebook on hand to jot important moments, lay out of the setting, and demographics of the participants. In these notes, I used short hand to refer to students by a coded number scheme. This allowed me to take notes about students without their

names attached. This was particularly useful when students sitting near me or passing by would attempt to glance my field notes. I would receive comments such as, “What you writing?” and upon review these students would quickly shuffle onto their next task or to another location in the room.

Each day’s field notes would be developed into slightly more descriptive memos. In writing these notes, I made sure not to attribute motivation to actors and attempted to avoid interpretation. When I did jot incidents and I began to interpret, I would create separate memos on the interpretation of the event. This allowed me to have more objective field notes which I would then convert into more analytic memos.

After I had created descriptive field notes which I re-edited as more information returned to my mind regarding the observations, I began linking my memos that I created while coding data to my field notes. From these linked memos, I created analytic memos that dealt with the meanings of interactions and areas of interest. These analytic memos were then incorporated into the analyses of accompanying interview data to produce ethnographic accounts of incidents inside and outside of school.

Comparative Case Study

The data that I collected amongst the sub-sample of boys within the RAPS schools was used to inform all analyses, but I particularly drew on this data for chapter six. In chapter six, I deliver a case study comparing a Black and White boy from the same classroom who are located geographically proximate. I decided to use my data to construct a case study to illuminate the differences between the social locations that these boys occupied and how these location differences informed their envisioned futures. When discussing the merits of the case study relative to other methodologies Robert Yin (2003) commented,

In contrast [to *what* questions], *how* and *why* questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments as the preferred research strategies. This is because such questions deal with the operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence. P.6

The choice of a case study blended well with the other qualitative methods employed in this dissertation (interviewing, participant observation, and ethnography) and allows for a richer discussion of the ways that typical cases can be influenced by the more general social processes explored in other chapters.

I describe my design as a comparative-case study, though other may describe it as a singular embedded case study (Yin 2003). In reviewing my data, I found that many of the boys at first glance appeared similar in academic engagement, goals, and orientation, but upon closer investigation there were subtle differences in their outlooks toward the future and the messages they received regarding these potential futures. In reviewing the initial interviews of these boys and watching my sub-sample operate in school, I noticed that these observed differences appeared related to space, in particular their respective neighborhoods. With the goal of demonstrating these differences, I sought to find boys who were relative analogues when it came to dimensions such as academic engagement, goals, and social orientations. I found this to be a fairly easy task, considering most of the boys in my sample tended to be fascinated with the same things: sports, video games, wrestling, etc. So in an attempt to narrow my sample I decided on a study design that compared boys from similar social stratum amongst their respective racial groups. I reviewed interview records on income, occupation, and a few other factors to select cases that produced children that were respectively each sample populations' analogues. I then analyzed these children's interviews and observations across domains of interest to find similarities and fissures within their perspectives and experiences.

Conclusion

Smaller scaled qualitative inquiry can elucidate important processes often overlooked by quantitative methodologies. While my study is based in three classrooms drawn from two schools, the narratives that emerge can provide rich context, meaning, and extension to previous literatures on educational inequality. To best accomplish this, the incorporation of multiple qualitative methods including semi-structured in-depth interviewing, participant observation, ethnography, and archival evidence were employed. I also incorporated small scaled quantitative analysis on differences in student treatment using a student-teacher interaction scale. The combining of methods allows me to more fully investigate the subtle processes associated with educational inequality both inside and outside of school.

As an African-American man, I made special efforts to consider the role of my identity in the gathering and analysis of my data. While I could not avoid Hawthorne effects or interviewer effects, the processes that I enacted via my field identity make me

confident that I gathered strong and valid data. Additionally, my analytic strategies for memos, interviews, and field notes provided internal and external validity checks for my observed phenomenon. While I did not subscribe to a singular methodological school's approach to the study of my topic, I attempted to incorporate what I found to be the most helpful in explicating my area of study.

As qualitative researchers, the field often demands changes in approach and areas of study. I think I met both of these challenges through adapting research instruments, analysis, and write-up. In writing this manuscript, my goal was for readers to journey with me into the worlds of residents of Rolling Acres. However, my goal is not simply rich description but also providing both emic and etic understanding of the sites where advantage and disadvantage are born, manipulated, and intertwined with the biographies of individuals and groups.

Chapter Three

The City of Rolling Acres

In my study, I chose the city of Rolling Acres because in many ways its issues with educational inequality are mirrored throughout an increasingly diversifying United States. As neighborhoods' racial and class compositions shift, the composition of their school populations change and are often the staging areas of debate and competition for resources. Because residential change is often a drawn out process and very individual based, for scholars interested in future-oriented consideration of race and social class issues, public schools are an important site of study. Arguably, the schools in Rolling Acres foreshadow the coming complexities of social interaction from differing groups entertaining the same social spaces.

The issue of Black and White educational inequality is not a new topic, nor is the exploration of racial educational inequality in affluent settings (Ogbu 2003). However, the work that engages the educational inequality in non-impooverished settings has failed to provide rich consideration of in-school as well as out of school processes. While studies of educational inequality have been centered on the experiences of high poverty and high minority schools, I center on a school district where Black and poor students remain in the minority, but are sizable enough to warrant careful attention. While in many segregated schools there is a severe over-representation of Black and poor students or an under-representation of both of these populations, there are an increasing number of schools where Black, White, rich, and poor students occupy the same buildings, though admittedly not always the same classrooms. As a result, my analysis studies the contexts outside of schools, within schools, and between classrooms.

My consideration of Rolling Acres places me squarely in a post Civil Rights context where the boundaries of race and the meaning of racial categories have been redefined but still remain consequential to children and adults. While the Civil Rights

Movement is often represented by stark images of protest, which lead to radical change, the lives of the average American were only gradually transformed. These gradual transformations necessitated shifts in ideologies and practices of individuals, groups and institutions. While Jim Crow segregation did not reign throughout the United States, the racial ideologies that accompanied it were at play throughout the US. As a result, adults and children in the North and Midwest lived lives informed by overt racial politics, which operated to segment and isolate low income Blacks. These overt politics also yielded covert practices that influenced the distribution of resources and opportunity. These subtle racial politics are rampant in areas like Rolling Acres where inequalities were present but often overlooked due to the gross segregation and maltreatment visible in other major metropolitan cities.

Small-City Studies

Rolling Acres is classified as a mid-sized city by the US Census. With approximately 100,000 residents Rolling Acres feels much more like a town than a bustling metropolis. In attempting to categorize Rolling Acres, I felt that neither city, nor suburb adequately described the character of the location. RA contained many of the advantages often associated with larger metropolitan areas such as cultural draws like performance arts, universities, and ample social opportunities for enterprising families. At the same time it is not a suburb because of it, it lacked the conveniences of large metropolises, which offered comprehensive and affordable mass transit, vibrant ethnic communities, and the pace commonly associated with a city. On the other hand, it did not offer the traditional perils of the city which are often associated with urban life such as concentrated poverty, violence, and entrenched urban politics. At the same time, RA is not immediately attached to a major metropolitan area and was not the outgrowth of careful social engineering that allowed refuge for “White flight” from the urban core. At the entrance of Rolling Acres’ schools you are more likely to encounter a smiling secretary than metal detectors. This however does not mean issues of poverty, resources, and politics do not exist, instead these issues are much less visible to casual observers. In essence, Rolling Acres is both urban and suburban and neither urban nor suburban. As a result, I label Rolling Acres as a small city. While this challenges its census classification, a simple classification based on geography and population is too limiting

to capture “the feel” of my area of study. Through analyses of distances, both social and geographic, political economy, and race and social class meanings among residents, I am able to reflect the complexity of Rolling Acres’ state.

The classification of small-city is not anomalous. There are many small cities throughout the United States that go understudied and un-considered in discussions of policies such as No Child Left Behind. While some of these smaller cities have been studied (e.g. New Haven, Richmond, etc.) the failure to consider these cities’ sizes and “feel” has forced scholars to accept that the processes of inequality operate the same in Chicago, IL as Evanston, IL. I argue these differences in scale, local histories, and policies demand different treatment by social scientists.

The Setting

Rolling Acres’ by most popular accounts is considered liberal leanings. Its residents consistently vote Democratic, social protests commonly grace the local paper and editorials consistently bash the conservative social policies. These political dimensions only represent part of the residency though. As I discuss in chapter five, Rolling Acres contains a diversity of political perspectives that only rise to the surface during times of tension around resource distribution. For this reason, on an average day typical paper articles include local politics around zoning, a review of a visiting performer’s previous night’s show, and the happenings at nearby universities.

While in the field on descriptor of Rolling Acres that was echoed was “diverse.” These references would often be followed mentions of the international students who attended local schools, performances at the local venues by groups on tour from other continents, or references to Rolling Acres as, “one big melting pot.” While these descriptions were common, they do not necessarily reflect the reality of race in Rolling Acres. According to recent census estimates, the Rolling Acres’ population is approximately 9 percent Black, 75 percent White, and 12 percent Asian. These census classifications also provide a skewed portrait of the meaning and representations of race amongst Rolling Acres. While these percentages may not appear overwhelmingly diverse, when considering many neighboring towns, cities, and other Midwestern locations, Rolling Acres appears racially cosmopolitan. The multiracial population in 2000 was reported at approximately 2 percent, with about 20 percent of these multiracial

individuals identifying as part Black and part White. These features make Rolling Acres a prime destination for families seeking a setting where racial segregation is an enduring project like other nearby cities.

While Rolling Acres' visible ethnic diversity is celebrated, economic diversity is not the subject of widespread attention or part of RA's popular imagination. In Rolling Acres the median family income is approximately 72,000 dollars, which compares to a national average of 50,046 in 1999 dollars. Homes in Rolling Acres were valued around 190,000 dollars and only 10 percent of residents did not identify having a car available for their use. Less than five percent of households in the city lived beneath the poverty line in comparison to national average of 9 percent in 2005. By most standards, Rolling Acres meets the litmus test of affluence and provides a comfortable life for its residents. This affluence and small-scaled poverty made the poor invisible to most residents who did not dwell in poverty. This veil of invisibility was lifted when issues of student achievement and social problems arose at school or city-wide.

The affluence of Rolling Acres was known by RA residents, the ethnic diversity was noted, and the lack of large scaled social disorder allowed residents to comfortably carry on their daily lives without thinking of common urban perils. Though most residents did not have to consider these on a daily basis, this did not mean that these issues lay outside of their minds. During interviews with parents, I asked adults to compare the quality of life and quality of schooling of Rolling Acres to a proximal poorer industrial city with a greater ethnic diversity than RA, a proximal city with great affluence but that was nearly all White, and a lower income city that was overwhelming African-American. White residents were quick to suggest the combination of economic affluence and ethnic diversity made Rolling Acres the best option out of these choices for quality of life and quality of schooling.¹ Most White parents said deciding between Rolling Acres and the affluent White city posed a challenge because they did not know "a lot" about the White city other than its affluence and ethnic composition. Alternatively, when asked about the low income majority Black city and the poorer more ethnically mixed city, they quickly responded that Rolling Acres was the better location. This asymmetry in response likely reflects these parents' willingness to maintain negative images of poor and Black spaces over affluent and White spaces. When probed on

knowledge about the Black city, few respondents could provide examples of contemporary issues in the city and then closed their response with comments such as, “well you know they’ve had issues there.” This reliance on popular imagination reappeared throughout my time in the field in discussions of high poverty and high minority areas such as public housing within Rolling Acres, though few White residents could attest to having visited these spaces, they did not hesitate to offer commentaries on the problems within these communities.

It is important to note, Black parents did also select Rolling Acres over the alternative choices, but none of the respondents mentioned the diversity of Rolling Acres as the plus factor. Instead they concentrated on Rolling Acres’ economic affluence and its positive relation to school quality.¹⁶ Residents’ higher than average incomes could allow for greater purchase of school and non-school related resources. While there had been attempts to equalize funding the state that Rolling Acres’ was located, disparities in funding remained and Rolling Acres continued to be identified as a district with “good schools.”

Rolling Acres Public Schools

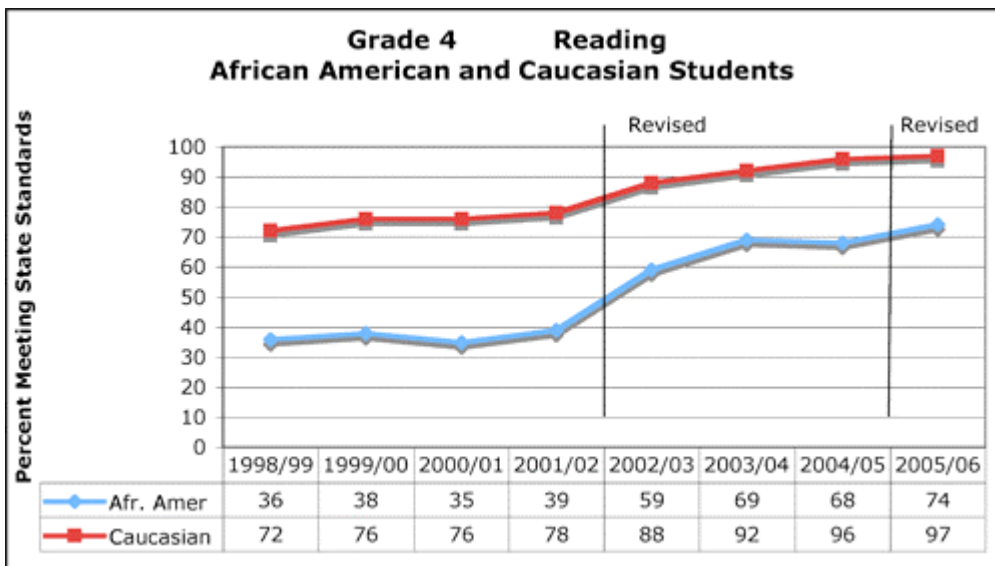
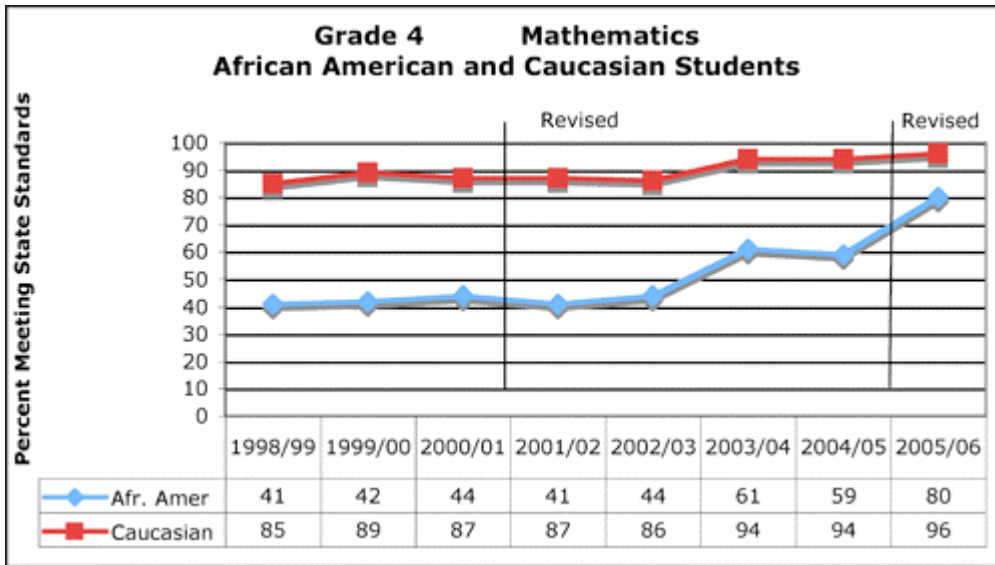
Rolling Acres Public Schools’ have long been identified as a high performing district due to their school’s performances on national metrics such as standardized tests, academic competition and college going rates. This image of RAPS as a location of quality education was carried by parents, residents, and affirmed through national accolades. RAPS’ performance in the aggregate is stunning, but a closer look at the performance of subgroups is much less pristine. While data issues do not allow for a long term identification of trends in inequality, it is commonly stated that African-American students, on average, have consistently underperformed their White counterparts on state standardized tests, national metrics, and report cards. In the late 1970s, Rolling Acres Public Schools were sued for under serving low income, predominantly Black students, from a local housing project. The case, which the district lost, serves as the earliest evidence of African-American underperformance and under service in public schools.

¹⁶ As I discuss later in the dissertation, African-American parents’ perceptions of school quality were complicated by knowledge that African-Americans tended to under perform their White counterparts, but their characterizations of quality were often measured against the areas from which they moved which they perceived to have school of poor quality.

Chapter four discusses this case and the development of educational policies in response to the decision and documented inequalities following the case.

These race-related gaps in performance between groups are now more meticulously documented. The charts below display the gap in student performance on the state standardized test among fourth graders over the past 8 years.

Figure 3.1 Achievement in Rolling Acres 1



While ethnic-based gaps in the district have closed more over time, it is important to note the largest reductions occur immediately after revision of the testing instrument. Whether these reductions represent a true decline in disparities or are artifacts of changes in the test is not my purpose for display of these charts.¹⁷ Instead, I have selected these charts to display that Rolling Acres still has a problem of educational inequality. On average, there remains a 23 percentage point pass gap in reading and a 16 percentage pass gap in mathematics between White and Black students.

These disparities prove to be disconcerting when we look at the fiscal expenditures of the RAPS. The Rolling Acres public school district serves approximately 18,000 students and expends upwards of 10,000 dollars per pupil. The RAPS elementary schools during 2005-2006 school year were approximately 15 percent Black, 50 percent White, 15 percent Asian, and 20 percent “other.” The overrepresentation of minority children in schooling is common, as is the overrepresentation of poor children in public schools. 20 percent of RAPS students in the same year received free or reduced lunch. While I was unable to identify district level data that explored the intersection of race and poverty status due to confidentiality restrictions, from observations and conversations with district administrators, I can safely assume that the majority of poor students were Black.

RAPS, like many districts, have identified the achievement gap as a serious issue in their schools. The district’s early adoption of monitoring technologies and attempts at intervention make Rolling Acres a great area to study educational inequality. The passing of the NCLB likely heightened concern over these inequalities which have been present for over thirty years, but historically masked by the district’s high achievement. The unmasking of these disparities and the identification of consequence to their persistence have sustained and transformed buzz around educational and social interventions locally. While RAPS, as a district, was concerned with improving subgroup performance on achievement test, alternatively, I was concerned with understanding the everyday experiences of residents and students that endowed this inequality. Thus in this dissertation, I limited my discussions of achievement and foreground discussions of

¹⁷ There is already a considerable literature on achievement gains that are related to testing instruments. This literature explores if the gains in score are true gains in student performance or artifacts of the testing instruments.

process with the goal of illuminating levers for social change. An important key to understanding this inequality is understanding the arrangement and meaning of space to Rolling Acres' ecology and social relations.

Measuring Social Distance in Rolling Acres

Social distance can be measured in various forms (e.g. segregation, desegregation policies, integration), at different levels of analysis (e.g. city, school district), and in different domains (e.g. neighborhoods, schools, social networks). By many metrics social relations between Blacks and Whites have improved since the era of Jim Crow segregation, but it is important to examine the contemporary forms of social distance. Additionally, considering the ways that these legacies of segregation and inter-group conflict affect or inform the worlds that fourth graders inhabit today is equally important. There are several traditional measures of social distance and each contributes uniquely to revelations on the cleavages between Black and Whites in Rolling Acres.

At the city level, Rolling Acres can be classified as moderately segregated when using the index of dissimilarity (Massey and Denton 1993). Approximately 37 out of 100 residents in the city would need to move to have an equal distribution of Black and White residents among neighborhoods according to the 2000 Census. This metric, though useful to a degree, may be misleading if taken as the sole indicator of social distance between Blacks and Whites. The index of dissimilarity is based on the census tract, which is too large of a unit of analysis for neighborhoods in Rolling Acres. While in major metropolises (e.g. Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, etc.) census tracts proxy well for neighborhoods, this is not the case for Rolling Acres. Census tracts in Rolling Acres, by residents' standards would contain multiple communities which were highly variable. Thus, I would argue the estimation of segregation using the index of dissimilarity is likely biased downward.

Distinctions between sociological definitions of neighborhood and residents' definitions of neighborhood are common. Adults tended to refer to neighborhoods using names that were associated with subdivisions or housing developments. These communities were composed of residences which contained less than 50 or so households. These areas carried their own sets of characteristics which were generally

associated with economic status, social (dis)organization, and amenities such as private parks. Children, alternatively, tended to think of their neighborhoods on a much smaller scale. In general this was determined by the degree of latitude that parents allowed children to travel on their own or with visible supervision. These spaces were smaller and could include up to 20 households but were generally bound by streets or cul-de-sacs. Adult definitions of neighborhood not only influenced their own children's definitions of community and social networks, but informed the distribution of capitals (e.g. economic, social, and cultural) across families. In chapter five, I discuss the importance of the subdivision for the hoarding of information and the pursuit of social advantage amongst affluent White families. Residents, both adult and children, tended to base their social networks on the neighborhoods in which they lived and to a lesser degree the activities in which they engaged.

The geography of Rolling Acres was very important for the distribution and acquisition of capitals: economic, social, and cultural. The development and location of subdivisions and public housing facilities was not haphazard. Residents both Black and White were aware of the homogeneity economically and racially of their communities. Residents often discussed housing as proxies for race and social class identities. The careful engineering of space in Rolling Acres was particularly evident among the subdivisions in which many White residents lived. While traveling to the varying subdivisions constructed in the 1990s, I found myself confusing the nature-based names and manicured lawns. Even when I entered a new neighborhood I experienced a strange sense of *déjà vu*. White residents not located in subdivisions tended to be located in neighborhoods with detached ranch houses with manicured large yards. While these non-subdivision residents did not necessarily discuss their neighborhoods as the central dimension of their social lives, they tended to maintain networks that were informed by extracurricular activities which were largely racially and economically homogenous. The exceptions to this were the connections maintained between affluent White subdivision residents and White affluent and non-affluent non-subdivision residents. These connections were racial and transcended spatial, activity based, and economic boundaries.

Contrastingly, the Black residents' neighborhoods were much less aesthetically homogenous though their networks were homogenous. Among both home owners and renters, neighborhoods were densely populated but their construction usually dated back to the 1960s or the 1970s. Black residents in my sample typically lived in cul-de-sacs or subsidized housing. In both cases, neighborhoods often featured children playing outside unsupervised, and cars in disrepair. The yards in Black communities were not overgrown with grass, but they lacked the careful landscaping present among most White neighborhoods such as small lanterns that illuminated driveways or carefully trimmed shrubbery. These residents, while familiar with each other, tended not to identify other each other as part of their social lives. These Black parents were able to utilize social networks when necessary, but the degree of social closeness exhibited in subdivisions was not as present. Alternatively, children in these neighborhoods tended to spend large amounts of unsupervised time with their peers in the neighborhood which was often bigger than the 20 house metric commonly used by their White counterparts.

For Black residents who lived in subsidized or public housing, spaces were much more cramped. While each Black neighborhood would be sprinkled with low numbers of White residents, it was rare to find Black families located among the neighborhoods in which Whites resided. In part, this can be attributed to the average difference in housing value as well as residents' incomes. It is important to note that among the Black residents' neighborhoods, even in the highest poverty locations such as the Chestnut houses, the construction and feel of them was distinct from housing developments in major cities such as towering housing projects in Chicago or New York (Venkatesh 2000). Subsidized housing in Rolling Acres was low rise and more akin to scattered site housing. While these communities were low rise, this did not mean they did not carry similar sets of social stigmas particularly around the prevalence of social problems and residents' issues with successful "integration" into institutions like RAPS.

According the index of exposure calculated using 2000 Census figures Whites lived in neighborhoods that were 76 percent White and 8 percent Black in comparison to Blacks who lived in neighborhoods that were 65 percent Black and 16 percent White. As I discussed earlier, due to the unit of measurement, this likely underestimates the racial composition of these areas. Despite this underestimation, it is still likely that Blacks had

more exposure to Whites than Whites had to Blacks (Charles 2003). While social distance in Rolling Acres looks somewhat different than in major cities, Rolling Acres' ecology allows for many interesting comparisons. While most Blacks in RA live in Black neighborhoods and Whites live in White neighborhoods, the schools they attend are arguably desegregated (at the school racial composition level, not within schools though). For residents that seldom interact in everyday life, what are their exchanges in shared spaces? In what ways do you children and adults interact differently or similarly in shared spaces? How does school staff interpret these residential locations and distances as they relate to education? I explore these questions throughout the text of this dissertation.

Chapter Four

RAPS and Education Policy

Rolling Acres has grappled with the achievement gap for over thirty years. These conversations about the disparities in education between Black and White students have taken on numerous forms, but most recently they have become centered on the racial achievement gap. While the racial achievement gap gained national attention with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Rolling Acres had already undertaken many of the key components of the legislation, such as disaggregating test scores years earlier. While my study does not concentrate on outcomes (e.g. differences in student test scores), it is important to understand how these dialogues about educational inequality are framed within the district of Rolling Acres. The framing of the problem determines the resulting policy interventions and its potential successes or failures.

To gain a richer understanding of this environment I explore four key policies that affected the landscape of race and public education in Rolling Acres. I compare the redistricting plans of 1985 to those of 1997 and the achievement initiatives of 1997 to those of 2004. Through comparison of these district framed policies aimed at addressing educational inequality, I argue the Rolling Acres Public Schools' policy interventions inadequately addressed the conditions that hindered the performance of racial and economic minorities.

To build this case, I rely on archival evidence, in the form of newspapers and official district communication, informal conversations with community members, and formal and informal interviews with school personnel. While the project of “accurately” representing past policy initiatives and community response is difficult, a careful discussion of historical framing and contemporary manifestations are necessary to build an understanding of the policy context. By employing multiple methodologies (e.g. archives and interviews) I am able to produce a more robust portrait of educational

inequality in RAPS. Before discussing the four cases in this chapter, I introduce a model of the political economy of the Rolling Acres Public Schools as it relates to educational equity policy.

Political Economy of RAPS

Policies related to educational equity are not conceived, implemented, nor evaluated in a vacuum. For this reason the ways that these policies come to fruition are equally as important as the policies themselves. If one does not consider the ways that the political economy dynamically influences policy implementation an unclear understanding about the state of educational inequality is produced. In review of archives and based on formal and informal interviews with RAPS personnel I developed the following chart of influence on policy regarding educational inequality.¹⁸

Figure 4.1 Hierarchy of Influence 1

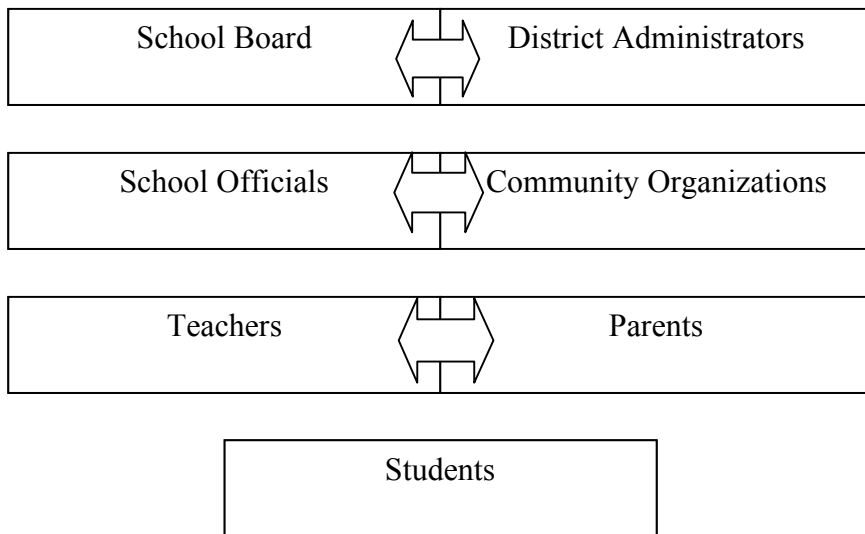


Chart 3.1 represents the hierarchy of influence on matters related to educational inequality in the Rolling Acres Public Schools. Individuals/Groups towards the top of the chart hold the most influence, while those towards the bottom hold less. The chart outlines a four tier system, with three levels featuring relatively parallel relationships and the lowest rung with no analogue of influence. This chart represents the power of varying

¹⁸ This chart is designed to speak to the ways that educational policy around equity is influenced, while it may operate to explain other education policies in the same district, the data that I have only allows me to discuss equity policy.

actors, not the official distribution of power under the mandate of the district bylaws. While the two do have overlap, it is important to recognize actors often mobilize quickly to influence decisions in ways that are outside of the official politics of school reform. These types of informal interventions are often achieved through blockages or modification of proposed education reforms.

The school board is the official body in Rolling Acres that is responsible for representing the interests of the residents of Rolling Acres and the implementation of policy. The school board elections occur annually and each elected member serves a four year term. Unlike large urban districts, there are no smaller local school councils. District administrators include individuals such as the superintendent, deputy superintendent, and the Achievement Gap Administrator (AGA). These individuals are responsible for operating in the interest of the school system and are held accountable by the school board. While the school board and the superintendent's priorities may align, they do not always, so they operate in a check and balance fashion. On the next level, school officials are representatives such as teacher unions, building administrators and commissioned committees. Community organizations occupy the same level of influence because of the impact that ad hoc and established organizations (e.g. NAACP, etc.) have on responding to policies such as redistricting and achievement gap policies. The rung beneath is occupied by teachers who are the street level bureaucrats of the RAPS system. I have paired them with parents because in Rolling Acres, both teachers and parents respond individually and collectively to policy changes. Teachers are officially represented by the teachers' union, while parents often wield their influence officially through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and unofficially via exit, voice, or loyalty (Hirschman 1970). I place students at the lowest rung because they have little influence on policy as it is defined within the district, though they are the subject of most suggested and implemented policies.

Despite the hierarchical pictorial representation, my illustration is intended to be multifaceted and dynamic. This hierarchy may not exist in the exact same order depending upon the policy in question or the political economy at the time. This can be seen by the ways that actors of influence transform across the life of a proposed policy. Additionally, individuals who are members of outlined groups may not hold equal shares

of power. For example, affluent White parents who have the opportunity to exit RAPS if they are not satisfied with the schools for their children, often hold more influence than low-income African-American parents who may not have the financial resources to exit public school and pursue private schooling options.

The policy interventions that I outline in this chapter are all administered in a top-down fashion. Traditionally top-down policy begins with the identification of social issue of concern. When the social issue is located then research is conducted to assess the nature of the problem. Following identification and assessment of the problem a policy charge or intervention is issued by a legislative body, official, or private group. In RAPS the legislative body and officials, school board and superintendent, are endowed with the power to create such a charge. This charge is then presented to the community which includes the third and fourth tiers. Presentation of the charge is typically carried out in school board meeting, in meetings with union officials, and when concerning smaller scaled policy issues, at the local school level. Once a charge is issued and presented to the public, it is then voted on in a public hearing that is governed by the school board. Following ratification, the policy is then set for implementation within the RAPS.

Implementation is arguably the largest issue with policy within bureaucracies. James Q. Wilson, building on Lipsky's conception of street-level bureaucrats, argues that street-level bureaucrats, those individuals responsible for carrying out the everyday actions associated with the policy, are the most influential in determining implementation within bureaucracies. In the case of RAPS, these street-level bureaucrats are often school teachers, who are mandated to change praxis or orientations to align with the intended policy charge. As I discuss later in this dissertation, teachers in Rolling Acres discussed felt they were the subject of interventions, but had little input on the conceptualization of these interventions. Despite this, teachers are often under close scrutiny when a policy fails to make a "successful" intervention. Placing blame on teachers often occurs in discussions of educational policy failure in the popular media (Herbert 2003). Successful policy intervention necessitates the alignment of the policy charge with the actors within the organization responsible for carrying out the identified intervention.

Another key set of constituents in the policy process are parents and students. The interests of parents and students in RAPS are officially represented by the school board,

but as is demonstrated in this chapter, parents and students often feel ignored, silenced, or wholly absent from the development and implementation of policy. Because of the political economy of Rolling Acres, I argue that the address of educational inequality would need to consider and to some degree address all of the actors outlined in the above hierarchy. Though it is impossible to “satisfy” all actors, it is possible to involve multiple actors and their interests in the conceptualization in policy construction. In the case of Rolling Acres, inequalities in capital often reduced the input and influenced the form of policy interventions. Thus conflicts and sentiments of feeling “left out” were common amongst residents. Though narratives of exclusion were most common amongst affluent Whites, I argue poor Blacks and Whites were actually the most neglected in the policy process. Additionally, producing equity policy with measurable impact necessitates alignment of goals at the institutional, community, and school levels. Unfortunately none of the policies outlined in this chapter: 1985 redistricting, 1997 redistricting, 1997 achievement initiatives, nor the 2004 achievement initiatives met this alignment standard. Evaluating the success of these policies however is not the intent of this discussion, rather the initiatives and the subsequent struggles tied to them demonstrate how race and class serve to explicitly and implicitly shape social relations related to schooling in Rolling Acres.

Aims and Environment

Cohen, Moffitt and Goldin (2007) provide a synthesis of issues between policy and practice in educational policy in their *American Journal of Education* piece. They argue that four factors: aims, instruments, capabilities, and environment lie at the core of understanding how the distances between policy and practice result in unsuccessful educational programs. Cohen and colleagues’ discussion of the conflicts that emerge between policy and practice force us to reconsider the belief that policy and practice are likely tied, in fact, policies in educational research for the past 30 years have often been unsuccessful at affecting the their targets: students. While discussion of policies often occurs at the federal or national level, I am interested in district level response to issues of educational inequality. Through analysis at the district level, I can develop a rich portrait of the conceptualization, attempted implementation, and reception across actors:

local community, schools, teachers, families and students. While my dissertation speaks to all of these areas, in this chapter, I am interested in two of these dimensions: aims and environment.

Through the lens of aim, I investigate the stated goals of policies as well as consider the degree to which current practice would need to change to reach its intended targets. My discussion of aim is not about evaluation of the impact of the policies; rather it investigates the intention of the policies and their potential linkages to practice. A proper exploration of aims can uncover details about the knowledge of the problem that is the subject of intervention. I am also concerned with the role that environment plays in the constraint and shaping of the policies proposed by the district. While implementation is often considered with regards to bureaucracy, it is equally important to consider how the political environment and the stakeholders vested within these environments influence policy and practice.

Race and Archives

The bulk of the data in this chapter is based on archival data, in particular newspapers. This produces a unique challenge for identifying the racial and social class identities of actors in the past. While this is a task that is easily negotiated when discussing individuals, when attempting to characterize groups by racial and class background this becomes increasingly problematic. When discussing the conflict around policies in Rolling Acres, past and current parents, staff, etc. often identified groups based on their class identities. These respondents would discuss “wealthy” or “rich” families objecting to district level changes and organizing against them. When discussing these changes with African-American respondents, they tended to use racial labels in addition to social class labels. As a result, I used respondent characterizations of the groups’ general composition and knowledge of the economic distribution by race in RAPS to inform my description of group racial and social class dynamics. While this, in and of itself, may not be entirely accurate, it does allow me to maintain emic understanding of the dynamics within RAPS’ past.

Redistricting/ Desegregation

While areas such as Boston experienced physical confrontations around desegregation, Rolling Acres followed a less physically contentious path. While there were no physical confrontations, the ideological battles that ensued when desegregation was pursued in Rolling Acres were nonetheless violent. The first wave of school desegregation occurred throughout the late 1960s and into the beginnings of the 1970s. While Rolling Acres was able to avoid court ordered desegregation, the district in the late 1970s was named in a class action suit by families from a local elementary school. The suit claimed that the RAPS under-served African-American students by not providing sufficient instruction to and engagement with students who came from disadvantaged family backgrounds. As a result, the school district was mandated to alter its treatment of African-American students, who were overwhelmingly poor, and assure that students received educational instruction, regardless of the backgrounds from which they came. This landmark decision marked Rolling Acres first official battle with addressing educational inequality between residents. While the district itself was well-performing, poor African-American students' scores lagged far behind their richer White counterparts. This decision served as a warning bell and the threat of another legal suit against RAPS motivated proactive thinking about educational inequality by district administrators. Over the next thirty years, RAPS would continually introduce new bodies of policy to address educational inequality in the district, with the hopes of avoiding another public legal battle.

1985 Redistricting

Rolling Acres as a district has a history of strong performance. However in the 1980s the number of students attending the RAPS declined and the achievement of Black students lagged far behind White students. To respond to these two phenomenons, the board of education commissioned a committee of 21 community members to examine the contemporary and future needs of the district with the goal of providing a quality education for all children. The committee presented a final report with over 100 recommendations to the school board. One of the most notable recommendations was the need to redraw district lines to reduce segregation between schools. Redistricting was introduced because some RA schools had concentrations of over 70 percent African-

American students, while others had student of bodies of less than 2 percent African-American students. In response to the report, the school board adopted many of the suggestions and attempted to develop a formalized school redistricting plan with the overall goal of balancing the racial demographics of the schools. The target goal was to have all elementary schools composed of 12 to 27 percent Black students. As the issue of redistricting was further examined, the need to close schools due to inefficiency was also identified. In 1985, the RAPS introduced a plan to bus students from their neighborhood schools across town (predominantly Black students moving to White schools) and a plan to close several local schools. This introduction was not met with open arms, instead residents, particularly affluent White residents, quickly mobilized to block the implementation of the plan.

While the idea of equitable schools was agreeable to most residents, in order to achieve “racial balance” in schools, some schools would be closed and other schools would experience busing. These disturbances to existing school communities rustled action amongst well to do White residents. While they supported equality and efficiency abstractly, they did not fall behind the new proposed plans. Immediately following its announcement, White residents began to mobilize against the plan. From the archival evidence, I identified three main contentions: 1) the busing of students from their local school, 2) lack of belief in the need for school desegregation, and 3) lack of necessity for closing schools.

The first issue was the perception that White students would be moved from their neighborhood schools. White fear of children being relocated to less well-resourced schools was largely one imagined, since small amounts of White students were actually bused (Wells and Crain 1997). This fear was even more absurd because of the overall quality of schools in Rolling Acres. In cities like St. Louis where busing crossed district lines or in areas of meager economic resources this fear would have been more founded. The second issue reflects the popular mythos present among White Rolling Acres residents that their city was “diverse” and “integrated.” The narrative of Rolling Acres as a “racial utopia” was not one only held in popular belief amongst its current White residents. A documentary in 1995 was produced in part by city residents, the city, and a local university described Rolling Acres as one of the few cities in its state that did not

suffer from segregation. This however is inaccurate; a review of historical documents in Rolling Acres mirrors other cities. RA featured restrictive covenants as well as the intentional steering of small numbers of African-American into the westside of the city. These idealized notions of the racial past and present equipped White residents with an obscured portrait of the composition and needs of Rolling Acres and more particularly RAPS.

Residents reacted strongly to the potential closing of their local schools and potential rezoning. The rhetoric surrounding this issue described local schools as effectively operating, regardless of their size. With some schools serving too few students, the parents responded by arguing that the demographics that were being used to determine school closings were not entirely accurate. This objection was one of the weakest because the data contained the information on school efficiency which included detailed budget information. Nonetheless, this was the objection that many parent reiterated in the local paper when discussing their non-support for redistricting.

In 1985, the movement against redistricting was spearheaded by affluent White parents who sought to avoid having their children moved from their local zoned school. The district framed redistricting as a necessity for achieving racial balance in Rolling Acres. This did not resonate with many affluent families, who enjoyed conveniences such as high familiarity with the schools their children attended, the ability to walk to schools, and other features that were common amongst smaller school systems. With a small school-aged population and the threat of schools being closed and Black students being bused to their local schools, many White parents, produced a unified front against the program. Parents formed ad hoc groups to respond to proposed redistricting and wrote letters to local papers, held rallies, and served to formalize discontent under the umbrella of “maintaining neighborhood schools.” They relied on rhetoric of closeness, community, and inaccuracy in the district’s rushed reorganization plans. These vocal dissenters advanced a narrative about Rolling Acres’ “home-town” feel and how it would be lost if the will of the school board was carried out and students were shuffled away from their friends, neighbors and schools.

While the many parents fretted the “destruction” of local schools, others viewed the need to restructure schools based on race as preposterous. The committee that

suggested redistricting discussed it as central to the future well-being of the district. In their estimation, along with the districts, racial disparities would also in part be addressed by restructuring students between schools. Concentrating on racial balance, rather than curricular restructuring, is a very common policy response to disparities in student performance. However, the research literatures demonstrates moving students between schools is not a panacea. While improving access to resources by moving children is logical, there was little discussion of the changes that would occur and schools and the positives to be gained by well-to-do White residents. This is particularly important, because Rolling Acres enjoyed a history of liberalism and until the 1980s had relatively low levels of school segregation. The suggestion that RAPS schools were on a path to heavy segregation seemed illogical to many White residents. Since segregation is a process that is generally understood asymmetrically, White residents had little understanding of the degree of segregation and little political will to support desegregation practices.

Another factor that influenced the lack of support among affluent residents was the redistricting plans were developed using data that was not entirely accurate. Once the first plans of redistricting were produced, issues of discrepancy between headcounts and population projections emerged. This is not to suggest that the estimations that were made were not scientific, but the data that was provided to the analysts deviated from the actual numbers in the RAPS school system. Due to this, parents found sufficient space to challenge the projected numbers with less systematic, yet compelling comments about the expanding housing stock and anecdotal evidence on school efficiency. Because of the asymmetry of knowledge about segregation and issues with data, affluent parents remained leery about segregation in RAPS.

The public outcry over the redistricting plans was not only expressed informally. During the school year, the school board held five public hearings on the original plans and its subsequent revisions. The first sets of plans were developed by an out-of-state consultant via computer analysis. These plans involved the closing of multiple schools and heavy busing of students between schools, so these plans were quickly doused by residents. After this the school board formed a committee to develop two more sets of plans, these plans were also met with resistance. The final sets of plans were developed

by the school board in closed door meetings. The plans went through over five incarnations and over this multiple month process resistance flowed and ebbed for some months. The final breaking point in resistance to the district's adoption of the redistricting plans was an electoral cycle when anti-redistricting school board members, who were already in the minority, lost their re-election bids. The result was the adoption of a modified redistricting plan that affected nearly 20 elementary schools and relied on the busing of a few African-American students to majority White schools. The implementation of the redistricting plan was set to occur over two years and there were few incidents in its implementation.¹⁹

By popular conceptions, Rolling Acres adopted a “voluntary” desegregation program which was less tumultuous than similar adoptions in other cities, but the legacy of this “voluntary” adoption would loom large for the next twenty years as the district attempted to provide quality education for all children.²⁰ While this program may have come at the discretion of the school board, there was little buy-in from many families in Rolling Acres. The vocal dissent of affluent White parents to redistricting stood in contrast to the silences among the residents for whom redistricting was intended. In reviewing the local newspaper archives, there are few discussions with families that identify as Black and or as potential busing subjects. While I do not have evidence to suggest the voices and needs of these communities were intentionally ignored, there is little that appears in the historical record to suggest their needs were advocated for beyond the initial 1985 equity report and the school board's attempt to redistrict. Additionally, the school board's support of redistricting may not have come as a function of commitment to “social justice” or desire for equitable treatment, the threat of being in legal violation of desegregation mandates loomed in the background of the district's rush to implement a program to avoid further segregation. The political pressures that produced the redistricting plans however were not sufficient to gain support amongst the

¹⁹ Though there were no major disturbances there were small protests. One notable protest was conducted at a local middle school where students, predominantly White, walked out of classes and demanded that their school not be dismantled. The protest received attention in the local paper, but had little to no influence on derailing the policy's implementation.

²⁰ I place the word voluntary in quotations because this is terminology commonly used to discuss desegregation plans that were elected by districts without court mandate. However, the clear objections of residents suggest that labeling these plans as voluntary adoptions glosses over mixed sentiments that often characterized school desegregation.

most vocal in Rolling Acres. The inability to gain the support of the most vocal residents, and by some accounts the most powerful, of Rolling Acres would continue to shape the direction that Rolling Acres took to address educational inequality.

1997-1998 Redistricting

As Rolling Acres grew over the next 12 years, its demographics patterns also shifted. Once again RAPS were faced with the need to redistrict. The changes in school populations and concentration of low income and racial minority students reflected a shift in the developing housing stock located on the periphery of the city. Schools located on the outskirts of Rolling Acres were overcrowded as developers gobbled up farm land to build subdivisions. These newly emerged housing stocks were developed with little consideration for their effects on the distribution of the elementary school population. As Rolling Acres grew, these newly constructed neighborhoods remained largely economically homogeneous: predominantly White and affluent.

In 1997, the RAPS school board commissioned a consultant to propose a redistricting strategy that would optimize building use, relieve crowding, and improve racial balance. The introduction of the 1997 redistricting plan eerily resembled the struggle of redistricting in 1985. Like in 1985, the first set of plans was drafted from a consultant outside of the Rolling Acres schools and these plans were heavily criticized. The critiques of these plans relied on a similar rationale as those that opposed the 1985 redistricting. Parents quickly mobilized and formed organizations that characterized the redistricting as destroying communities and relying on inaccurate demographics.

Even though the same attacks were levied against these plans, there were two notable differences in the district's presentation of the 1997 plans when compared to the 1985 plans. First, in 1985, the district made the pursuit of racial balance its top priority in redistricting, in 1997-98 racial balance was a tertiary concern. This is not to suggest racial balance was not a concern, as I detail in the following discussion, rather it was not explicitly stated. Instead a more color-blind discussion of redistricting was presented, though public dialogue around the subject elevated the role of race, which allowed affluent White residents to shape the direction of the policy, unlike in 1985. Second, in 1985 the school board and the superintendent were aligned in the need for redistricting and worked collaboratively to move plans for change forward rapidly, in 1997 the school

board actively challenged the superintendent to redesign plans and make his intentions for redistricting clear. In this sense, the 1997 school board operated in the interests of the vocal dissenters among Rolling Acres residents. These differences in the 1985 and the 1997 redistricting served to change the tenor of the policy discussion and the policies' ultimate forms.

Elementary education reforms do not occur in a vacuum and the national policy environment at the time was also shifting towards race-neutral framing. In 1996 the state of California passed proposition 209 which outlawed consideration of race in public higher education admissions and public hiring. The ripple effects of this passage were felt throughout the nation. During 1997 the University of Michigan was also sued over its race-considerate admissions policies, which further turned the national attention towards race and education. While universities scrambled to make sure their programs did not “violate equal opportunity laws” similar questions were debated and taking hold of primary and secondary education (Pollock 2004). At the core of these national debates was the question “Is the consideration of race, in and of itself, discrimination?” This question was asked by most consumers of public education, but their interests in this question varied considerably.

Policy Interests

The 1998 set of redistricting plans did not list achieving racial balance as its primary charge. This time, discussion of race was largely considered tertiary to relieving overcrowding and improving efficiency of schools. It is unclear whether the ranking of racial balance as tertiary was actually a reflection of district intent or a political move to downplay the role of race. One important difference between the 1985 and 1997 redistricting was the character of the leadership. Unlike in 1985, in 1997 the district superintendent, Henry Patterson, was African-American. While he seldom made comments about the role of racial balancing, any mention of race from him or his deputy superintendent was sure to make front page news in the local paper. During the middle of the campaign, at a school board meeting, Patterson inquired about the state guidelines on racial balance. He cautioned that it was unlikely that in redrawing district lines that avoiding consideration of racial balance would be allowed. After hearing these statements, the Rolling Acres Courier emphasized his question and suggested that

Patterson implied that racial balance was legally mandated by the state. For the next few weeks the Courier carried quotes from state representatives and legal scholars questioning if Rolling Acres schools were responsible for desegregating. The general consensus was that the district could potentially face legal issues, but in its current standing there was no immediate action necessary. As a result, the superintendent and his deputy were painted as adding race into the redistricting equation under the guise of a legal mandate. No matter how Patterson denied this claim, this image remained attached to his leadership.

Another set of influential actors in the 97-98 redistricting were affluent parents. From the archival evidence from local newspapers and magazines, there was no consensus on the motivations of the parents to block the plan. Some parents lobbied against the closing of their local school, others lobbied against their children being bused to schools outside of their neighborhoods, and some protested the redistricting proposal as “rushed” despite espousing no outright objection to redistricting. As was the case in 1985, the public response of opposition was divided, yet unified against the proposal.

A part of the variation in public reaction to the plans can be seen when the editorials and letters of the Rolling Acres Courier are examined. The editorials that appeared in local papers tended to be highly ideological and fell into two camps. The first camp featured editorials that advocated race-blind redistricting and suggested that the consideration of race when making redistricting decisions about attendance boundaries was discriminatory. The second camp featured race-conscious advocates of redistricting who suggested race needed to be a central concern for consideration of the future of Rolling Acres Public Schools. Of the two camps, there was a greater preponderance of race-blind editorials. This is likely because the people who were most likely to write in to voice their dissenting opinions were those who were most invested in blocking the changes and those who felt the most empowered in the political process of Rolling Acres. In actuality, neither of these camps represented the plans or actors in redistricting accurately. The district was in need of race-considerate plan, but not one that was focused on racial balance solely. While the district administrators and board members attempted to argue for this common ground, they were pulled into the two camps despite their intentions.

A few days before the vote on the redistricting plans, a group named the *Residents for Neighborhood Schools* purchased an advertisement in the Rolling Acres Courier which was an “open letter to the RAPS School Board.” The letter asked the board to reconsider their plans to “destroy neighborhood schools” for the purpose of appeasing a few overcrowded and under-used schools. The letter cited a survey sponsored by RAPS that listed maintaining neighborhood schools as district parents’ top priority.²¹ The letter strategically referenced the 1985 redistricting,

Like you, we want efficiency in our schools. But we want efficiency with the least disruption, not the most. Eleven years ago, Rolling Acres suffered through a painful redistricting. The community lost a generation of schoolchildren with a sense of belonging, and a generation of parents with a commitment to the schools. Only in the last few years have that belonging and commitment returned.

The letter was well written and presented the parents of Rolling Acres as unified against the proposed plans. The authors strategically never invoked discussions of racial balance in the letter, instead they alluded to past redistricting and its troubled history. The authors opted to discuss the redistricting exclusively in terms of efficiency and the costs that would be associated for residents who would be removed from their “nurturing” neighborhood schools. In the silences of this color blind letter, the racial and economic relations of Rolling Acres, as they related to public education, were an important subtext. By using language like “destroyed neighborhood schools” the harms of racial desegregation were conjured, while the positives associated with desegregation were ignored. These rhetorical maneuvers allowed affluent, likely White, residents to shape contemporary debate by neatly tying past narratives on the “costs” of change in Rolling Acres.

The voices of low-income African-Americans were largely silent and made invisible by the cacophonous clashes between the school board, the superintendent, and affluent residents. While their images were used to add color to articles about the segregation that existed within Rolling Acres schools, their voices and stories were seldom quoted or elevated. This is not to suggest that African-American voices were entirely absent, instead the African-Americans who were often quoted were school board

²¹ While the survey did list this as residents’ top priority, it is nearly impossible to estimate to what degree these responses represented the interests of all families. Since the survey was conducted by the district in a non-scientific (simple random sample) fashion, its coverage of the racial and economic minority communities’ needs were likely under-represented (Bowman 1991).

members or other professionals in the Rolling Acres school system. While it is important that African-American voices were present in the public discussion, this does not mean that the interests or realities that these affluent Blacks had mirrored the experiences of low-income Blacks. Affluent Black families were often located in more socially desirable neighborhood (single family houses, neighborhoods with high incomes, etc.) which stood in contrast to poor African-American families who typically were located in less socially desirable neighborhoods (rental properties, neighborhoods with low incomes, etc.) and schools over which they had little choice. Public conversations on educational inequality in the district were dominated by middle class residents across the color-line. For this reason, I argue that the interests and needs of low-income African-American families were not only neglected in public discussion, but were also neglected in subsequent policy initiatives.

The 1985 redistricting was ushered in by a research report that in part addressed the needs of low-income African-American families. However, the 1997 redistricting had no such research to lean upon and the response of disgruntled parents allowed the process to be revised and reshaped. In 1985 the school board was viewed as complicit with the superintendent in “breaking up” neighborhood schools. However in 1997, the school board acted as a political foil to the superintendent and a number of members of the board were vocal about the issues with the proposed redistricting. With a lack of research to base the guidance of redistricting, a non unified body amongst the RAPS, vocal and powerful redistricting dissenters, and the absence of influential African-American low income voices, the 1997 redistricting was increasingly susceptible to lobbying. The group with the most publicly vested interest and most robust social capital were affluent White parents who did not want neighborhood schools dismantled nor saw race as a justifiable criterion for disturbing *their* schools.

While the affluent parents were unsuccessful in lobbying in 1985, in 1997 they were granted an active role in the decision making processes of redistricting. Typically the power of citizens is instilled via the school board, but after much debate and contention, the assistant superintendent asked parents from some of the schools that were projected to be affected to develop an alternative redistricting plan. While their plan was not accepted, the response to the vocal citizenry marked an important moment in the

political economy of Rolling Acres. In essence, while the affluent parents in 1985 felt they were disenfranchised by the union of the school board and superintendent, in 1997 their concerns were at least acknowledged. I hesitate to say that their issues were addressed, because eventually their suggestions were denied, however they did inform the discussion that followed for redistricting. The final plan that was approved affected 20 percent of students in elementary grades, a far smaller percentage than initially projected. The actions and vocal dissent of affluent parents allowed the margins of the plan not only to shifted, but be redrafted. This established a precedent where responses to residents' voices could occur formally beyond the established organizational culture of RAPS.

Race-based or Race-Considerate?

The central difference between the 1985 and 1997 redistricting was the focus on racial balance as a policy goal. In 1985, RAPS' attempt at race-based redistricting was met with significant resistance. In part, this was because the report that generated the impetus for redistricting argued school-level segregation was related to the under performance of minority students. Even though the policy of redistricting passed, improvement in African-American students' performance on state standardized tests were small. The legacy that emerged from the 1985 redistricting was not the pursuit of equality for students and increased achievement for minority students. Instead, a message was sent to officials of Rolling Acres Public Schools that consideration of race was acceptable, except when it disturbed the daily operations of children's lives. So in 1997 when redistricting was proposed, Rolling Acres Public Schools' approach was less focused on race, which also meant discussions of student achievement were largely absent. In 1997, the proposal for redistricting took an explicitly non-race-based framing, but the public discussion of these plans implicated the importance of race. The district's proposal would best be described as race-considerate. I use the term race-considerate as opposed to race-conscious or race-based because other factors were central to the stated policy goals. In 1985 the central policy goal was racial balance. Between 1985 and 1997 we observe a shift in goals and framing, but a similar logic of collective response was exercised by affluent parents. In part, this framing as race-neutral occurred because another discussion about race-based achievement gap policy was emerging in the district.

Tackling the Gap

1997 Achievement Gap Initiatives

Immediately preceding the redistricting discussion of 1997- 1998, the RAPS district was embroiled in controversy over a plan designed to reduce the Black-White academic achievement gap. In early 1997, the RAPS school board agreed to undertake an ambitious set of 10 initiatives with a price tag of nearly 450,000 dollars. The initiatives were adopted by the school board at the recommendation of a local committee established to explore the educational performance of the district's African-American children. The 10 initiatives included: 1) increasing access to all day kindergarten, 2) improving home-school linkages at the elementary level, 3) increasing mentorship and tutoring, 4) creating support groups for African-American parents, 5) adding cultural sensitivity training for staff and teachers at 3 schools, 6) creating spaces for public acknowledgement of African-American student achievement, 7) monitoring disparities in school suspension rates by race, 8) increasing communication between district and teacher's union on the reducing the achievement gap, 9) increasing communication with African-American population on their needs, 10) identifying structural areas in RAPS schools where African-American achievement was affected.

These 10 initiatives marked the first time that Rolling Acres had agreed to undertake a set of district-wide sustained policy levers and evaluations on educational inequality. Past responses to educational inequality had been small in scale school-based or had not integrated evaluation strategies. One of the most significant elements of these initiative was the creation, recruitment, and hiring of an Achievement Gap Administrator (AGA). This individual occupied a full time position with the RAPS and was responsible for overseeing the implementation and evaluation of the outlined 10 initiatives. The position description explicitly stated they would be responsible for acting as a liaison to RAPS on the initiatives that targeted African-American students. The hiring of the administrator proved to be a difficult task, due to resistance among parents in Rolling Acres.

During the fall of 1997 a set of parents from the Rolling Acres school system filed a complaint with the United States Department of Civil Rights to block implementation of the program. The complaint, which was later dismissed, centered on the singling out of African-Americans as the recipients of the benefits in the outlined achievement plan. One

of the complaint's authors in the Rolling Acres Courier was quoted as saying, "When you start excluding students based on race, to me, that's racism." These type of anti-race conscious sentiments are common among White Americans when discussing race-related affirmative action or race-considerate policies ((Swain 2001)). At the core of many of these anti-race conscious sentiments was a lack of shared interest in the addressing of racial disparities. By adopting and accepting the 10 step initiative, the RAPS once again placed themselves at a political disadvantage because they were interpreted as prioritizing the needs of African-American students over other students in the districts.

In their 1993 article on racial attitudes Bobo and Kluegel argue that White resistance to race-related policies depends upon if the policy is race-targeted and is used for equality of opportunity or equality of outcome, with Whites supporting the former more than the latter. Across the domains that they studied, education was the realm where Whites supported policy interventions the most, but still there was resistance to the use of race in targeting resources. In their analyses they find Whites show greater support for income-targeted educational policies than for race-targeted educational policy interventions. African-Americans show greater support for race-based policies than income-targeted policies. This is not surprising considering the dimension of self-interest but African-Americans also support income-targeted policies for increased opportunity more than Whites. Bobo and Kluegel argue that self-interest remains an important mechanism of explaining support of social equity policy, with educational policies being no different. Their observations of White's tenuous support for certain forms of social equity policies connects to a larger discussion in political science about the process of creating interest convergence for minority-centered policies amongst the White majority. The process of interracial and inter-social class interest convergence is a complicated one, one that seldom occurs without some form of legal threat or mandate.

Derrick Bell (1980) in his seminal theory of interest convergence argued that these watershed legal moments, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, are ushered in by the political landscape on which they occur, rather than being a moral response to oppression. In the case of the *Brown* decision, Bell argued that following World War II race-relations were the subject of international scrutiny considering the US had just come from fighting fascism throughout the world. If the Supreme Court failed to dismantle

legalized segregation and unequal treatment, its position in the view of other nations would fall tremendously. Additionally, the presence of African-Americans in the military coupled with growing discontent amongst African-Americans provided a “perfect storm” for change. As a result, the Supreme Court opted to act in favor of dismantling legal segregation, which many interpreted as a moral imperative rather than a political one. Bell’s model works well to explain these type of watershed moments, but leaves little hope for smaller scaled challenges to equality. In the case of Rolling Acres, in neither 1985 nor 1997 did the political economy of the area mandate change. Instead changes in policy were generated under the notion that change would need to occur to avoid legal retribution, but this approach was not very successful. This approach served neither to increase support amongst Whites, nor increase concern amongst White residents in a way that would develop the necessary conditions for interest convergence. Ultimately, these two failings served as additional barriers to RAPS’ proposed policy changes. I now turn to look at some of the ways the policies conceptualizations and implementation were troubled by beginning with the 1997 initiatives.

The initiatives that were undertaken by the RAPS were ambitious and distinct in character, but they were constructed and implemented in an overly top-down fashion. Top down approaches to policy design begin with a mandate that comes from the public, private, or legislative sector. In this case, the mandate for change was delivered via a committee commissioned by the superintendent Henry Patterson. The Coalition for African American Excellence (CAAE) conducted research on the conditions of African-American students and in the spring of 1997 conducted a town hall meeting at a local church. From their research and the conversations at the town hall meeting, the committee produced a set of recommendations to Patterson and the school board. Since they were commissioned to perform the inquiry by the superintendent, their report was accepted and recommendations were approved with little issue. CAAE itself contained members who were familiar with local educational issues and experts on urban education needs.²² Their recommendations were meticulously crafted with each initiative containing

²² Many of the recommendations were based on urban education research. While the issues that many African-American students in Rolling Acres face are similar to those of the inner city, I argue there are considerable differences (e.g. concentrated poverty, high levels of segregation, presence of resources, etc.)

details on: context, inputs, process, and product outcomes. The initiatives were well reasoned, but buy-in from local RAPS members was neglected in the design and subsequently hampered their implementation.

The approval of the initiatives via the school board meant that staffs (teachers, building administrators, etc.) were mandated to adopt alternative practices. However, the mandate to change behavior does not mean that practices will change, unless buy-in from the RAPS staff was increased. This is the case with any set of policy levers, unfortunately the 1997 initiatives were conceived and implemented without gaining the buy-in of street-level bureaucrats, such as teachers (Wilson 1989). Even if political will amongst residents was high, which it was not, there was little reason to suspect that the changes defined by the 1997 initiatives would take hold considering factors such as teacher discretion (Cohen and Loewenberg Ball 1990). Despite meticulously designed initiatives, the district administrators and the CAAE failed to build relationships with key bureaucrats throughout the RAPS. Without prior relationships, lack of buy-in by school system members, and a lack of community support, the 1997 initiatives were at best poised for marginal success. In the next section, I go into greater detail about the initiatives themselves and their reception within the district.

The 10 Initiatives

The first initiative was to establish all day or extended day kindergartens at select locations where there were high concentrations of African American students. Educational disparities are easiest to impact in early childhood education (Fryer and Levitt 2004; Phillips et al. 1998). The expansion to all day kindergartens is a common early educational intervention for low-income students. Because the bulk of low-income students at the identified schools were African-American, there was no need to target these programs for only African-American students. The students in my sample were some of the first to attend the expanded kindergarten programming.²³ The small expansion in full-day kindergarten was to be evaluated and expanded for more widespread implementation after two years.

in the educational experiences of Black children in Rolling Acres when compared to Black students in urban schools.

²³ In chapter five, I discuss how one affluent White parent attempted to negotiate around this new policy that served to desegregate whole day and part day kindergartens.

The second initiative was the establishment of a partnership between the Rolling Acres Teacher's Union (RATU) and RAPS to focus on issues related to racial diversity. Earlier in the year, the RATU released a statement about the importance of educating diverse students and the perils of discrimination. From this document, the CAAE proposed forming a stronger relationship with the RATU to eliminate discrimination among classroom teachers. The proposal of increasing collaboration and using an official correspondence as the point of departure was good, but the statement issued by RATU was a general statement about the repudiation of discrimination. The statement did not suggest that discriminatory practices were present in their workforce.²⁴ The CAAE's attempted connection to the RATU however neglected discussing the implementation of the other proposed initiatives which required increases in the labor force and shifts in practice, arguably an even more fertile area for discussion and engagement.

The third initiative was designed to create a data system that kept track of out-of-school referrals for African American students. This need was based on the disproportionate suspension rates of Black students in comparison to White students in Rolling Acres. The database was intended to monitor differential treatment that resulted in Black students spending less time in school and thus less time receiving instruction. The intent of the policy was clear, but the ways in which this data could be used to impact African American students' experiences was less apparent. The desired outcome was a reduction of out of school referrals that African American students received, but the process of disciplining occurs first at the classroom level, second at the school level. Unfortunately the initiative had no policy levers at either of these levels. Because the initiative had monitoring as its main goal there was no discussion of intervention. Additionally, the initiative was concentrated on junior high school and high school referrals. This meant that elementary grades were neglected. In part this was likely due to the lack of out-of-school referrals amongst the elementary age population overall. Instead of receiving out-of-school referrals, elementary students tended to be disciplined in their classrooms and then sent to spend extended periods with the school principal. These

²⁴ In chapter seven, I discuss the ways that teachers' feared being categorized as a source of educational inequality and tended to explain differences in student performance as a function of students' family background. As a result, it was unlikely that they would self-identify as a source of educational inequality when policy reforms were proposed.

types of practices could have been monitored and arguably they could be considered a gateway to out-of-school referrals in later years.

The fourth initiative's goal was to increase the number of elementary school support staff who acted as child-to-home or child-to-community liaisons. These positions would be created using soft money from grants or would be implemented in the next budget year if soft funding was not available. The exact role of these liaisons was not known, but staff, parents, and students were encouraged to generate ideas about the job tasks of these individuals. There was no specified method of evaluation for this initiative. The gaps between the home lives of African-American students and their educational environment in Rolling Acres were particularly alarming due to the bimodal distribution of incomes which consisted of affluent Whites and poor Blacks. This initiative deviated from most of the others because it lacked a clear target, process, and evaluation strategy.

The fifth initiative was designed to address cultural diversity/sensitivity training for the staff at three schools, which would serve as a pilot for diversity training in all of the RAPS. While diversity training is important, the content of the programming remains much more significant than the title. The initial outline of the training would cover issues such as student expectancies, cultural awareness, and historical narratives. These forms of diversity training were implemented in many schools throughout the 1990s. The impacts of these programs are difficult to test for a number of reasons. First, the staff were mandated to participate in diversity workshops, but their agreement with the ideas or presentation of the materials were not measured. As I demonstrate in chapter seven, even with diversity training, bias among teachers can still exist and influence their treatment of students.

The sixth initiative sought to look carefully at school organizational structures that potentially impacted African-American student underperformance. The desired outcome was the identification of school processes such as curriculum segmentation, access to courses, and a host of school level processes that have been overlooked in past policy analyses that affected African-American students. This initiative was one of the most ambitious and potentially most powerful for unearthing areas for intervention. Unfortunately, the initiative lacked an infrastructure that would produce the desired results. It required the development of new research, but there was no one body within or

outside of the RAPS structure that was charged with conducting this research. While the RAPS did contain an office of research, these individuals were not tied into the planning of the 1997 initiatives and thus could not be expected to undertake another research task on top of their standard body of work. In an informal interview with the director of the research services office, I was informed that the office did not take on this initiative; instead it was saddled back with the Achievement Gap Administrator. I discuss the issue of shirked responsibility and the AGA later in this chapter.

The seventh initiative was the celebration of the achievement of African American students in the district. The initiative attempted to focus attention away from the achievement gap and towards success as a norm for African American students. The CAAE was proposed to aid in construction of lists of honorees and manners to publicize their achievement. The desired outcome of this policy was increased affirmation of African American student achievers in the RAPS.

The eighth initiative was to support and expand efforts that provided mentorship and tutoring to students. Additional support would be provided to extant community organizations through funding and resources. This initiative sought to strengthen community partnerships such as the African-American Academy, which focused on improving the achievement of African American students through tutorial and exploratory work on weekends. This program and others like it were attacked in the Civil Rights suit for using public tax dollars for racially targeted programming.

The ninth initiative was the development of a systematic method of involving the voices of African American families in discussions of programs and services. The initiative would involve receiving input for African American students about issues that were occurring inside and outside of school. These narratives were to be collected via community meetings and surveys. Like other “discovery oriented” initiatives there was no individual body responsible for undertaking the research.

The tenth initiative was the creation of parent support groups throughout the community that provided parenting skills education, advice on improving student performance, and peer support groups.²⁵ The parent support groups and workshops were

²⁵ The formal community organizations and churches that were identified as potential partners tended to be composed of middle class Blacks. While there was significant Black middle class in Rolling Acres, they

to be designed and executed by community members and attended by parents of students in the RAPS. The support groups were to be developed based on already present networks through organizations like churches. This initiative was designed to increase parental participation in parent-teacher conferences and parental involvement overall.

The hiring of the Achievement Gap Administrator, Karyn Tolliver, sometimes referred to as the eleventh initiative, was intended to produce an accountability structure for the implementation of the initiatives within RAPS. Unfortunately the hiring of the AGA only further segmented the achievement policies from the RAPS everyday operations. In communications with past and current personnel of Rolling Acres, the consensus among staff was that by hiring a new full time employee to deal with the achievement gap, staff felt little responsibility for individually contributing to the adoption of initiatives. This explicitly ran counter to the intent of the hire, but it demonstrates how attempts at centralization in bureaucracies can sometimes serve to diffuse responsibility. As was the case with a number of the initiatives, there was little consideration of how the organizational culture of Rolling Acres Public Schools would need to shift to accommodate new practices and players.

Producing buy-in among the RAPS system was important for the implementation of the policies, unfortunately this buy-in was not produced. In part, this was due to their external development. The 1997 initiatives were commissioned by the superintendent but were carried out by a body (CAAE) that was outside of the RAPS official structure. For this reason, the superintendent and the CAAE should have taken special care to develop relationships with the constituent members of the RAPS organizational structure if successful implementation was their intention. Unfortunately, there was no such buy-in produced and the individuals within the RAPS had little incentive or disincentive to adhere to or carry out the proposed policy levers. An example of this was the second 1997 initiative which was a partnership with the RATU. The proposed partnership between the RATU and the RAPS assumed that teachers in the district saw themselves as contributors to the achievement gap. Even if the official teacher union saw teachers as a

were often not located in the RAPS. When discussing attendance of church and involvement with community organizations, respondents would mention attending church and relying on social services in a neighboring city. I argue one additionally barrier to the success of this initiative was the social class bifurcation of the Black community in RA.

potential source in the achievement gap, it would be challenging and against self-interest for individual teachers to state they saw themselves as contributors to educational inequality. These type of confluences between the psycho-social and policy intents were not adequately dealt with. Additionally, teachers in the district that I interviewed often characterized the district's approach to educational inequality, particularly the achievement gap, was overly prescriptive, rapidly changing, and devoid of teacher feedback.

Another issue with the set of initiatives was the ability to evaluate the impact of these initiatives. The school-based initiatives (all day kindergarten, diversity training, elementary school relations, etc.) were designed with a short window of two years before evaluation and being scaled up to district level. Of the ten outlined initiatives a year after their approval and hiring of the AGA only five were on track to potentially meeting the two year horizon (Internal District Correspondence 1998). A number of the outlined initiatives were strong ideas for social intervention, but measuring their impact and producing the political will among school staff and community to engage these initiatives proved to be an overwhelming task.

Centralization and Diffusion

Rolling Acres Public Schools, like many districts across the nation, attempted to deal with issues of inequality by centralizing resources and adding personnel. Unfortunately, I argue that this centralization and eventual diffusion of policy aims was an ill-step in the attempted address of inequality, given the policy environment of RAPS. Lack of clear implementation strategy, pressure from affluent parents, meshed with non-penetrating policy tools served to hinder RAPS intended policies interventions.

From 1997 until the year 2000, Karyn Tolliver, the Achievement Gap Administrator attempted to corral the resources of the RAPS to address the Black-White achievement gap. She was unable to garner much support form within the district or from non-African-American community members. When interviewed by a local news source about the interests that non-African-American parents in Rolling Acres' had to support the initiatives and reduce the gap she responded,

If there is disruption or there is not a climate conducive to learning in the classroom that's going to affect students who are high achievers and students who

are low achievers. If a teacher is spending an inordinate amount of time in class going over material, having to provide remedial skill building, then those students who are on the higher fringe are really not as engaged in the education process as they could be. And they're not given the opportunity to learn more. What we've got to do is make sure the learning environment is positive for all students.

Tolliver framed her answer in race-neutral language, despite the prompt which asked her specifically about the interests of non-African-Americans in supporting the initiatives. In her description of the interests of families with students “on the upper fringe” this category becomes synonymous with White, while readers are left to imply that “students who disrupted the classroom” are African-American. Even if this was only a rhetorical strategy it is still troubling because of its implicit assumptions about race, behavior and student performance. The AGA, as the advocate for the initiatives, should have a unique perspective on the gap, but not one that confirms to stereotypes about the community she is employed to assist.

Tolliver's discussion of the interests that Whites had in supporting the achievement gap initiatives was framed as an issue of benevolence. In her framing, White children's achievement was slowed by underperforming racial minorities. As a result, she argued that supporting the initiatives increased the likelihood of non-African-Americans receiving the additional academic push that they deserved. The implicit interest, as defined by Tolliver, was acceleration of the academic curriculum. However, this interest is quite weak when considered against the perceived negatives of supporting race-based policies. Tolliver's framing did not aid in defining a shared interest that Blacks and Whites had to gain from supporting the initiatives. Tolliver was the public figure in charge of presenting the district's response to educational inequality, even with this responsibility, her argument for supporting the initiatives was far from compelling.

This explicit use of non-racial frames was likely a response to the tense debates occurring in the district about race-based policies towards achievement. At the time of the interview, a case with the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Office regarding the targeting of the Achievement Gap Initiative funds was pending. While the case was never taken up and Rolling Acres was not court-ordered to change their practices, they did. This shift mirrored other national higher education policy changes where programs designed to increase minority participation in underrepresented areas of study were

opened up to all students, not just students of color, to avoid legal challenges. Soon after challenges to the exclusivity of these programs was raised, district administrators began making public statements that some of the programs were pilot programs the district intended to scale-up and include all district students in. In my review of the original documents on the initiatives, there was discussion of scaling up of programs, but no mention of opening them to all students. This likely occurred in response to the political pressure from complaints about the exclusivity of programs. Soon thereafter, RAPS opened the programs that were originally designed to increase the participation of Black students to all students.

Over the coming years, a number of initiatives like all day kindergarten were implemented and scaled-up to include multiple groups of students, which posed another dilemma. As Thomas Cook and colleagues (1975) identified, the introduction of the same early childhood treatment serves to “raise the tide” for all students. While this may be advantageous for raising the floor of disadvantaged students’ achievement, the gains that advantaged students receive often trump the gains that disadvantaged students receive. The “opening up” of these initiatives, while politically advantageous, likely did not serve the goal of reducing the achievement gap.

Leadership Transition

With the achievement gap as the target of the policies, the achievement gap initiatives marked the district’s first systematic attempt at reducing unequal student performance across schools. Unfortunately issues of top-down administration, lack of buy-in from key actors, pressures from the local community, and eschewing of responsibility from staff made the initiatives fall short of their intended targets. An additional challenge to their implementation was the transition in leadership in the district. With the shift in district administrators, the implementation, evaluation, and revision of the 1997 initiatives became piece-meal and to some degree inconsistent. Each superintendent between 1997 and 2004 took a different approach to the address of the gap between Black and White students.

Patterson’s successor, Michelle Henderson, an African-American woman was brought from a larger urban district to Rolling Acres. Her time in Rolling Acres was contentious with her enrolling the district in a national study on educational inequality

and stressing the need for the entire district to share in the responsibility for reducing the achievement gap. Henderson at a PTA meeting in 2000 commented, “The achievement gap is not only Karyn’s [Tolliver] problem.” Her cry was aimed at garnering greater support from her staff and community at large to address the achievement gap. Eventually this cry was heeded by the Rolling Acres community, but not likely in the manner that she intended.

Henderson’s commentary was latched onto by affluent White attendees of the PTA meeting and subsequently they began working on the issue of the achievement gap. In the year 2000 a review of the district’s Parent Teacher Association minutes displays the parental push to shift district focus away from the achievement gap to achievement for all students. During a 2000 district-wide PTA meeting the following statement was produced and adopted.

The gap arises from complex interactions of many variables, not all of which are under the control of RAPS or its staff. However, we are tired of hearing these used as excuses and believe that RAPS can take actions which it is not now taking that will raise achievement generally in our school system. The district should change its focus from one of “closing the gap” to one of promoting high academic achievement for all children. Not only do we have, but we note that overall, achievement is lower in RAPS than we think it should and could be in a system with our resources. *Undue focus* on race-based gap has many counterproductive side effects that perpetuate the problem.²⁶

The prescribed direction by the Parent-Teacher Association was in fact supported by the next steps that Rolling Acres would take in addressing achievement in the district as a whole. The parents’ statement reflects the vanguard of backlash that had been brewing for years over the concentration on the achievement gap. Despite parental dissatisfaction with this focus, the district’s leadership retained focus on the achievement gap. This tension eventually came to head when the superintendent, a Black woman, was dismissed. With the turn-over of multiple superintendents, the AGA position was eventually subsumed and discontinued. Quickly the 1997 initiatives faded out of the policy spotlight but remained a part of the district’s collective memory. The next superintendent selected was a White male and under his leadership, the language around

²⁶ My emphasis.

student performance officially transitioned from a focus on the achievement gap to achievement for all.²⁷

2004 Initiatives

In 2004, the RAPS board approved a set of 7 new initiatives that were focused on improving student achievement in the district. Unlike the initiatives of 1997 that were generated from outside of the ranks of RAPS staff, these were generated internally by the instructional services office. Early in 2004 these set of initiatives were undertaken to run the course of two years, after which they would be evaluated and expanded. The plan was divided into seven different areas: 1) academic achievement, 2) special education, 3) facilities, 4) program marketing, 5) technology, 6) climate of equity, and 7) professional development. Each area contained sub mandates and goals that were divided by elementary and secondary goals.

A considerable difference between this set of policy initiatives and the 1997 set was the absence of racialized language and reliance on conceptions of “equity” and “equality” among subgroups. This shift in language, in part, could be attributed to the NCLB act’s language. However, an additional factor could have been the resistance that cropped up in response to the 1997 initiatives. The legacy of these challenges to achievement policy lingered as programs that were changed in 1997 remained open in 2004.

The first initiative was designed “to improve the achievement for all students” and featured 32 points to address issues of achievement within the district. The first set of goals centered on achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) according to the state standardized test for all subgroups in the district. The remaining goals involved increasing students’ achievement by 10 percent annually in each subgroup and having all students at 80 percent proficiency on district benchmarks in reading, math, and writing by 2006. Unlike the 1997 initiatives these achievement goals were clear and tied closely to current, local, and national mandates for student performance.

²⁷ By identifying the superintendent’s race and gender I do not mean to insinuate that he was the reason the achievement gap initiatives were abandoned. Rather, I think public perception of him, as a White male, made his concentration on achievement for all students less controversial than if the previous superintendent a Black woman had attempted such a shift.

The second plank of the 2004 initiatives involved strengthening programming for special education students. The goals for this plank involved getting all students on an individualized education plan (IEP) and full compliance among staff with special education procedures approved by the district. Additionally, the district set a goal of seeing a 10 percent reduction in the special education caseload. The previous set of achievement initiatives neglected discussion of special education, which was a potentially important area affecting achievement disparities.

The third plank concerned improvement and expansion of building facilities. The fourth plank was to improve communication between home and schools regarding available programming in the district. The district noted White and affluent students participated in activities at school more than poor and Black families at the middle school and secondary levels. The initiative was noble but centered more on improving marketing, rather than exploring the barriers to participation (e.g. financial issues, transportation, cultural interesting programming, etc.).

The fifth plank was the improvement of access to technology. In elementary classrooms students were to have a 3 to 1 computer ratio and teachers were to undergo additional training. An additional point for this plank was at the close of the first year, the district would evaluate the need and ability to provide technological access to low-income and special needs populations.

The sixth plank is one that most resembles a 1997 initiative. The goal was “to create a climate of equity and acceptance that respects, values and responds to the diversity of all its members.” Amongst the other measurable goals, this plank appears particularly ideological and difficult to measure. However, the district in its literature suggests they would measure increases in the ability to work with diverse groups by using a scientific measure which would be repeatedly administered to capture change. To date, I am unaware of a scientific tool that can reliably assess the ability of a teacher respond to diverse populations. Additionally, even if such an instrument was administered, the relationship between it and classroom practice would be largely unknown.

The seventh and final plank was the creation of a framework to aid the district in moving to systematic professional development. Each individual School Improvement

Team (SIT) in the coming year would align their programming with district needs. This is one of the most ambitious but potentially influential policies suggested. Because professional development often occurs in a piece-meal fashion, systematizing the on-going training teachers receive could increase even coverage of training and presentation of approaches to prescribed policy changes.

The 2004 initiatives took a much more academic focused and systematic approach to addressing student achievement. The initiatives utilized federal language and local standards to identify metrics of success. The plans were also generated from within the RAPS system, so evaluation of these initiatives was more likely to occur. While these were strengths of the 2004 initiatives the use of race-neutral frame and reliance on a top-down policy design limited the reach of these policies. As I discuss in the following section, the prescribed initiatives missed key needs amongst its target populations.

Community Influence

The four policy events discussed in this chapter were informed by as well as informed the policy environment of Rolling Acres. A common thread amongst the changes in these policies was the role of community influence. In Rolling Acres, the issue of influence was a complicated one. As I discuss in chapter five, the stocks of capital (social, cultural, and economic) that affluent families were able to draw upon outweighed the capitals minority counterparts stocked. Because of these disparities in capital, addressing the concerns of affluent White families was critical to the policy process. RAPS response to the needs of affluent White families varied by the individual policy and the time in which the change was suggested, but nonetheless these residents demanded institutional response from the RAPS.

These demands of institutional response, coupled with larger national struggles around race and education coalesced to produce a policy environment where the consideration of race as a mechanism for policy development eventually atrophied. The shifts from race-central to race-considerate to race-neutral policy solutions demonstrate the importance of community influence. For a mid-sized school district like Rolling Acres, the adage “the squeaky well gets the oil” certainly applies. This is not to suggest the experiences of other groups than affluent Whites were not difficult, quite the contrary, but due to capital imbalances affluent Whites were able to get their needs

discussed. Additionally the interests of Black families were represented by middle class Blacks who were present in the school district. While the NAACP and other organizations were often charged with conveying issues around well-being amongst RA's Black population, they were largely unable to connect with lower-income Black families. This result was community input that was largely driven by middle class and affluent residents.

Contrastingly, the experiences of poor families, arguably the most disadvantaged in the district, remained silent and overlooked when these shifts occur. Public discussion of policy change centered on the policy, the responses of affluent Whites, but never the children who were underserved at school. In this dissertation, I discuss the ways that race and class pervade life in Rolling Acres, even when public discourse suggests they do not. These silences around and omissions of racial and economic minorities have material consequences, mainly the maintenance of educational inequality.

Conclusion

The policy environment of Rolling Acres is one of constant challenges between community residents, school personnel, and district administration. These struggles over the direction of policy related to educational inequality demonstrate that in smaller-cities the politics of educational reform are particularly subject to lobbying. While large metropolis' such as Chicago, New York, grapple with policy at levels that are often beyond the reach of affected communities, Rolling Acres' policy construction and implementation is accessible to *some* small scaled actors. Amongst RA's political economy affluent parents tended to lobby administrators with relative success, while teachers and minority families were largely absent from discussion of policy and their subsequent implementation. These power imbalances reflect the general power dynamics that operated within Rolling Acres, where race and social class coincide to advantage the most advantaged, while stratifying opportunity from the most marginalized.

When looking closely at the four cases of policy interventions that I presented a narrative of discord and transformation emerges. The aims of each policy intervention were clear, but due to lobbying these aims were shifted in each subsequent incarnation. Between 1985 and 2004 Rolling Acres shifted away from race-targeted solution to non-

race centered solutions. At the same time, they shifted from process oriented considerations of educational inequality to outcome-centered policy levers. These changes do relate to national trends in policy, but it is important to note that they were generated by localized actions. The district did not immediately acquiesce to the local or national pressures, instead the combination of both served to reshape the districts' approach to inequality.

When I entered the field in late 2005, the district was focused on increasing achievement for all students. While *prima facie* this appears to be the most equitable approach to addressing educational inequality, in fact it reflects acquiescence to pressures from the most powerful stakeholders. Beyond their acquiescing, the district's concentration on student achievement obscures the everyday processes that inform the educational inequality that they seek to reduce. In this sense, Rolling Acres is like most school districts who have subscribed to student performance metrics as the indicator of successful schools. While affecting differences in average student performance remains the mandate of the nation under NCLB, the processes that contribute to this inequality remain hidden and missed by many of Rolling Acres' past interventions. While the district did not have the opportunity to uncover these processes, this dissertation is designed to speak to these gaps in understanding and sight. In the next chapter, I turn to an analysis and discussion of the operation of social capital on families' relationship to resources as it relates to educational inequality.

Chapter Five

Social and Cultural Capital in Rolling Acres

A basic feature of United States is that all children are entitled access to education. This basic feature of United States public education system however in its original penning did not guarantee all students an equal quality of education. With the decision of *Brown v. Board of education* (1954) the United States government took its first official steps to dismantling educational inequality between Black and White students throughout the country. While it has been documented that the policies and programs following the *Brown* decision have not been fully realized in segregated schools, the promise of access to an equal quality of education for students in racially and class heterogeneous settings is still yet to be realized as well.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which race and class structure the opportunity of children to gain access to education by looking at cultural and social capital. Past research on parental involvement, cultural capital and schooling has failed to adequately consider the role of race (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lareau 2000). Lareau's research on parental involvement and home life's influence on educational inequality argues race is an additional consideration for African-American parents but race was not significant in influencing relationship to institutions such as school. Lareau (2002) and Horvat et al. (2003) argue that social class is the primary mechanism that matters for parental involvement, social networks and institutional reception. However, my data suggests that race is also influential in shaping social networks as well as institutional reception. I contend that race is not simply an additional consideration; rather parental race intersects with social class and sometimes independently influences the ability of parents to affect the educational experiences of their children via social networks and institutional reception.

In this chapter, I demonstrate this contention through analysis of school-family communication and through a case study of parental organizing at Cherry Elementary school. My case study presentation extends past work on social capital by challenging past arguments which suggested social capital simply benefited individual families, rather than collectives. Through this discussion, I seek to develop a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of racial identities and class positions in affecting the distribution of school related resources. In particular, I discuss the ways that affluent White parents attempt to customize their children's education which in turn affects the educational choices of poor and African-American families.

Bourdieu offered cultural capital as a theoretical intervention to past works that viewed academic performance as inherently tied to innate academic ability. His theory of cultural capital at its core centers on coherent endowments of social norms and values that are advantageous within a given social institution (e.g. schools). Contemporary American sociologists use Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital when discussing education to understand social reproduction of privilege and constrained opportunities (Swartz 1997). Because of Bourdieu's theoretical interests and lineages, contemporary research about education and cultural capital has mainly evolved into discussions of participation in high culture and mismatch in cultural norms between schools and families (Lareau and Weininger 2003). In this chapter, I am concerned with the research that is based on the mismatch between cultural capital among families and schools. These studies are useful because they identify sites of inequality and demonstrate the pervasive nature of social class.

Unfortunately, these works inadequately address the way race alters the relationship between social class and parental involvement. The research on capital mismatches between schools and minority families often can be boiled down into two categories: resistance models and culture as defined by social class. The first set of models contend that African-Americans are resistant to traditional routes to opportunity (McWhorter 2000; Ogbu 2003). Resistance models suggest that African-Americans recognize their limited opportunities and barriers and then chose to disengage or select a different route than traditional education to "get ahead." These models of race-based cultural capital have been challenged extensively (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998;

Horvat and O'Connor 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005) and thus I will not address them in this chapter's discussion.

Another model of cultural capital and school involvement, which I explore in more detail below, explains variations in parental participation as largely defined by social class status (Lareau 2000; Lareau 2003). Because African-American families are overrepresented in impoverished communities, these approaches center on ways of incorporating low income families. While these strategies are important, they ignore the emergent Black middle class who are also attending schools and experiencing differential rates of parental participation. Annette Lareau's research on parent involvement and schools in *Home Advantage* leads the guard of contemporary education based cultural capital research. In her study she interviews and observes the interactions of families from two first grade classrooms from two schools: one working-class (Colton) and one middle-class (Prescott). She persuasively argues that social class shapes the ways that parents become involved in their children's schooling. These patterns of interaction prove the most advantageous for families located in the middle class schools because of the congruency of their cultural practices and institutional values. Her research also serves as a corrective to prior literature which considered differences in parental involvement largely a result of motivation or other individual-center explanations.

She argues, "... Cultural capital improves upon existing explanations of why working-class parents are less involved in school than upper-middle-class parents. Social class provides parents with social resources which they 'invest' to yield social profits. (p. 10)" She further specifies the patterns she observes and argues that cultural resources are not automatically actualized by middle-class families or families in middle-class schools, instead families invest differentially in their children's schooling. Her analyses carefully treat the intervening role of individual biography in the investments of cultural capital which produces a portrait of cultural capital as coherently endowed but differentially drawn upon.

Lareau's observations about cultural capital are valuable contributions to discussions of parental involvement and educational inequality. Even with her strong work, I argue some of her arguments are mis-specified, in part due to her research design. In particular, her comparisons of Prescott and Colton parents do not allow her to

determine if observed differences are in part attributable to differences between schools (Weston 1991). *Home Advantage* leaves readers to assume that differences between the families in cultural capital are almost entirely family-based rather than simply a reflection of differences between her sampled schools. To fully understand differences in cultural capital between families and the role of these differences on schooling, she would have to compare families in the same school. While this critique of Lareau's work is not new, the implications for our understanding of differences in parent participation are important. Her inability to discuss the lives of affluent and poor students in the same school limits our understandings of interaction between these groups and if these interactions affect parental involvement.

In *Home Advantage*, Lareau's data is based on an entirely White sample from two first grade classrooms. She corrects for this racial imbalance in her next work *Unequal Childhoods* which tackles the relationship between children's homes and their interactions with institutions (e.g. schools, medical care, etc.). She argues that middle class families practice childrearing based on *concerted cultivation*. This concerted cultivation involves the structuring of children's extracurricular times and consistent interaction with authority figures. This form of childrearing operates in opposition to poor and working class families which practice *natural growth* which is characterized by unstructured free time and few sustained interactions with authorities.

In this project she samples families from fourth grade classrooms. Her sample in the book again is based on two schools – Lower Richmond and Swan School, but this time she includes representation of both Black and White families. This correction, on the surface, may appear to adequately address past critiques about her comparisons within schools and across racial groups. She states, "Among middle class families, race played a role, not in terms of whether or how parents intervened in their children's organizational lives, but rather, in kinds of issues that they kept their eyes on and in the number of potential problems parents and children faced. (p.181)" She continues, "This vigilance meant that Black middle-class parents, mothers especially, undertook more labor than did their white middle-class counterparts, as they worried about racial balance and insensitivity on the part of other children as well as adults." Lareau's perspective on the

“burden of race” sees it simply as an additive concern, not as a factor that shifts relations with organizations and institutions.

However, a close read of her methodology reveals that her Black middle class sample was gathered from outside of Lower Richmond and Swan schools. To “fill-in” her sampling needs she drew on students located in non-public schools as well as students who were not in fourth grade. I argue her methodological choices limit our ability to understand the experiences of the Black middle class and low-income Blacks in well-resourced schools. The result of these imputations is an acknowledgment of the additional burden of race among Black parents, but neglect of the ways in which race plays into the interactions with institutions (e.g. schools) that Black families face.

Lareau’s use of cultural capital theory in the contemporary terrain of American public schools lays a great point of departure for research focused on both race and class inequality. Amanda Lewis builds on Lareau’s work by grappling with schools as race making institutions. In *Race in the Schoolyard* (Lewis 2003), Lewis investigates three classrooms with differing racial compositions. She studies three schools in California to understand how race functions among young children. She selects two schools with large numbers of minority students and one suburban school. Though she identifies the high minority schools as “diverse” there is not great variation in the representation of students from different racial and economic backgrounds. Her research is designed to reflect the diversity of California schools, which means it also reflects the racial and economic segregation of the state thus disallowing within school heterogeneous race and social class analysis. Additionally, her classrooms of observation were selected for her by school leadership, which may mean they operate differently than other classrooms at the school. Ultimately these differences make it difficult for Lewis to speak to the ways that families from different backgrounds come together to experience and interact with schools.

Despite these design issues, Lewis consistently demonstrates that race is a structuring agent in the early elementary education mainly through the use of ethnography. Through a careful weaving of ethnography and critical race theory she argues that ideological orientations, particularly color-blind racism, permeate conversations about race-based educational inequality. Lewis' project effectively

demonstrates the ways in which race works through institutions to affect individuals. However, her book does not address the ways in which race becomes utilized by parents in conjunction with institutional rules to gain advantage for their children. Additionally the voices of the families in her schools are muted due to her focus on theoretical intervention. Looking at the intersections of families and institutions while considering race and class is a logical extension for my research. In order to do this, I must consider social capital.

Social Capital

Though definitions of social capital vary greatly, I draw from Bourdieu's definition of social capital in this chapter as well as maintain consideration of Coleman's conception. Bourdieu defines social capital as the sum of potential or actual resources that an individual can bring to bear on a given situation through actualization of a network of people (Bourdieu 1986). In Coleman's (1988) estimation, individuals do not possess social capital; instead individuals are linked to networks with high amounts of social capital which contribute to the individual's and social network's ability to achieve a desired end. Bourdieu's take on social capital is much less rigid. He believes that actors may not be aware of their desired goal, but nonetheless use social capital in the pursuit of status maintenance. The data in this chapter suggest that both Bourdieu and Coleman's theories of social capital are operating, though neither of their theoretical constellations operates in complete form. Coleman's conception of social capital remains overtly rational choice based, but in my data I find parents participate in social networks with little understanding of the ends achieved by this membership. At the same time, I find Bourdieu's conception of social capital "too loose" to describe the disparity in the accumulation of social capital in Rolling Acres between affluent Whites and poor Blacks. Lastly, I think neither of their conceptualizations have been adequately updated to discuss the role of race and the ways it affects social network membership and resulting distribution of educational resources that contribute to educational inequality.

Contemporary research on social and cultural capital and school involvement has the same failings as Coleman and Bourdieu's. Lareau correctly states in *Unequal Childhoods*, "Finally, networks, themselves linked to social class position, provide parents with different amounts of general information about schooling.(p. 172)" In her

article with Horvat (2003) they use survey research to describe how middle class families, across racial groups, are more connected to professionals. Lareau's previous research on cultural capital compellingly addresses the separation between the presence of cultural capital and investments of cultural capital for a child's well being. Unfortunately her consideration of social capital does not build upon this logical distinction. Her operationalization of social capital via social networks is a flat individual based measurement. By "counting" the number of associates that individual families have to professionals, she does not capture the quality of these relationships. Nor can this type of quantification reflect the collective power that is garnered through weak ties and organizing which can be used to affect multiple children's outcomes, not simply an individual's child (Orr 1999). I argue it is equally important to look not only at the presence of networks, but the ability to use these networks to gain a "desired social end." By looking at social network presence and use, I can gain a richer understanding of families and their relation to school resources and schooling at large.

At its core, this chapter is concerned with the influence of information and networks on relationship to resources. I investigate the structure of formal information transmission between school and homes, then I deliver a case study that demonstrates the power of networks and the ways in which this power is used to segment access to key educational information. This segmentation of information happens in raced and classed ways. I argue that this segmentation of information can lead to a segmentation of opportunity, of which poor and minority families are particularly vulnerable. The visible appearance of diversity, which many call integration (both economically and racially), does not sufficiently translate to diverse social networks and information sharing.

By building on and challenging past research on cultural and social capital in schools, I argue that a more sensitive analysis of race *and* class will yield better insights to the production of educational inequality. I do this by drawing on ethnographic and interview data from the city of Rolling Acres. I explore how parents in Rolling Acres, an affluent school system, organize, lobby and jockey to create their perceived optimal educational position for their children. I argue that these parents', mainly affluent White parents, efforts to maximize their children's educational options impinge on the ability of marginalized communities, poor and minority families, to gain an equal educational

experience. I also argue that the responses of the school staff, both official and unofficial, are constrained by the district's need to respond to demographic transition. Despite the "best of intents" the intersection of these phenomena produce an environment ripe for the promulgation of educational inequality.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement remains a popular area of research in education. The role of parental involvement on education depends on a number of factors particularly cultural, social and economic capital. In my sample, affluent White parents utilize their social, cultural and economic capital to impact the schooling of their children. While prima facie this jockeying may demonstrate opportunist foresight, I argue that these processes of informal and formal negotiations affect the quality of education received by low-income and minority communities in the same school. Leading research on educational inequality in well-resourced school districts has argued that low-income and minority families' outlooks and approaches towards education are responsible for educational under-achievement (Ogbu 2003). This research however does not consider how advantages are transmitted in these settings, and how these transmissions are in part based upon exclusion. While it is impossible to re-produce Ogbu's work to formally test the differences in outlook between groups, I have designed my work to incorporate a comparative perspective which allows for a deeper discussion of outlooks and approaches.

Information as Capital

In order to affect the schooling of one's child (positively) some degree of knowledge about the school and its policies for decision making are important. For many parents the knowledge of schools' practices are received via informal social networks (Lareau 2000). However, simply considering the ways in which knowledge is transmitted informally is short-sighted for a number of reasons. First, districts and schools likely vary widely in their transmission of information. In the case of Rolling Acres, information about the school and extracurricular opportunities are often sent home to parents via the mail: both postal and backpack. Each teacher is provided some discretion for official methods of communicating with homes (e.g. newsletters, phone calls, etc.) while a standard set of materials travel home via school or district mandate (e.g. classroom

assignment sheets, field trip information, etc.) Mrs. Reno, a classroom teacher at River Elementary discusses the weekly contact that she has with her students' families. She commented, "Every Friday we send home a letter that you know kind of talks about curriculum and field trips, days off. We communicate information through that every week. Then we also send home an evaluation of the kids." She further explains the normal process of communication with parents about their children's academic progress.

Yeah they have folders they take home everyday so it goes in there with all their old work... You know we used to have it so the parents would sign them and send them back and we found that the kids who really needed their parents to see it and bring it back, they never signed them. So why are we making all these parents sign these every week and send them back when if they know they are coming, it is up to them to look at them or not to look at them? So we stopped having them send them back. But yes they can make comments on there if they want to. I don't think that parents do usually but they can of course call or email. So they do that way more.

Mrs. Reno's identification of the dominant forms of parental communication all rely on written correspondence: home-folders and email. Through her own admission she finds that these written correspondences do not get acknowledged or returned among the neediest students. In her description of parental communication she outlines that hard policies are often softened based on perceived family environment and the utility of the policy. Reno believes that weekly communication is valuable but by mid-school year mark (when the interview occurred) she slipped from following that ideal. Instead she responded by removing the requirements. I call the practice of (re)moving a classroom standard based on teacher discretion a *sliding standard*. Throughout my in-class observations, in two of the three classrooms I observed, *sliding standards* were used by teachers as a method of managing relationships between homes and schools but these sliding standards can be particularly important for students in minority (both racial and economic) groups in Rolling Acres' classrooms. Over the course of my observations, Mrs. Reno eventually began to identify the students who came from families that did not return the folders that she sent home, they were almost exclusively low-income and minority families. Later in the semester, I asked her to identify which students families' tended to email her and she identified almost exclusively affluent White families. In her classroom, parents' patterns of communicating with the teacher were stratified by race

and class. In response to these differences, the teacher responded by removing the requirement of communication with parents, rather than experimenting with other forms of communication for the families that were not responding.

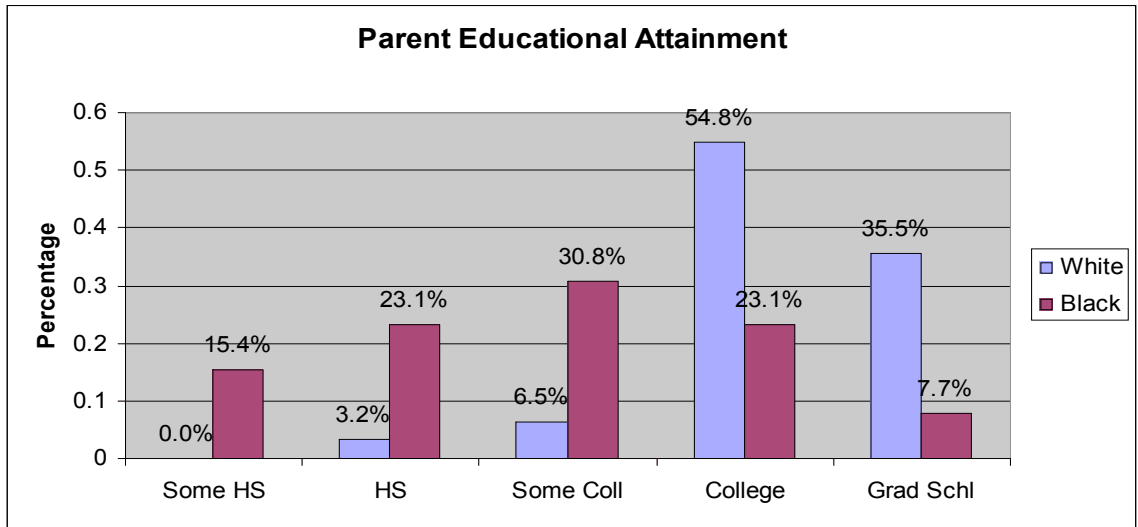
The use of printed media to communicate information to families was common place and it often traveled home via backpack mail. In my time in the field at River Elementary, I routinely saw students scurry to their individual mailboxes and pull out stacks of paper and shuffle them into their bag prior to dismissal.

As Mr. Marks explains, “There’s a huge, huge, huge public relations marketing attempt, there isn’t a kid... I mean a kids got to be completely out of it not to be aware that [extracurricular activities are] available to him. There is stuff all over the school...” In the view of Mr. Marks and Mrs. Reno there was sufficient information available from school to families and the responsibility of dealing with this information lay in the home. While Rolling Acres was consistent with its transmission of formal information, the reception of this information varied among families.

These opportunities were expressed almost exclusively in written form which made them increasingly difficult to access to the families of students who came from households with lower educational attainment. Lareau (2000) noted a similar pattern in her study of elementary schools. In a public school, the communication of information to families is key to assuring that all families have equal opportunity to access resources. The Rolling Acres school district is like many other well-resourced school districts, it features many extracurricular opportunities for students such as science clubs, scouting activities, as well as a host of recreational opportunities sponsored by the local city government. Unfortunately, in both Cherry and River Elementary, the dominant mode of communication to families from the school was printed materials.

The reliance on printed materials in an economically diverse setting seems increasingly concern worthy. Among the parents in my sample, parental levels of education varied greatly between students in the same classrooms.

Figure 5.1 Parental Ed Attainment 1



In Rolling Acres the children of cardiologists sat next to the children of janitors. Most low income families in my sample were single-income and single-headed with educational levels that averaged high school completion or some college, while middle and upper income families almost always had two incomes and education levels of at least one college graduate.

These differences between families in education and family structure deeply affected time use. This is not to suggest that the occupations of middle and upper income families were not time-intensive. Quite to the contrary, these middle income and affluent families' lives were very busy and heavily scheduled. However, these families were able to rely on multiple social supports which provided them "more time." The supports that middle income and affluent families commonly relied on were expensive childcare, electing for a parent to be "stay at home", or hiring a housekeeper to complete basic household chores. All of these social supports come at some premium and are in part based on economic capital. By using their economic capital to "free" their time they were able to interact with their children as well as deal with the masses of information that came home with their children from homework to program announcements. I often found that low income families neglected to open my mailings and would comment that my packet was probably in a "stack of bills." Contrastingly, middle income families that did not respond to mailings would tell me, "I'm sorry, I saw the mailing but just didn't get a chance to respond." These small differences in availability of time, paired with

educational differences, lead to widely divergent understanding of offerings when these communications are in written form exclusively.

In Rolling Acres, families of different backgrounds receive the opportunity to consume some of the same formal information, but do not. By not considering the differences in family background and relying on the same approach to reach all families the participation of parents with weaker educational backgrounds is unlikely. I learned this first hand when I repeatedly mailed a Mr. Clarke a grandfather of Vince at Cherry elementary to gain his child's participation and he responded, "I didn't know what the hell you were talking about in those letters you sent. Why didn't you just say you wanted to talk to us about being Black?" Mr. Clarke, informed me that he received my correspondences but that the packet I mailed home (one single spaced page introduction, student consent, parental consent, and returning envelope – approximately 8 pages total) contained too many papers to read through.²⁸ I was only able to gain this feedback from him while he was at school attending his child's poetry presentation at the Cherry elementary.

Additionally, I found differences in the ways that families processed the information sent home. Among affluent families information about schooling was primarily gathered by parents through the school newsletter or other official correspondences and secondarily through their child. Mrs. Pederson, an affluent White mother in Mr. Marks' classroom illustrates this approach,

We get the newsletter. So I get that. I will ask Amanda [her daughter], ask a lot of stuff in general, what is going on in class? Who she had lunch with? Who she played with on the playground? Try and get that kind of stuff. I talked to Mr. Marks if something comes home or I am questioning something, then I will talk to him. And friends I talk to... I will tell them what I hear and see what they have heard and you know, it is the typical rumor mill. Then I will do my best to kind of confirm or get rid of whatever is right and wrong.

In contrast to the approach of relying primarily on official communication, I found low income families also utilized written material, but to a lesser extent. Mrs.

²⁸ The Institutional Review Board required that I contact families via mailing first. I found that among low income and minority families my response rate via mail was considerably lower than among middle income and affluent families.

Wolfe, a low income White single mother, informed me about her process for wading through school communications to determine happenings,

“Yeah sometimes he [Robert] will let me know what is going on. I get tons and tons of paperwork on what is going on in the class and what kind of activities are coming up.

Then if I have any questions, of course, I go in talk to Mr. Marks.” When asked about the paperwork she continued,

Well if it is something [mailed material] is... It is usually stuff that is letting me know what is going on in Rolling Acres this weekend for kids their age or what kind of functions are coming up in school or what is going on in class. If it is like the class weekly newsletter I will read that. If it is something that is going on around town and I don't think it is anything he will be interested in, I usually don't read that kind of stuff. Based on class material and his interest I will read those and anything else....

In the cases of both low income and affluent families, I found parents taking an interest in their children's education. However, among affluent families, I found a greater inclination to review information about district wide opportunities or local activities, which they interpreted as key to their child's educational development. Affluent families in my sample were much more likely to reference trips to fairs, museums, and other cultural spaces as part of “education-related activities” that they took part in outside of school. Affluent families, by in large, saw all activities that were mailed home as relevant to their child and their child's development, while the scale of inclusion that lower income families operated with was more concerned with mailings that directly related to their child's curricular education or immediate social issues (e.g. behavior, interpersonal incidents, etc.).

Through the administration of formal information almost exclusively in written form, families were sorted into and out of opportunities.²⁹ Affluent families with more access to education and more time to wade through large mounds of paper gained a “leg up” on the happenings in the district and opportunities to become involved. While

²⁹ It is important to note that there are other types of communication between families and the schools, such as parent teacher conferences, but even announcement of events such as these were conveyed exclusively in written form. On two occasions I had two low-income African-American mothers inform me that there were no parent teacher conferences during the year that I observed. This was an incorrect observation, but in both cases, they informed me they had not read about parent teacher conferences, so they thought they did not happen. Neither mother indicated that they followed-up with the school regarding the conference, but in part this may be due to perceptions of the school as not welcoming, which I discuss later in this chapter.

teachers in the district were sure information was easily accessible to all, actual discussions with families and observations yielded a different picture. This type of stratification is very subtle, but reflects the ways in which institutional culture can serve to disenfranchise some and incorporate others. As I discussed earlier, one identified strategy for improving enrollment of minority families in activities was increased communication. However, an increase in the same forms of communication without acknowledgement of differences in processing is unlikely to reach their target audience or goals.

Rolling Acres provides ample opportunities for parents to become involved at school, even if these invitations are almost exclusively conveyed in written form. Throughout the year I attended school-related events and activities both on campus and off-campus. As I attended these events I noticed that African-American parents were under-represented at these events, including the more economically stable Black families.

One of the first African-American parents that I was introduced to was Ms. Towles. During a school open house at River Elementary, Mr. Marks took the opportunity to introduce me to different parents throughout the evening and encourage their participation in my study. Mr. Marks was very excited to introduce me to Ms. Towles he repeated to me throughout the evening, “You have to meet Ms. Towles, she’s African-American and a lawyer!” As the evening progressed Mr. Marks saw Ms. Towles’ son Jeffrey. Mr. Marks’ grabbed Jeffrey and requested that he bring his mother over to meet me. After the introduction we exchanged information and I proceeded on to recruit more participants. Ms. Towles during the time of my study, would be one of the most active African-American parents. When I asked Ms. Towles about her experiences in helping with a science night hosted at River Elementary she told me,

I was chairing the Science Fair and we were.... You know, there were other people but I was the only Black on the committee. We had been meeting all along. The night we were setting up this lady was on the PTA comes into the room and Mr. Tyler [school principal] was there and Mr. Tyler pissed me off too. She walked in and she says, “well you can’t do this like this” and she started re-arranging everything we had worked to put together. And Mr. Tyler just like ... rather than saying you know, “well Sheila³⁰ these people are on the committee. Ms. Towles is chairing (the evening’s program), [the committee has] already talked about it, this is what they... I don’t think you should be in here doing this.”

³⁰ Pseudonym for another parent in attendance

He's like, "oh yeah, you are right. Let's move this and move these tables around" and I was furious. I just walked out of the room 'cause I thought I was going to kill him.

Even in the face of incidents such as these, Ms. Towles continued to participate at River Elementary, but she was sure to communicate that her experience was not isolated. She continued telling me about the aftermath of the event and said,

... Maybe I am a little sensitive, but I thought it was, "Oh she's Black, she doesn't know what she is doing" kind of thing. You know because, other black women and I have talked about this. They will tell you to chair but then they want to micro manage you and tell you how to do it. So yeah I have experienced that subtle racism, which is why I think a lot of black parents don't get involved because they don't like that micro managing. Tell me to chair something, leave me alone and let me do it.

Ms. Towles' narrative of feeling marginalized and discriminated against while participating in school functions was repeated, as she predicted, among a number of my black respondents. In attempting to understand what allowed Ms. Towles to persevere, it is important to consider Bourdieu's (1986) notion of habitus. I invoke habitus because Ms. Towles' education and occupation likely affected her ability to negotiate such forms of "subtle racism." As a public defender, Ms. Towles encounters disagreement, bureaucracy, and compromise on a daily basis. In this way, her occupation fortified her for these types of interactions. While I doubt she prefers to have the struggles of her work day repeated, her habitus provides a map for navigating these barriers. By the close of the school year, Ms. Towles was the only Black parent who remained an active volunteer.

Other African-American parents in Mr. Marks' classroom either did not participate throughout the year or their participation waned off as the year progressed. One such African-American parent was Ms. Martin, Raven's mother. I first met Ms. Martin during the same night as Ms. Towles, but under much different circumstances. As I floated about the school open house, I returned to Mr. Marks' classroom to find him positioned with his back to his classroom door. Mr. Marks stood at the door with his arms crossed and repeated, "I will not discuss this with you now. We can set up a time to talk." After Marks repeated this several times Ms. Martin left his doorway visually discouraged.

As I introduced myself to Ms. Martin and introduced my research project she suggested that she would not be a good participant, because she did not have a “good relationship” with River Elementary. I reassured her that I was interested in all families’ experiences, good and bad. Eventually she agreed to participate and I learned through her, her daughter Raven, and Mr. Marks the issue about which she confronted Mr. Marks.

Earlier that day, Ms. Martin sent a set of cupcakes to school by Raven to celebrate another student’s birthday. While this in many spaces would be considered normal and appreciated, at River elementary following appropriate organizational structure was key. In Mr. Marks’ classroom all baked goods were arranged through room parents (the parents of two homeroom children who organized school activities including volunteering) and only distributed at certain times in the day. Ms. Martin had not gone through the room parents to send in these cupcakes. In the course of the day, Mr. Marks, by his own admission, chastised Raven for bringing in the baked goods and reminded her that Ms. Martin was aware she was in violation of classroom policy. Raven, a quiet and sensitive girl, was saddened by this commentary and relayed it to her mother. The evening that I met Ms. Martin she was in the school attempting to speak with Mr. Marks about the incident but he refused to engage her on the issue. This was not the only time that Ms. Martin attempted to participate at River school and was denied the opportunity.

At the close of the academic year, Ms. Martin informed Mr. Marks that she wanted to chaperone a field trip to the state capital. Mr. Marks informed her that chaperones had already been identified via the room parents but informed her that she could attend, if she drove herself there and back. Mr. Marks and Ms. Martin over the course of the year had multiple contentious interactions and Mr. Marks confided in me that he hoped that she did not attend the field trip. As the final field trip arrived, Ms. Martin did not attend and later informed me that she did not feel like River Elementary was a welcoming place to her.³¹ As a single mother of three school aged children she informed me it was difficult to juggle time and become involved at River Elementary.

³¹ I think it is important to note that Ms. Martin informed me though she thought River Elementary wasn't welcoming, that she would not hesitate to contact RAPS central office if she felt her daughter was mistreated. She informed me that her willingness to contact the central office was because they put pressure on school administrators to address her concerns.

Ms. Martin who had in the past been very vocal regarding her daughter's treatment in school eventually chose to withdraw from "making a fuss." In my multiple interviews with Ms. Martin she offered multiple tales of standing up to "unfairness." For example, at the time of one interview she was suspended from her job for "cussing out" the manager of her restaurant. She retold the tale and suggested that she was being treated unfairly by the management but felt she had done the "right thing" in arguing her case and thus gladly accepted the suspension. This form of engagement of authority while valuable to her ideologically, does not have universal rewards, particularly when it came to her daughter's schooling. I learned from Mr. Marks that in the year prior to Raven entering his classroom, Ms. Martin was banned from entering the school following an interaction that she had with Raven's third grade classroom teacher. When I discussed the encounter that Mr. Marks and Ms. Martin had in the hallway with Mr. Marks he recounted the story of her being banned the previous year and commented to me, "you can understand why." In part, Ms. Martin's past was used as a way to legitimize Mr. Marks' contemporary treatment of Ms. Martin. While her behavior of approaching Mr. Marks at non-conference time to discuss issues was "out of bounds", we see that Mr. Marks' inflexibility served to amplify Ms. Martin's frustration and eventually eliminate her classroom participation.

In the cases of Ms. Towles and Ms. Martin, you can see two parents who were dedicated to their children's education and engaged the school with differing outcomes. In both cases, they attributed their treatment to their race but their responses to this perceived discrimination were different. These experiences suggest that race mattered for both parents, but this effect was mediated by habitus. Ms. Towles' ability to endure maltreatment as well as continually negotiate this treatment is likely linked to her occupation as a lawyer. Ms. Martin also behaved in ways that mirrored her relationship to her occupation as a fast food worker, but with much less success. The consequences and rewards doled out by the school, via other parents, teachers, and the principal, suggest that institutional involvement is complicated by racial group membership and mediated by the habits of individual actors.

The perceived social class position of Ms. Towles was also important to her

relation of school difficulties.³² In my introduction to Ms. Towles, Mr. Marks conveyed a sense of delight in the ability to announce her occupation. This sentiment was mirrored by other teachers and administrators when discussing middle-income Black families. As middle-income families they still did not have trouble-free relations, but they received more favorable treatment than low-income families. The cases of Ms. Towles and Ms. Martin demonstrate the heterogeneity of treatment amongst African-Americans within the same district and school. Their perceived social classes and habituses informed the degree of success that each with negotiating the school norms that proved to be a challenge for a number of my Black respondents.

Contrastingly, Mrs. Pederson, another mother from the Marks' classroom was much more successful in becoming involved and staying involved. Mrs. Pederson is a White, married, stay at home mother of 4 children. She is a college graduate who opted to remain at home after the birth of her first child. While Mrs. Pederson's life is busy with four children, she was able to volunteer at her daughter's school for math instruction every other week because all her children were school-aged and she did not hold a out of home job. As I mentioned earlier, Mrs. Pederson primarily received information via the newsletter, but she also relied on Mr. Marks' for information on school related issues.

Mrs. Pederson informed me that in "down time" between helping in the math class, she was able to talk to Mr. Marks about school happenings and issues. All of the classroom volunteers that I observed across three classrooms were White mothers of middle to upper economic standing. Their presence in the classroom, by their own admission, carried advantages for understanding what was happening in River Elementary and Rolling Acres. Through classroom volunteering they gained key information for their children's education, which is an opportunity that many low-income and minority families in my sample could not take advantage of because of family structure and out of home work obligations.

The methods through which information, both formal and informal, traveled in Rolling Acres privileged those of middle and upper class backgrounds. In conjunction with racial mistreatment, African-American parents began to form a consistent narrative

³² I identify this as her perceived social class position because though she was a lawyer, she was a single mother who with two dependent children. She resided in a neighborhood that was predominantly low-income by Rolling Acres standards as well.

of exclusion from other parents in the school. This narrative is not simply one of exclusion based on skin color, but more importantly it demonstrates a mechanism through which inequality operates. In the case of Rolling Acres classrooms, information is announced publicly - generally in written form, participation is organized – via room parents, and then individual habitus – cultural capital, is used to sort who becomes involved. Affluent White mothers were most successful at negotiating this process. The least successful were poor Black mothers.³³ Looking carefully at organizational structures through which parental involvement occurs, racial group membership, interpersonal interaction, and cultural capital helps elucidate subtle sites of inequality.

Classroom Placement Policies

Earlier research investigated the ways that race holds an additive effect to differences in social class based social networks, but even this work underestimated race's influence (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). In the following section I use a case study to further demonstrate the power of race on collectives such as social networks. To begin my discussion of social networks and schooling policy, it is important to outline the ways Cherry Elementary determines student classroom placement. The Rolling Acres school system allows each building to determine its own procedures for student classroom placement. During the spring of each academic year, Cherry mails their families announcing that decisions about the coming school year's classroom placement are occurring. An excerpt of the letter sent home reads, “The same careful consideration in placement will be given to your child(ren) even if you choose not to return this form.” Mrs. Bell, the principal at Cherry, provides the parents with two weeks to return the parent input form on the needs of their child in the classroom. The forms ask parents to identify students that their child works well with, students that their child doesn't work well with, and special needs. The bottom of the sheet reads “Please do not request a specific teacher.”

After the request forms are received, Mrs. Bell sits down in conference with teachers and assigns students to different classrooms based on characteristics such as

³³ The majority of in-school parental involvement was carried out by mothers in my sample. While fathers often expressed interest in their children's education, gender roles played a strong role in who participated in school-related activities.

student performance, demographics, and special concerns. She however retains ultimate oversight of the classroom rosters. The official letter to parents on classroom placement stated that decisions on classroom placement would be mailed five days prior to the start of the school year.

When I asked Principal Bell about the short response time and single mailing she explained, “I send a letter home. I don’t want to make a big fuss, because I don’t want everyone coming in here.” Principal Bell’s attempt to minimize parental influence in the process of classroom assignment did not necessarily deter certain parents. Though the letter stated parents could not suggest teachers, Bell informed me that affluent White families often ignored this request and suggested teachers. In response to past years in which parents have clogged the main office with teacher requests during the summer, Bell’s notification of parents right before the beginning of the school year leaves parents with little time to “negotiate” their child’s classroom location.

Despite all these adjustments and strategic mailing Principal Bell informed me that affluent White parents at their school returned classroom placement forms the most. She told me, “I tried to get parents from the Mulberry co-op (local low income housing development) but they just didn’t participate.” Bell’s attempts to minimize the influence of classroom selection did not deter many affluent White families. However by using a mailing and a short time frame for response, she likely dis-served lower income families in the school.

The Case of Ms. Baker

During the Winter of the school year, conversations at Cherry elementary around a fifth grade teacher, Ms. Baker, began to brew. Ms. Baker was a new teacher to Cherry Elementary. She has a commanding presence being a six-foot tall African-American woman in her early 30s. Each day that I saw her, she dressed professionally in skirts with turtle necks and sported a short cropped haircut. Her appearance never looked rushed, each outfit and hairstyle was deliberately chosen. On occasion she stopped by the classroom that I was observing to speak with Mrs. Jackson. At Cherry Elementary she is one of 4 Black faculty members. She worked at two other elementary schools in Rolling Acres prior to arriving to Cherry Elementary. As I began the formal interview process at Cherry Elementary I first heard mention of “problems” and “issues” with Ms. Baker.

During this early point in the school year parents were unable to identify individual issues, but they indicated that she “wasn’t a good teacher” and that they were “keeping an eye on her.” One of the first respondents to mention Ms. Baker was Mrs. Cooper when I asked about whether she knew how Cherry Elementary made selections of classrooms for students. Mrs. Cooper, a White female and a real estate agent in her forties, explained,

I have never; I usually have never been one that picks teachers. You know there is fanatic parents out there that want to hand pick each year. I am not into that. I mean I think part of my kid’s happiness is who they are with in their class, unless the teacher is just really low, which I have worried about this one fifth grade [teacher]. I have heard that nothing is happening in there. So anyway that is going to be an awkward position for me because I am not usually one that...I don’t pick a teacher.

Mrs. Cooper acknowledges that her sensibilities about classroom placement were heightened by discussions she heard about Ms. Baker. She identified that in the past she had not participated in this process but this year she would likely participate.³⁴ Earlier in the interview Cooper explained the process of classroom placement in detail. When she described the procedure, she did not mention the ability to “pick” a teacher for her daughter. However when confronted with the possibility of her daughter receiving a “low” teacher, her language connoted the ability to select teachers. This is of course contradictory to Cherry Elementary’s explicit no-teacher selection policy. In this case Mrs. Cooper has expressed Bourdieun *illusio* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Building on Weber’s notion of interests, Bourdieu argued that in certain situations actors will navigate around stated boundaries or guidelines when they understand them based in part upon the perceived value of these boundaries. These negotiations rely on an individual being invested in a game, in this case classroom selection, and belief in the worth of the outcome, in this case a classroom of Cooper’s choosing. Mrs. Cooper had clear

³⁴ Earlier in the interview Mrs. Cooper identified that she had in fact undertaken a process of class selection with Mrs. Bell at Cherry Elementary when she was choosing morning or afternoon kindergarten for her daughter to attend. At the Cherry elementary there were two kindergarten classes: morning and afternoon. The majority of affluent families at the school had their children attend the afternoon kindergarten and walked to the school from their nearby neighborhood. The morning kindergarten, according to Mrs. Cooper, was full of low income and minority families and Cherry needed more affluent White students in the morning session. Mrs. Cooper wanted to switch Rachel from morning to afternoon kindergarten so she could go to class with her neighbors, but Mrs. Bell did not allow her to change classes. Eventually Mrs. Cooper figured out that if she told Mrs. Bell that she had a job in the morning and couldn’t bring Rachel, that she would be switched to the afternoon class. Mrs. Cooper told Mrs. Bell that she worked in the morning and Rachel’s class was eventually changed.

knowledge of the boundaries and applicable sanctions for classroom selection and then eschewed the legality of the no-teacher selection policy. She, as well as other affluent parents, commonly responded to my question about classroom placement with clear understandings of the ways in which the policy was constructed, but when their children were mentioned, they quickly reverted to language of choice. At the time of my interview with Mrs. Cooper, the process for classroom selection was approximately four months away, but Cooper had already begun the thought process behind “customizing” her child’s educational pathway for the next year.

When I asked Mrs. Cooper how she intended to follow up over the course of the remainder of the year regarding Ms. Baker and finding out if there was a change in the classroom she informed me, “... you just hate to be petty and you know you don’t want to have it appear to be gossipy with other parents but I probably will ask some parents [in Baker’s class] that I know. ‘How did that go?’” Cooper, like other parents in my sample, relied on their social capital to gain potentially important information about their children’s education and used this as part of the decision-making process. This second hand information is subjective, but is still valued by parents when making decisions. Another form of information that parents used in gathering information on Ms. Baker was informal information gathered from formal associations. When I asked Mrs. Cooper how she learned of the issues with Ms. Baker she told me,

There was some people on a committee to help pick and couldn’t believe she was chosen out of the ones that were up for it. And they said she is on her third elementary now. One year at each one and that Mrs. Bell would like to save her. And I am not into that. It’s like gosh in business you would be fired. You know these are our kids and maybe it is not her field. Maybe it is not this girl’s thing. I don’t know. I don’t know her.

Cooper coupled the informal information that she received from other parents with a more official set of knowledge on the matter of Baker’s hiring. While this additional information was useful, it was not necessarily more accurate. Cooper mentioned learning of the issues with Baker from parents who sat on the hiring committee for Cherry school. She then described the decision to bring Baker to the school as Mrs. Bell’s attempt to salvage her career.³⁵ In actuality, the Rolling Acres

³⁵ A number of parents suggested Principal Bell held some special allegiance to Baker. I did not personally observe evidence of this, nor did parents provide data that supported this. I do however think

School District gives building principals very little oversight on hiring within their buildings. In the case of Ms. Baker, she was “on leave” from another school and was thus placed in the first hire pool. Teachers in the hiring pool then interviewed with a group of representatives, which did not contain the building principal. Ultimately, because Baker was in the “first hire” pool and Cherry Elementary had an immediate opening she was placed at Cherry Elementary.

Offenses

To gain a better understanding why parents were concerned about Ms. Baker, it is important to outline the offenses that parents described. In my exploration of the issues relayed by parents and staff, I made an effort not to privilege any one story or perspective. Ultimately, I am most concerned with how organizing and pressures exerted affected the families not in these discussions of educational customization: poor and minority families.

The retention and re-assignment of school teachers is an issue in any public school district. Rolling Acres still contains a strong teacher union that is able to ensure that hired teachers remain employed within the school district. In the case of Ms. Baker her high rate of movement from school to school was uncommon. A leading complaint among parents was Ms. Baker’s perpetual absence from the classroom. In the interviews where parents cited her absence as an issue, none offered an explanation for this behavior. Aly Stone is Rick Stone’s mother and is substitute teacher in the Rolling Acres district. When I asked her to explain how she learned about Ms. Baker and her issues she described Baker’s past performance as a rationale for contemporary concern.

When she came here, she was to the new building. I subbed [substituted] for her. So I knew a lot of things. I knew a lot of things before any parents. And I couldn’t tell anybody. This is her third building in three years. The first thing that I learned was it’s her third building in three years and I’d been to her other two buildings. I know that in her last building she would go out for lunch and not come back and leave her kids unattended. It’s not like she told anybody, it’s not like she told anyone “I’m not feeling well” and it’s not like she went out and called a sub. She’d just leave and not come back. How can a teacher do that? How can the district allow her to be in charge of kids? I guess that didn’t really happen this year ...

this view was partially due to Baker and Bell's racial and gender identities, they were both Black women in a predominantly White school.

Mrs. Stone drew on her “insider” information to gather data on Ms Baker’s past. While she acknowledges her role as a professional did not allow her to divulge these issues to other parents in the school, later in the interview she did identify that she was in conversation with Cherry parents about these matters. Stone concluded her comments acknowledging that issues of abandonment did not occur while Baker was at Cherry, but other parents repeated a similar tale to me about Ms. Baker’s past. While Mrs. Stone outlined her participation in her classroom as a key source of information, she neglected to tell concerned parents that she substituted for Baker because of the death of one of Baker’s close family members. In this case, the narrative about Baker’s past indiscretion (whether true or not) was extended to her informal contemporary classroom evaluation.

Another concern echoed among parents was her interaction with her fifth grade students. Mrs. Sommers, the mother of Erin Sommers, is a high school educated White woman who lives in the Beaver subdivision.

I don’t know the exchange, but what she ended up saying to the student was, “Learn or not, I’m still going to get a paycheck.” You know those kinds of things. You just shouldn’t say those things to a child. You just can’t have that type of teacher saying “I don’t care if you learn or you don’t, I’m still going to get paid.” That’s a problem.

The evidence surrounding Ms. Baker’s behavior could best be classified as second-hand. In my conversations with Principal Bell and other Cherry staff they acknowledged that complaints had been lodged but suggested they were largely false. Among the many conversations, formal and informal, they repeatedly tempered their discussion of Ms. Baker’s behavior with qualifying statements. For example Mrs. Sommers commented,

But the stories that I’ve heard, and that’s the thing that kind of bothers me, at first it did, there were just a lot of stories out there. Nobody really could substantiate a lot of it. “Like well I heard this and I heard that.” I don’t particularly like going on something that somebody heard about.

Almost all parents who discussed Ms Baker were careful to identify that their children were not personally mistreated by Baker. However, they also were careful to mention that they were interested in avoiding Ms Baker being their child’s teacher for the coming year. In the case of Ms. Baker the truthfulness of the evidence eventually became a secondary concern as Mr. Sommers reported, “... There is this huge groundswell of dissatisfaction and lack of support for this individual. It seems like with this many people

they just can't be out to get somebody." In the minds and the hearts of Cherry elementary parents, Ms. Baker was guilty. Though the crime itself had not been identified (I received a range of different stories and explanations) the process of assuring Ms Baker was not teaching *their* children was underway.

Alfie Kohn (1998) in his article in the Phi Delta Kappan describes how privileged parents throughout the nation have organized and lobbied to gain their desired educational programs, such as the retention of academic tracking. This finding has been replicated in smaller scaled studies as well (McGarth and Kuriloff 1999). Rolling Acres unlike many other school districts does not have talented and gifted programs, so parents attempts at educational customization occur in different elements of the curriculum, in this case, classroom placement.

Organizing

Through weak ties, certain families at Cherry Elementary mobilized against the placement of their child in Ms. Baker's room. As Horvat and colleagues (2003) noted, these well resourced parents' responses were collective. This collective response was spearheaded out of the Beaver subdivision, where a number of wealthy Cherry Elementary parents lived. They organized a petition that traveled door to door through the subdivision and eventually landed them a meeting with Principal Bell. As this organizing brewed, conspicuously absent from these parents were non-affluent and non-White parents. This stratified organizing is in part due to networks of parents, geographical proximity and organizational participation, all of which are tied to social class and race. This is because in many ways, the families of affluent and poor children in Rolling Acres live in two different worlds. Whether the exclusion of poor and minority families is intentional or not, I argue that in the process of affluent White parent's collective attempt to "customize" their children's educational opportunities, they influenced the potential opportunities of other families, particularly the non-wealthy and non-White families.

The central location for organizing against Ms. Baker was the Beaver subdivision. The Beaver subdivision is situated less than a mile from Cherry elementary and is a development that was constructed in the 1990s. The division is composed largely of

White families, but contains a significant Asian and Asian-American population.³⁶ I am not aware of a formal neighborhood organization, but the families with children in Cherry elementary generally knew each other. When interviewing parents for the project, interview subjects would make comments about other families that I should interview who were “just around the corner” or “right over there.” The familiarity with which families in the subdivision discussed each other’s children as well as their overlapping events represents a network of weak social ties (Granovetter 1973). Through these weak social ties, discussion about Ms. Baker developed and extended to parents who were willing to listen.

Approximately three miles from the Beaver subdivision lies Mulberry cooperative (co-ops) houses. The co-ops are low-income housing and are predominantly African-American. The Mulberry co-ops carry a negative reputation throughout Rolling Acres. This stigma operated across race lines. Ms. Coleman, an African-American parent who grew up in Rolling Acres and now resides in Mulberry co-ops, mentioned when she attended the local high school that, “We [the Black and White students] avoided the kids from Mulberry.” The unit was constructed in the late seventies and featured an un-manned security gate at its entrance. While in the Mulberry Co-ops I often saw children playing outside unsupervised, but I did not see artifacts of their presence like I did in the Beaver subdivision (e.g. toys and sports equipment). The families from Mulberry that attended Cherry elementary also showed strong degrees of connection between each other through weak ties. Ms. Coleman explained,

It’s always known, if you go up there [Cherry], you can check on mine and if I go up there I can check on yours [kids]. We sit and discuss the teachers and little issues that we might have. But that’s the extent. I’m concerned with mine, I love them all but mine is my concern.

Ms. Coleman is one of the more involved parents from the Mulberry co-op and I met her on several occasions at the school where she would pick up and drop off other Mulberry children. I also found her daughter Monique traveling with other Mulberry

³⁶ One limitation of my study is that I only interviewed Black and White families, which eliminated conversations with families from different backgrounds. I was unable to directly test the closeness of association between the Asian and Asian-American parents and the White parents in the Beaver subdivision. However, from interviews with the White families (both children and guardians) they rarely mentioned the Asian and Asian-American families as associates, which suggests to me that there was within subdivision separation between groups.

residents to school events. Ms. Coleman monitored her daughter and other neighborhood children but was most concerned with her daughter's well-being. This sentiment was shared by most Cherry parents and I do not think that rich, poor, White, or Black parents varied on this. However this sentiment became particularly consequential when there was information that could affect others' children as well as one's own and that information was withheld. Key information traveled selectively around the school community which was in part influenced by the separate social spaces that families inhabited.

Though both Beaver and Mulberry were close geographically to Cherry Elementary, it was clear that the experiences of families from Mulberry were different from those of Beaver. The school leadership, particularly Mrs. Bell attempted to integrate the Mulberry families into the workings of Cherry elementary but had only marginal success. When I asked Ms. Coleman about her relationship to the school and other parents, particularly the affluent ones, she responded,

The teachers seem open and loving, but I can't say that about all the parents. Not all of them are friendly, they're not rude, but they have their cliques, I noticed there. I've gone to the picnics all the years and never end up talking to anybody unless I dragged [another Mulberry residents] mom. They're there, they volunteer, I appreciate all their help, but they're not the friendliest people in the world. You know you gotta go out of your way, you have to go "Hey Ms. So and So." Otherwise they sit right next to you and not say a word.

Ms. Coleman grew up in Rolling Acres and by her own description "can talk to anybody." She said she was raised "in a melting pot", by a (racially) mixed family; still she felt that other parents, particularly affluent White mothers, did not accept her into their "clique." Ms. Coleman's comments demonstrate that parent participation, in and of itself, may not allow one to gain access to the social ties of certain networks.

In my interviews with residents of Mulberry as well as more affluent African-American families, none of them demonstrated any knowledge of the situation with Ms. Baker. The flow of information between parents of differing race and class backgrounds, despite engagement in school, appeared never to reach parents outside of the wealthy white subdivision of Beaver.³⁷ I also found in my follow-up interviews the Rosenberg family had little knowledge of the Ms. Baker situation. The Rosenbergs are an ethnically

³⁷ Other affluent white families who were not in the Beaver subdivision, such the Stone family, did have knowledge of the issues and organizing surrounding Ms. Baker.

and racially mixed family, Frank Rosenberg is a Jewish American White male and Katia Gonzalez is a Mexican American woman. When I mentioned the Ms. Baker situation after the close of our formal interview Mrs. Gonzalez stated, “I never heard about any of that [the petition, the organizing, the meeting with the principal]. I heard a parent mention something at a baseball game, but nothing like that.” As we talked I asked Mrs. Gonzalez about what she thought other parents at Cherry considered her son ethnically and racially. She responded, “Well they think of my son as White, but they don't know what I am? I've heard them whisper and wonder.” She continued to suggest that her ethnic identity as well as her husband's made them outsiders to the other White families at Cherry. Economically, the Rosenbergs were on par economically and exceeded many of the affluent parents of Beaver subdivision, but they were not fully socially integrated despite the fact their son played instruments, attended the same camps, played on the same sports teams. When asked about this exclusion and her son she responded, “I think it's the parents. They're racist. The kids, they don't care, they learn it from their parents.” Mrs. Gonzalez saw her family's unique ethnic identity as a stratifier at Cherry Elementary and in Rolling Acres as a whole. Many affluent White families in my study identified “diversity” (e.g. racial and economic) as one of the most desirable characteristics of the city, but the social networks that parents and children entertained were largely race and class homogeneous. It can be argued that the minority families in Rolling Acres were just as exclusive in their social relationships to Whites, but this is not entirely accurate. While minority parents did identify some hesitation in fully participating in the same spaces as affluent White families, they still encouraged their children's participation with students across racial and class lines. From interviews and observational data I noticed affluent White students would rarely go over to the houses of minority students, but minority students would travel to the affluent children's houses to play. In these ways, the lives of minority families at Cherry Elementary were distant from those of their affluent White schoolmates, and at best selectively integrated.

Though the intentions of parents in the Beaver subdivision and other affluent White neighborhoods may not have been to exclude other families from the issues surrounding Ms. Baker, the reality is that they did exclude families in raced and class-related ways. This is similar to findings in the area of work, race, and social networks

(Royster 2003). Without the knowledge of issues surrounding potential teachers, whether accurate or inaccurate, non-White and non-affluent parents were not provided the opportunity to collectively respond and potentially customize their children's educational experience.

Exit Options

In the minds of many Cherry parents, the assignment of their child to Ms. Baker's class was akin to a prison sentence. Repeatedly when I asked parents, "If your child does end up in Ms. Baker's class, what will you do?" They casually responded, "I'll pull her/him." Even among parents that expressed reservation at the validity of claims against Baker the response was largely the same. When I asked where parents would take their children the majority responded private schools. Others who, by their own definition, were not in a position to pay for private school suggested they would go to charter schools or attempt to get into another school district. One parent, Mrs. Stone commented that [Baker's] class next year would be full of "Asian kids" because "Asian parents" didn't expect public schools to "do everything." Stone's comment suggests that she and other parents were aware that their actions could potentially have effects on the distribution of students in classrooms. She, and other parents, viewed Asian families at the school as less concerned with which teacher their child received and thus they would end up in Ms. Baker's class. Though not the focus of this chapter, parents both Black and White at Cherry, often commented on the attitudes and behaviors of Asian and Asian-American families by drawing from the model-minority stereotype. While many White families in my sample seldom mentioned culture as a mechanism behind Black-White educational inequality, they often implicated "culture" as a reason for Asian and Asian-American student success. The strength of this mythology across groups, both Black and White, suggests that there are always multiple racial dynamics operating in the same space. Because of the limits of the project, I was not able to give full consideration to the role of Asian-Americans and other groups that may be seen as buffer to the relationships between Black and White, but in future projects this would be a worthwhile area to explore.

In the book *Exit, Voice, Loyalty* (1970) Albert Hirschman outlines the ways in which actors usually respond to organizational decline. The choice to exit at Cherry

school has significant race and class implications for classrooms as well as the school. At Cherry, affluent parents wielded the exit option throughout the process of developing and enacting a voice option (petition). While the exit option is not new to education, particularly urban education, the use of the exit option in this school setting is smaller on scale, but it is still very consequential. As I discussed in chapter four, parental pressure often affected decisions made in the district. While the collective actions described in chapter four were used to affect district-wide practice, parental pressure could also be found at the school level. At the building level, principals at both Cherry and River elementary expressed pressure to satisfy affluent White parents who consistently threatened exit. Though Cherry is a public school, monetary influence occurred via the PTA, by volunteering time, as well as donation of resources (e.g. guest lectures, classroom materials, treats, etc.). Additionally, principals lived under the district mandate to equalize student achievement outcomes without using racially based interventions. The result for Principal Bell in particular, and likely many administrators in heterogeneous school settings, was a delicate dance of listening, response, and selective action.

Responses to Organizing

At the close of the school year, three parents representing the petitioners, met with Mrs. Bell to discuss the issues with Ms. Baker. The meeting was a closed meeting so I was unable to attend. But the reaction of parents to this meeting was positive, but inconclusive. Mr. Sommers explained, "...The parents that met with the principal were reasonably satisfied with her handling how she said that she would handle the situation. Maybe the principal was not aware of everything and they were satisfied that they made her aware of it and the principal promised to watch her [Baker] very closely." This response was common among the parents that I interviewed following the meeting with Principal Bell. Each parent described it as an informational meeting between concerned parents and the principal.

Alternatively, when I asked Mrs. Bell about the meeting she looked at it very differently. She told me, "L'Heureux they were not interested in talking to Ms. Baker and they weren't interested in hearing that Ms. Baker was a good teacher. They weren't here for that." Bell described the meeting as one that was fueled by rumors and involved a number of incidents from Baker's past schools, which Mrs. Bell attributed to Cherry

parents having contacted parents at Baker's old schools. At the close of the meeting, Bell agreed to talk further with Baker about the incidents mentioned. The parents in the meeting assured Principal Bell that if their children, and the children of those who signed the petition, were assigned to Baker's classroom, they would leave Cherry Elementary.

The conversation that Bell had with Baker after the meeting with parents centered on the tensions that bubbled over amongst the Cherry parents. Principal Bell confided in Ms. Baker and informed her that if she taught the coming year, that she would be under high-scrutiny, "They'd be in the parking lot writing what time you [Baker] came, what time you left, what you did." After the conversation with Baker, Bell informed me that Baker would have the summer to decide to return, there were no formal charges against Baker, so the job of teaching fifth grade at Cherry elementary was still hers. However, Principal Bell said to me, "L'Heureux, I'm not sure why she would want to come back to this kind of environment. It would just make the job even tougher." When I asked Mrs. Bell if tussles with affluent families and schools in the Rolling Acres district were common, she responded, "You wouldn't believe if I told you. You haven't seen anything! It was even worse at my old school. The problem is that they [affluent parents] treat it like their private school." Mrs. Bell was careful to stress that it was not all affluent White parents who agitated in this manner. While this is an important distinction, I believe it is equally important to notice that the parents who were labeled by others as "complainers" and "agitators" gained social support and legitimacy from other parents who signed onto the petition and threatened exit. This flexing of social and cultural capital in part relies also on financial capital which would fund exit from Cherry a public school to a local private school or literally relocating to another house.

During a follow-up interview with Mrs. Jackson, the teacher I observed at Cherry, she informed some parents had become excited because they found out that Ms. Baker's name was not on the roster of fifth grade teachers. She explained this in a comical tone and then told me that Ms. Baker married over the summer, so those parents would be surprised in the fall.

At the end of the summer, families learned of their children's placement via postal mail. Prior to this mailing, some parents decided to dis-enroll in Cherry and attend a private school, under the fear of receiving Ms. Baker. When the mailing arrived, many

families were surprised and relieved to see that Ms. Baker's name was not listed as their assigned classroom when they skimmed for the line that was filled in with their child's teacher's name. This however was a “system error.” The letter that accompanied the mailing stated that Ms. Baker's married name appeared on the printed line. The letter continued to explain that Ms. Baker would be taking the first semester off for “medical leave” and would later return.³⁸ When I spoke with parents about Baker's absence and the substitute, there were mixed feelings. While questioning the cause of her “leave” and guessing she would not return, they still stressed that if Baker did return there would be an issue. In the meantime, they were very happy with the substitute for Ms. Baker, who coincidentally was a resident of the Beaver subdivision. Though parents’ political lobbying did not end as many desired – the firing of Baker, their lobbying did affect student classroom placement. Mrs. Jackson suggested to me that families that did not participate in classroom selection and school lobbying were funneled into the classroom that Baker was scheduled to teach. Though some individual families that organized and participated did end up in Baker's scheduled class, the message that these parents collectively sent to Cherry is not simply a response to Ms. Baker. The dissatisfaction that they voiced with their children's educational options is endemic of other voices of discontent that drive educational inequality in well-resourced settings.

Conclusion

What lessons can Rolling Acres provide the sociology of education and education policy? For sociology of education, this chapter establishes the power of race to affect social networks and demonstrates the subsequent unequal distribution of resources. Previous studies begin to articulate the importance of considering race and class differences in social network construction, but did not fully uncover how these differences can dialectically affect opportunities. Affluent White parents at Cherry elementary school were connected to rich social networks which they actively used to achieve a desired end. Even though minority families were connected to the same social networks, in a way, they did not contain the same information for decision making and

³⁸ Ms. Baker did never return from her medical leave. Her non-return was not discussed with parents at the school, to my knowledge. Instead the substitute worked the full limit of her hours available via contract then she team taught with another substitute for the remainder of the school year.

thus could not achieve the same ends as affluent parents. In this sense, Coleman's conception that individuals are not possessors of social capital, instead they are merely linked to networks that possess social capital is accurate. At the same time my data suggest these same parents who were connected to these networks did not have a unified desired end, but they were willing to allow the capital of the group to guide their actions to other ends (e.g. exiting the school). Their collective discontent and fear allowed them to operate in a cohesive manner, though each family varied in its individual desire for their child and Ms. Baker's fate. In Rolling Acres, multiple capitals converge to cumulatively advantage more well-off families.

On the surface differences in parental involvement in districts like Rolling Acres appear closely related to differing values, but this was not born out in my data. Instead, differences in parental involvement can in part be attributed to a complicated web of resources and stratification which occurs via information, treatment, organizing, and lobbying. In this chapter, I demonstrated that parental involvement is greatly influenced by social class and racial group membership. My work complicates the social class – parental involvement pathway that Lareau advances by demonstrating the intervening role of race. While Lareau's analysis would lead to the suggestion that middle class families, across race, are able to actualize social networks and cultural capital to customize children's education, this is not true. Instead, I found that middle class Blacks and low income Blacks both had issues with parental involvement that were not shared by their White counterparts. This is not to suggest that Black families across social class categories were treated the same, but it does suggest that race and social class mattered for the engagement of school and school related resources. My findings suggest issues of parental involvement and educational customization are not shaped by race **or** class; rather they are shaped by race **and** class.

The situations described in this chapter suggest that connections to schools and knowledge about school were differentially accessed by race and social class groups. In the case of Rolling Acres, affluent White families viewed their schools as a resource to be consumed and customized. As a result, the

For educational policy, a number of important lessons are gleaned. While education policy is often conceptualized at the national level, the local implementation is

key in affecting the relationship to resources. Schools hold the responsibility of educating all students, but as my data demonstrates, providing all families with the same information still may result in different coverage. The evenhandedness by which the Cherry and River Elementary attempted to conduct their relations with their families actually disadvantaged low-income and minority families in part due to time and educational levels. Additionally the adaptations that administrators and teachers performed to reduce unequal treatment (e.g. Friday folders, classroom placement forms, etc.) may have actually exacerbated inequality. Even in a district like Rolling Acres, differences in the backgrounds of families play an important role in determining the quality of experiences that children have with education. Assessment of the ways that families receive and react to information could aid understanding sociological and policy-related work on parental involvement by moving the literature beyond motivation based explanations or cultural arguments.

While my chapter explores micro-level issues of policy, my findings mirror a macro-level policy question currently under debate in many national dialogues: Does providing the same treatment to unequal groups reduce or maintain inequality? In the case of information and relationship to resources, I find that “equal treatment” can be unequal considering background differences. Additionally, interpersonal power struggles can affect access to information and potentially exacerbate inequality. Ultimately strong assessment and oversight of information could help to address some of these issues.

My sample of organically occurring race and class heterogeneous classrooms and schools allowed me to capture key insights regarding cultural and social capital that have been overlooked in past scholarship. In both Cherry Elementary and River Elementary, Black parents expressed concern about their relationships to school, in both formal and informal ways. Their racial category membership did not simply add a dimension to their thinking about education and discrimination. Instead their racial membership affected their relationship to the schools their children attended. With this finding, my work supports and updates past research on the importance of cultural capital in family-school relationships. Additionally, informal interpersonal relationships, or lack thereof, can affect the distribution of social capital. My case study demonstrates that social capital can be concentrated in geographic spaces such as subdivisions which limits access to non-

proximal residents. Collectively, my analyses demonstrate that processes that support educational inequality often are relational. Examining inequality in a segmented or non-natural ways can miss these subtle interactions and their influence on relationship to resources and educational inequality overall.

Chapter Six

Community and Opportunity

In the previous chapter, I discussed the role of social networks and how they affect relationship to resources of Rolling Acres residents. I now turn my attention to the ways in which social location, particularly neighborhoods, affect the outlooks of Black and White children in Rolling Acres Public Schools. The students of Rolling Acres Public Schools spend seven hours a day in their school building and nine months receiving instruction. While many lay explanations of educational inequality rely on differences in treatment in schools, considerable social scientific research suggests the out of school environment contributes to educational inequality. Neighborhoods and families are the out of school contexts that have received the most scholarly attention (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber 1997). In Rolling Acres, the social distance between Black and White students is central to understanding their divergent perspectives towards education and opportunities at large. In this chapter, I explore the layers of Black-White social relations and social distance's role in shaping what I call *envisioned futures*. I achieve this by discussing general residential patterns in Rolling Acres of Black and White families. I interrogate the distance between groups through the lens of segregation, desegregation and integration. I then deliver a comparative case study of the experiences of one Black and one White boy who are classmates at River elementary, but come from two different neighborhoods. Large parts of the data for this chapter are drawn from my in-depth shadowing of a sub-sample of Black and White boys. I use these two cases as illustrative of the distances, both physical and interpersonal that shape typical Black-White relations in Rolling Acres.³⁹

³⁹ In this chapter, I discuss "Black" and "White" families, but my sample contained a number of multiracial families. This analysis is not reifying the one-drop rule that has long been employed in America (Davis 1991), but I seek to maintain some emic perspective on race relations in Rolling Acres. Within the ecology of Rolling Acres, these multiracial children were often interpreted as "Black."

This chapter is designed to unravel the complex web of assumptions that underlay research on educational inequality. Popular press representations of educational achievement gaps in well resourced cities suggest the persistence of these gaps in the face of racial and economic progress is bewildering (Fletcher 2001). My goal is to unpack this conundrum by demonstrating the multiple paths that social distance serves to impair the realization of educational opportunities for African-Americans in Rolling Acres.

After the publication of the Coleman Report (1966), sociological research began to seriously investigate the role of the family in educational inequality. This concentration on the family was later expanded to explore the domain that immediately surrounds the family, the neighborhood. Most work on neighborhoods has concentrated on the role of neighborhoods in high poverty areas (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber 1997; Wilson 1987). Through a qualitative comparison of the Stone Hinge neighborhood and the Vista Ridge neighborhood, I argue neighborhoods influence educational outlooks and perceptions of (in)equality in economically heterogeneous settings, even for children as young as fourth grade. My selection of the Vista Ridge and Stone Hinge neighborhoods represents the typical form of residential housing for White and Black respondents from my sample. My work serves to extend contemporary urban school ethnographies, which often depict schools and neighborhoods as highly segregated both economically and racially to the point where comparisons are nearly impossible. I bridge this gap by exploring the social terrain of students from heterogeneous backgrounds.

Re-Interrogating Neighborhoods and Schooling

In *Class and Schools* (2004), Richard Rothstein argues that the educational achievement gap remains, in large part, because larger social disparities outside of school (e.g. health disparities, economic disparities, and disparities in residential location) have become intransigent. Though Rothstein's thesis is not entirely revolutionary, it does appropriately recalibrate the lens of analysis of educational inequality away from simply school-based remedies to education reforms nested within the larger social world. While discussions of educational inequality often gain traction by centering on characteristics such as class-size, curriculum, and school-size, they neglect the world that surrounds the

Additionally, the multiracial students in my sample were considerably closer economically and spatially to the African-American families in my sample.

institution of school, providing a limited understanding of what influences educational experiences. A careful discussion of out-of-school factors' relationship outlooks towards opportunity in a heterogeneous (race and class) setting such as Rolling Acres can add richness to the literature on the lives of low-income and minority families.

Neighborhoods have become a focus of sociological and educational studies, but in very limited ways. If we are going to understand the role of social settings on not only academic achievement but also on orientations we must look carefully at the processes that children and parents negotiate daily. While the current United States policy environment is centered on “inputs” (e.g. funding, class size) and “outputs” (achievement test scores, school drop-outs) there are many processes that mediate the relationship between inputs and outputs that are under-explored. Different theoretical, analytical, and empirical strategies are needed to make sense of the contemporary terrain of educational inequality.

For the above reasons, I am interested in providing a different discussion of the ways that neighborhoods matter for schooling. My research goes beyond these traditional measures of social distance (e.g. indices of dissimilarity and exposure) and interrogates the interpersonal relations between Black and Whites students with an eye for structural influences. I analyze these social distances among neighborhoods, extracurricular activities, and within school outside of instructional interaction. While discussions about neighborhoods, poverty, and culture have been historically ripe with debate (Wilson 1987), it is important to seriously consider the role of culture when exploring schooling. I build on past work that explored the relationship between marginalized social positions and culture for my discussion of children's values, norms, and beliefs (Young 2004). Additionally I introduce the concept of envisioned future to expand current vocabulary on the process behind identifying potential opportunities. Though my project is not a neighborhood based study, I found that residents' views on education were influenced by the worlds that surrounded them. In the following pages I review recent literature on the role of neighborhoods as they relate to schooling.

Neighborhood Effects

Studies of urban space are a cornerstone of analysis of sociological inquiry. Early studies were concerned with structural and cultural variations imposed on residents by

geographic location (Drake and Cayton 1993; Du Bois, Anderson, and Eaton 1996). Since these early studies, methods have advanced that allow the estimation of neighborhood characteristics net of individual characteristics. These highly technical methods however are not without debate and limitations (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002).

The basic model advanced by neighborhood effects advocates is the contagion model of negative factors (Mayer et al. 1989; Wilson 1987). This model when applied to education argues that concentrated neighborhood characteristics such as poverty and joblessness, are negatively associated with educational outcomes. By extension, African-Americans tend to be disproportionately located in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty which implicates space as a factor in educational disparities. Despite the logic of this model, there has been inconsistent empirical evidence on the role of negative neighborhood characteristics on educational outcomes (Ainsworth 2002).

Contrastingly, recent empirical research has demonstrated that concentration of advantageous factors, or concentrated affluence, contributes more to our understanding of educational inequality ((Johnson 2003; Massey 1996). As this literature emerges, the mechanisms through which concentrated affluence conveys positive effects are yet explored. Johnson (2006) offers a unique addition to discussions of neighborhoods and affluence by introducing his theory of proximal capital. He argues that increased proximity to capital, human capital in particular, can lead to increased benefits under optimal conditions. Based on quantitative studies and qualitative inference, Johnson's theory of proximal capital has not been fully tested. In the same ways that the contagion model of neighborhoods is logical but inconsistent, proximal capital theory may fall prey to the same inconsistencies.

The aforementioned theories of space and youth development fail to adequately consider how spatial variation within standard strata (neighborhoods, census tracts, etc.) holds meaning for youth. Additionally, by simply quantifying neighborhood factors, the research literature has underplayed the ways that neighborhood factors are often complimented by family factors to affect the ways that youth understand and experience the world. My selection of Rolling Acres and its neighborhoods provide an ideal test for the exploration of space and capital.

Affluence and Poverty

The Gautreaux program and Moving to Opportunity, a set of prominent experiments, guide current sociological knowledge about the role of affluence on formally impoverished families. The Gautreaux program, the result of 1976 court decision, provided residents of the Chicago Housing Authority section 8 vouchers to relocate to suburban areas. The movement of these residents was meticulously researched using both quantitative and qualitative evidence to test the theory of “geography of opportunity” (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). While the Gautreaux relocation was a housing based program, Rubinowitz and colleagues found important connections between residential location and education. The participants of the program found that the standards of suburban schools far exceeded those in their original inner-city schools. The children’s prior skill levels made it difficult for them to stay afloat in their new schools. In part due to this skills gap, many formally poor Black students wound up in special education. Their placement in special education demonstrates not only under-preparedness based on the inner-city schools, but also the ways that many suburban schools are ill-equipped to deal with heterogeneity in student skill levels. Despite this, parents felt that the schools in suburban locations provided more attention to their children. Most students who moved to suburban schools did not experience increased educational performance, but this is likely because of their prior skills deficit.

The Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment was based on a voucher-based relocation program. Evaluation of MTO utilized quasi-experimental design to estimate the importance of relocation on a host of outcomes ranging from education to crime. Overall, the effects of relocation from a high-poverty setting to a lower poverty setting were positive, but the magnitude of the effects varied from domain to domain and in a few cases there were increases in negative behaviors (Kling and Liebman 2004; Sanbonmatsu et al. 2007). Research on MTO found greater positive effects of relocation on education for girls than boys. The majority of post-move data that was collected was quantitative, so there is still work being done to understand the qualitative processes that informed the observed effects. The Gautreaux program and the MTO experiment provide preliminary evidence that relocation to suburban spaces is no panacea, particularly when it comes to educational outcomes. While these studies are highly regarded in policy and

sociology circles, it is important to note that these studies *cannot* tell us about the experiences of youth who are raised in poverty but attend well resourced schools. This daily traversing of poverty and privilege, arguably, leads to a different outlook on opportunity and the world that surrounds these children.

Pattillo-McCoy's (1999) work on the Black middle class provides the best theoretical prior for my investigation of low-income residents nested in areas of proximal privilege. Pattillo-McCoy's work was conducted in an all Black middle class neighborhood, which she calls Groveland. She found that residents of Groveland, particularly youth, were located between "privilege and peril". Black youth, in Black middle class neighborhoods, had greater opportunities than those locked into neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. These opportunities included access to networks of professionals who could connect them to jobs, but they were also close to the issues that mired high poverty neighborhoods such as crime, violence, and joblessness. Her research is based on late adolescents and young adults. For this reason, I am cautious to assume that her finding of dialectical residential location apply in the same ways for younger children because they experience neighborhoods differently (Connell and Halpern-Felsher 1997). Additionally, the children in my sample attend schools that are of higher quality than those found in many Chicago neighborhoods. These differences in age and educational institution quality lead to interesting theoretical and empirical divergences between my and Pattillo-McCoy's work.

There is considerable room for contribution to discussions of neighborhoods and their meaning for education-related processes. Previous research identified the roles of concentrated poverty and affluence, the effects of re-location, and the dialectical nature of neighborhoods for non-poor Blacks as the key to understanding inequality. The degree to which low-income and Black residents are incorporated into the social fabric of everyday life in affluent settings lies at the core of conversations on post-Civil Rights equality. Being located in the same social spaces as well-resourced individuals does not appear to yield large scaled improvements over the low-income neighborhoods that Blacks are traditionally located in. I argue a key reason is that African-Americans are often not fully incorporated into the social landscape of these spaces. These barriers to opportunity serve

to segment lives and subsequently opportunities that may appear to be “ripe for picking” in spaces of improved geographic opportunity.

Segregation, Desegregation, and Integration

The concepts of segregation, desegregation and integration are central to conversations about race and ethnic relations. While the meaning of segregation is commonly agreed upon, there is no consensus on the differences between desegregation and integration. In social science and historical work, it is common to hear the terms used interchangeably. Books such as J. Harvie Wilkinson’s *From Bakke to Brown: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954- 1978* use these terms as substitutes. Slips in language such as these can be costly for our understanding of social distance between groups. Following recent legal reasoning, I challenge this blurring and argue desegregation and integration are distinct analytic concepts.⁴⁰ I rely on the following as working definitions of the concepts of segregation, desegregation and integration for my project.

Sociology traditionally defines segregation as the unequal distribution of groups in a given social space (e.g. neighborhoods, schools, etc). Legal theory distinguishes between two forms of segregation: 1) de jure which refers to legally allowed segregation between groups and 2) de facto which refers to non-legally supported, but still present segregation between groups. Alternatively, desegregation in the public policy lexicon commonly refers to urban policies, both federal and local, over the past thirty years aimed at reducing the unequal distribution of groups (Massey and Denton 1993; Orfield, Eaton, and Harvard Project on School Desegregation 1996). In essence, it is the process of removing or reducing barriers that support segregation between groups, most often through legal processes. However, the process of desegregation is not synonymous with integration. Desegregation policies are lynchpins in the pathway to integration of formally segregated spaces. Integration refers to the unfettered social relations between different groups into the same desegregated social spaces (e.g. neighborhoods, schools,

⁴⁰ The language used in the Brown decision lends to the interchangeable use of desegregation and integration. While the Justices at the time may not have seen a need to distinguish between the terms, I depart from this type of thinking because my project is about unpacking the distances between the lives of Black and White families.

social networks, etc.). While desegregation is largely a legal matter (e.g. *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority*), integration largely is a matter of social relations in desegregated spaces. Even with the passing of desegregation legislation, these policies cannot mandate interpersonal relationships.

Common discussions of Rolling Acres and spaces like it discuss it as integrated. Through an analysis of the social distances in housing stock, educational experiences, and outlooks, I argue that Rolling Acres is segregated. While policy levers such as school desegregation were implemented in the district, the lives of youth in 2006 remained separate and there were few spaces where youth integrated. My interpretation of Rolling Acres as segregated runs counter to the city's prevailing narrative, which portrays it as a diverse racial utopia. In the following sections, I interrogate the layers of social relations to understand the meaning of segregation in this small city and its implication for education related functions.

Segregation and Schooling

Currently, educational policy discussions are focused on segregation between districts. However, an equally important area of inquiry involves interrogating the role of segregation within districts and schools. Unfortunately the current reliance on secondary analyses of quantitative measures of social distance is inadequate for meaningfully advancing dialogue about the importance of economic and racial diversity. Point-in-time estimates of social distance such as segregation indices crudely estimate the degree to which people from different race and class background interact. They cannot inform us of the *quality* of these interactions and the effects of this social distance on children in both the short term and long term.

I chose to study Rolling Acres, in part, because it reflects larger trends where African-Americans are increasingly located in non-high poverty areas. While economic and racial heterogeneity are increasing in cities overall, this increased diversification is not always reflected at the neighborhood or school level. Research on neighborhoods and school composition reveal that most Black students now attend schools that are more segregated than schools were during the era of Jim Crow (Frankenburg, Lee, and Orfield 2003). This type of gross segregation however masks some of the heterogeneity of experience for Black children outside of central cities. Social demographers have recently

begun to re-explore segregation that exists not only between the average schools that Blacks and Whites attend, but also within school districts. The most recent set of analyses on national within district school segregation argue that segregation between White and minority students increased between 1985-1995 (Reardon, Yun, and Eitle 2000; Reardon and Yun 2001). This increase in within school district segregation is driven by Whites attending more White schools. Reardon and colleagues show that segregation has reduced between minority groups but remains high between Whites and non-Whites. These findings underscore the importance of looking at how social distance within districts matters.

Measuring Social Distance in Rolling Acres

Social distance can be measured in various forms (e.g. segregation, desegregation policies, integration), at different levels of analysis (e.g. city, school district), and in different domains (e.g. neighborhoods, schools, social networks). By many metrics social relations between Blacks and Whites have improved since the era of Jim Crow segregation, but it is important to examine the contemporary forms of social distance. Additionally, considering the ways that these legacies of segregation and inter-group conflict affect or inform the worlds that fourth graders inhabit today is equally important. There are several traditional measures of social distance and each contributes uniquely to revelations on the cleavages between Black and Whites in Rolling Acres.

At the city level, Rolling Acres can be classified as moderately segregated when using the index of dissimilarity (Massey and Denton 1993). Approximately 37 out of 100 residents in the city would need to move to have an equal distribution of Black and White residents among neighborhoods according to the 2000 Census. This metric, though useful to a degree, may be misleading if taken as the sole indicator of social distance between Blacks and Whites. The index of dissimilarity is based on the census tract, which is too large of a unit of analysis for neighborhoods in Rolling Acres. While in major metropolises (e.g. Los Angeles, New York City, etc.) census tracts proxy well for neighborhoods, this is not the case for Rolling Acres. Inside of census tracts, multiple communities exist that generally are economically and racially segregated. These communities usually are composed of multiple neighborhoods bounded by individual cul-de-sacs or subdivisions.

The majority of my interviews were conducted in families' homes. In these travels, residents described their neighborhoods using small classifications such as streets, subdivisions and other man made boundaries (e.g. cul-de-sacs). Additionally, children in my sample discussed their neighborhoods in terms of the places they were allowed to travel with or without their parent's permission. These geographic spaces were small in scale, approximately 15-20 households. For my case studies, I concentrate on two neighborhoods that represent the larger residential patterns of Black and White residents in Rolling Acres.

The careful engineering of space in Rolling Acres was most evident among the subdivisions in which many White residents lived. While traveling to the varying subdivisions constructed in the 1990s, I found myself confusing the nature-based names and manicured lawns. Even when I entered a new neighborhood I experienced a strange sense of déjà vu. Contrastingly, the Black residents' neighborhoods were much less aesthetically homogenous. Among both home owners and renters, neighborhoods were densely populated but their construction usually dated back to the 1960s or the 1970s. Black residents in my sample typically lived in cul-de-sacs or subsidized housing. In both cases, neighborhoods often featured children playing outside unsupervised, and cars in disrepair. The yards in Black communities were not overgrown with grass, but they lacked the careful landscaping present among most White neighborhoods such as small lanterns that illuminated driveways or carefully trimmed shrubbery. The differences in the aesthetic appearance between Black and White neighborhoods only begin to convey the differences between the worlds of families.

According to the index of exposure calculated using 2000 Census figures Whites lived in neighborhoods that were 76 percent White and 8 percent Black in comparison to Blacks who lived in neighborhoods that were 65 percent Black and 16 percent White. It is common for Blacks have more exposure to Whites than Whites have to Blacks in urban sociology (Charles 2003). While each Black neighborhood would be sprinkled with low numbers of White residents, it was rare to find Black families located among the neighborhoods in which Whites resided. In part, this can be attributed to the average difference in housing value as well as residents' incomes. It is important to note that among the Black residents' neighborhoods, even in the highest poverty locations such as

the Chestnut houses, the construction and feel of them was distinct from housing developments in major cities such as towering housing projects in Chicago or New York (Venkatesh 2000). Subsidized housing in Rolling Acres was low rise and more akin to scattered site housing. Rolling Acres' pockets of poverty were small and thus had low concentrations of poverty. In this way, subsidized housing did not dramatically clash with the architectural aesthetic of communities, but the social stigma of public housing remained about these communities and about their residents. Additionally, these poverty pockets were still composed of largely poor African-Americans.

While social distance in Rolling Acres looks somewhat different than in major cities, Rolling Acres' ecology allows for interesting comparisons. While most Blacks in RA live in Black neighborhoods and Whites live in White neighborhoods, however schools are arguably desegregated (at the school racial composition level, not within schools though). I am interested in how these distances and potential proximities relate to youth and adults experiences with schooling and opportunity. In the following pages I discuss residents' perceptions of housing patterns, quality of schools, as well as thoughts on the processes/prospects of desegregation.

Residential Location and Opportunity

Many of the White families in my sample discussed moving to Rolling Acres for jobs or educational options. Even those who were born and raised in Rolling Acres had traveled away, even if it was just to attend college. Contrastingly, my Black respondents who were raised in the area of Rolling Acres did not move far from Rolling Acres. For the residents who did move, it was usually to neighboring cities, less than an hour away. Though Black respondents did transition in and outside of Rolling Acres this was largely a cause of economic necessity, not the pursuit of opportunities such as better employment options or better housing stock. For these reasons Black respondents consistently discussed Rolling Acres as more desirable than the other areas that they moved to when they were not residing in Rolling Acres. For these Black parents, Rolling Acres' school system offered more educational options for their children. Black parents' characterization of educational quality in the RAPS revealed an interesting and textured portrait of schooling. When I asked Mrs. Downing, an African-American mother, about her perception of why other Black parents desired to be in Rolling Acres she responded,

You know kids just have a better opportunity in Rolling Acres as far as another white person look at you, if you say you are from [a neighboring industrial city] or say from Rolling Acres they [White people] look at you better.

Mrs. Downing's belief that Rolling Acres schools were more desirable to Whites than neighboring cities is particularly important when considered within the context of work and opportunity. Wilson (1987) demonstrated that in major metropolitan areas employers discriminated against residents from low-income housing areas. This type of discrimination utilizes the ecological fallacy by assuming the negative characteristics associated with an area (e.g. subsidized housing facilities, low skills producing schools, etc.) reflect the skill levels of all residents. In this case, residents of neighboring cities would be potentially discriminated against, while residents of Rolling Acres comparatively would have a good chance for opportunity at employment. For Black residents in and around Rolling Acres this discrimination was real. Black residents raised in the area often referenced experiencing discrimination when seeking employment and other negative treatment based upon their perceived identity.

When asked about the choice to locate to Rolling Acres, Mrs. Downing explained that she and Mr. Downing inherited the house that they lived in, in the Vista Ridge cul-de-sac from Mr. Downing's mother who was deceased. The Downings enjoyed the Vista Ridge neighborhood because they were familiar with the other families on the cul-de-sac and had close social ties. Close associations were common amongst Black families who lived in predominantly Black areas and among White families living in predominantly White areas. These close relationships often involved exchange of children between households, relationship with children's close friends' parents, and consistent communication about neighborhood happenings.

She continued on to discuss the influx of Black residents and the realities that these families faced in RAPS.

But Rolling Acres is getting worse. It used to be you would rather your kids go to Rolling Acres because you think they get taught better or more but that is not true. I see a lot more black people moving from Rolling Acres. [But] kids [are] going back to [neighboring industrial city] schools. All schools are ran different and Rolling Acres schools are harder, you know, they give kids more work....To me that [the academic press of RAPS] is excellent you know. They give kids more work in Rolling Acres than they do anywhere.

The desire to transition into Rolling Acres for improved educational opportunity for their children was a theme commonly shared by other Black respondents in my sample. This desire was often challenged by the realities that Black students faced in RAPS. Mrs. Downing provides a rather nuanced understanding of the actual quality of education offered in RAPS. The common perception that “high performing” school districts “teach” better for her is untrue. However she notes that students in RAPS received a higher level of academic press, relative to other school systems. This statement of mixed sentiments represents a view held by many of the Black parents in my sample. While this may appear dissonant, in reality these sentiments are appropriate when considering the average performance of Black students in the RAPS relative to Whites. While RAPS is a strong school district, as recognized by national awards, this “strength” rarely “trickled down” to Black students. Black students consistently under-performed relative to their White counterparts and the gap in pass rates between the average Black and White student was approximately 16 to 23 percent on the state standardized test. Thus, in Black parents’ views, Rolling Acres was a strong district for White children, but much less successful with Black children. Though Mrs. Downing did not see Rolling Acres as the ideal academic environment for her child, there were still positives beyond academics. Mrs. Downing suggested that the athletic exposure was a positive of attending public schools in Rolling Acres. This belief in sports leading to academic opportunity was one echoed by other low-income Black and White families in my sample. Even with athletic advantage, the role of race continued to loom large in Black parent’s conception of the value of attending RAPS.

L’Heureux: You said you like some of the qualities Rolling Acres has like if you are a good athlete folks are going to take notice. Are there other things you can think of?

Mrs. Downing: That’s about it. There ain’t nothing else to really like about Rolling Acres if you are Black.

For Mrs. Downing, and many of my Black respondents, RAPS drew families to the area, but did not fulfill its academic promise. The Downing’s, in this case, found alternative ways to discuss the utility of the educational system. Her view of the ill treatment that Black students received relative to non-Black students was consistently

echoed. On one occasion, I arrived at the Towles' house for an interview. Upon my arrival Ms. Towles was in the living room with another Black parent who was seated on the couch. Ms. Towles introduced me and said, "This is Mr. Lewis, he's going to find an answer to the Rolling Acres' achievement gap." With the completion of her statement, she and her guest broke into laughter. Their laughter reminded me that African-Americans in Rolling Acres had developed unique coping strategies for dealing with enduring educational inequality. In Rolling Acres, both Black and White families casually acknowledged the achievement gap and often scoffed at the potential to reduce it. As I discussed in chapter four, the achievement gap was a prominent local topic that many residents had resolved would not be eliminated through school district policy.

Despite a lack of faith in district wide efforts to rectify achievement disparities, many African-American families found innovative ways to address African-American underperformance. Mr. Downing suggested a unique way to navigate around the unequal educational experience that Black children faced.

I love Proctor school [local alternative school] that we have here. They take the kids in the eighth grade, I mean it's like 300 kids, if that, in that school. And they outline that school for problematic children. And I have a nephew, a daughter, nephew and two daughters that have gone through that school, graduated from there and [it] has done wonderful. One just graduated this year; she is going to be getting into [a local community college]. She has got numerous scholarships to get into that college.

He continued on to explain what he valued in the alternative high school versus the traditional high school,

[I know] you can't put twelve different little alternate schools but you can, seems like you should be able to put that type of teachers, those types of teachers or administrators in those buildings that is going to give these children an opportunity and give them a sense of, "hey I am here for a reason and the reason is to get this education. I don't care what they say about me or how I act, I am going to get this education."

Mr. Downing attributed the success of the alternative school to leadership and teacher quality. Implicit in his statement was the belief that the traditional schools that Rolling Acres provided were too large and that teachers did not provide sufficient mentorship to students, particularly Black students. He concentrated on the idea that these

teachers instilled a greater sense of possibility in children at the local alternative high school. Mr. Downing's assessment of Proctor school as strong school for Black students was not simply opinion, it was well founded. Under the guidance of its current administration, Proctor high school had developed a national reputation as an exemplar in student relations and parental involvement. While this acclaim is noteworthy, it is also important that Proctor school had the largest concentration of African-American students (65%) out of all the city's schools.

Proctor school was one of few sites that African-Americans themselves identified as working well for Black students upon entry to the district. However, Proctor did not represent an answer all to the needs of Black families. Students arrived to Proctor High School when they were removed from one of the traditional schools, most commonly for behavioral and emotional issues. This over-representation of Black students in an alternative school setting in some ways was a double edged sword. On the negative side, it is unlikely that such a disproportionate number of African-American students among the student body had behavioral or emotional needs. Their over-representation also reflects a process of differentiation that likely discriminated against Black students. On the positive side, by being placed at Proctor school students received a smaller school and likely more attention from school staff.

Mr. Downing's comments represent two important phenomenons: 1) Black parents were concerned about the education that their children received in RAPS and 2) due to limited opportunities, Black parents were lead to identify alternative educational strategies for school success. These two themes in particular may reflect the partial "creaming" of the Black population present in Rolling Acres when compared to Black families located in less economically desirable locations. Unfortunately, the alternative paths to Black academic success occurred at the individual family level. While the district in middle school and high school had formal methods for informing and involving Black families; at the elementary level, Black response to educational inadequacies was piecemeal. Not all Black families had extensive knowledge of the RAPS system like the Downings did, so they would not be able to negotiate their way to ideal educational environments. Additionally, the alternative path that Mr. Downing suggested occurred at the secondary level, while the achievement disparities were present between groups

throughout primary school. As a result, the adaptations that Black parents utilized on behalf of their children were only partial solutions to disparities of returns to education. The long standing issue of educational inequality in Rolling Acres Public Schools in part can be traced to the role of segregation. While the city as a whole looked desegregated, the inability of groups to integrate remained apparent.

Thoughts on Desegregation and Integration

The process of desegregation was undertaken several times in Rolling Acres, but the full realization of integration did not occur. Mr. Downing, who grew up in Rolling Acres, nostalgically remembered his youth as part of the first Black students bused in Rolling Acres during the era of school desegregation.

I was part of the integration in Rolling Acres back in the '60's and going to White schools by sixth grade year. That is when I got introduced to soccer and to golf, badminton. You know because of the fact once I made friends on that side of town, I would ride my bike and they had badminton rackets and stuff. . . and golf also. We were always in the local golf course...

Mr. Downing reflected that he had high amounts of interracial contact as a result of desegregation efforts. This sharing of social spaces with White families did not occur naturally or quickly. Mr. Downing recounted as a child African-Americans were concentrated in the westside of Rolling Acres. He estimated that approximately 30 families were routed to predominantly White schools on the opposite side of town. Upon arrival at the school, Mr. Downing recalled that White adults held the most opposition to busing and when he arrived at school they called him and other students racial epithets. The racial tensions and controversy over the busing occurred largely outside of school. Inside of school, Mr. Downing suggested that White students, shortly after his arrival, warmed to his and other Black students' presence. As a result, he held very fond memories of the friendships that he accrued with White Rolling Acres residents. According to him, these friendships extended beyond the time they spent in school and trickled into the out-of-school lives.

Mr. Downing's characterization of the desegregation and integration as successful may only have been his individual experience or an inaccurate reconstruction of the past. Had desegregation efforts affected the distribution of groups in Rolling Acres and affected social relations in a significant manner, the district likely would not have been

forced to desegregate schools again in 1985 and 1997. While Mr. Downing provided no explanation for the current state of segregation between students, he did acknowledge that RAPS in 2006 was once again undergoing a gradual process of school desegregation of which his son LeBron was a part. He paralleled his experience to his son's,

So I mean, once again, I was probably in the '66 [desegregation], twenty years later I have a friend who works for the [RAPS] transportation department and here he is, a bus driver, desegregating the schools again, twenty years later. And I try to explain to him [LeBron], you know, he is a part of desegregation, you know, he just doesn't realize it and [when] he looks back, and when they do it again 20 years from now. When they build this new high school, I guarantee that will segregate some more. I mean it is going to make segregation aplenty again because they put it in an affluent neighborhood. [They] should have never had it there.

Mr. Downing was well aware the attempts at desegregation that he pioneered had not endured, having experienced school desegregation first hand and having spoken with his friend who bussed children in Rolling Acres from predominantly Black neighborhoods to predominantly White schools. From his perspective, there was a cycle to desegregation that he saw renewed by the inability to desegregate housing stock and a lack of integration. He observed this cycle first hand as an African-American child in RAPS and now he patiently watched his son pass through a similar process. Unlike Mr. Downing's experience though, LeBron displayed few connections to his White schoolmates. The processes of desegregation and integration that Mr. Downing claimed as success from his childhood were absent from LeBron's life, both inside and outside of school.

Case Studies

In the following pages I use a comparative case study methodology focusing on two boys and their families in Rolling Acres to demonstrate the importance of social distance for youths' lives. I now introduce you to two boys, one Black (LeBron Downing), one White (Danny Morris). At the first glance, the boys are similar in educational disposition, love for sports, and demeanor. However, I argue their similarities are molded into different envisioned futures because of their out of school worlds. For LeBron and Danny, this means family, neighborhoods, and extracurricular activities matter for their orientations and behaviors. Danny and LeBron's interactions amongst

their peers outside of school were marked in raced and classed ways, which bled into their scholastic lives, oftentimes “below the radars” of teachers and administrators. In the following sections, I look closely at the worlds that surround LeBron and Danny. The lives of Danny and LeBron are emblematic of typical Black and White children in Rolling Acres, but there remain idiosyncratic dimensions of each child’s life. To add to the robustness of their lives and social meaning across the lives of Black and White children, I selectively supplement their narrative to show connections to the larger groups that they represent.

Future Selves

A common socialization message to children is “You can be anything you want to be.” When asked about their futures’ children often express great hope about their future careers and educational plans. These expressions of their hopes generally operate with little regard for the social realities or constraints that surround them. Looking simply at the possible futures that children envision only provides a partial picture of what their future could entail. Simple looking at aspirations does not allow one to see the processes involved in conceptualizing and pursuing future opportunities. As social scientists, a relevant question remains, what is the distance between *possible futures* and *probable futures*? Psychological theories of future orientation address part of this question by exploring the role of possible selves also known as future selves in regulating behavior. Possible selves essentially are conceptions of the person that one seeks to be in the future. Individuals identify and pursue multiple possible selves as they mature and move towards adulthood (Nurmi 1991). While this look at future selves is helpful, it is limited by its overly individual perspective and its lack of consideration of social surroundings. Classical future selves theory posits individuals’ future selves are defined by an individual’s past and current experiences. Based on these past experiences, the individual develops possible selves that he or she will strive towards by developing and enacting a plan to achieve their possible selves.

Recent works in the psychological literature on future orientation have concentrated on the maintenance of multiple future selves (Hoyle and Sherrill). This literature has additionally been dominated by research on adolescents by developmental psychologists. These expansions of the theory have been at the expense of explorations of

future selves with consideration of constraints on social opportunity. Contrastingly in the sociological literature, work on future selves has been closely tied to the literature on worldviews. Young's (2006) work on the constructive and projective realms provides an important theoretical distinction and point of departure (Young 2006). The constructive realm refers to general understandings of the operation of the world and the openness of the opportunity structure. Contrastingly, the projective realm captures the individual's understanding of their ability to navigate through the world towards social opportunity. The multiple realms through which opportunity is understood can help to clarify how individual locate themselves and actions within social structures. Even with the expansion of psychological and sociological work on the future lives, these investigations concentrate on adolescence or adulthood and there has been little discussion of how children understand and pursue their future selves and lives (for exception see (MacLeod 1995)).

To mediate these psychological and sociological literatures on future selves, I introduce *envisioned futures*. I am interested in interrogating and explicating the processes that lie behind the construction and pursuit of future selves. In this chapter I explore envisioned futures in two domains: education and occupation. My conception is designed to compliment and extend psychological conceptions of future orientation, while providing a meso-sociological perspective on the intersection of possible futures and futures that youth are likely to encounter due to their social location.

Danny Morris

On most days at River Elementary, I found Danny in a hooded sweatshirt emblazoned with colleges' athletic insignia. Danny espoused his love for hockey, baseball, and many other sports—with hockey serving as his true love. Danny stood shorter than most of his classmates, but any day at recess you could see his acorn brown hair and porcelain skin as he ran around on the field. For Danny and his parents, sports were a major part of their daily routines and his future life plans, even if he did not become a professional athlete.

The Stone Hinge neighborhood that Danny lived in looked like many other neighborhoods where White families in Rolling Acres resided: manicured lawns, carefully plotted houses, characterized by serenity. One resident of Stone Hinge joked

with me, “I wouldn’t know the difference between them [the varying subdivisions in Rolling Acres] either, except that I live here.” On the day of our first interview, I arrived at the Morris’ house in Stone Hinge prior to Danny and his mother who were returning from a sports practice. I parked my car, walked to the door and rang the bell, but received no answer. As I returned to my car and sat, I noticed the quiet of the neighborhood. To my surprise, the neighborhood was littered with skateboard ramps, basketball hoops, and plastic toys but no one was outside on this sunny afternoon.⁴¹ Across the street from the Morris’ house was a sign for the subdivision’s private park, which was also unoccupied. As I sat, the only disturbance to the engineered serenity was the buzz of cars passing up and down the subdivision’s main drag.

Eventually Danny and his mother Mrs. Morris arrived from the practice. Danny, like the majority of Whites in my sample, saw his friends outside of school during sports practices or structured extracurricular activities. During my observations he played on multiple baseball and hockey teams. Because he was often away from home, Danny’s friendships were nurtured outside of Stone Hinge. However, this did not mean that his friends were not located in the neighborhood; he still identified local children as his closest friends. Though Danny’s interactions were heavily regulated by his extracurricular schedule, Danny’s neighborhood still held an important place in his eyes. He fondly recalled going to barbeques at his neighbors’ houses and other subdivision centered activities as some of his favorite times. For Danny, Stone Hinge was home base even though he spent the majority of his out of school time engaging his hope of becoming professional hockey player elsewhere.

Danny’s family looked and felt like many others in the Stone Hinge neighborhood. Danny’s father worked in finance and spent long hours away from the house while Danny’s mother worked as a medical assistant and spent her afternoon and evenings carting Danny and his sister to activities. Danny was the younger of two children. He and his sister shared a love for sports and jostled each other playfully while at home. The Morris’ fell neatly into Lareau’s (2003) conception of concerted cultivators. The process of even finding a time to interview or observe Danny was complicated

⁴¹ Since Rolling Acres is located in the Midwest, sunny days are often uncommon and usually draw children and their parents out of hibernation.

because Danny's life was so heavily scheduled, between his practices, his sister's activities, and family time, there were few occasions to set up an in-depth conversation.

The Morris' moved to Rolling Acres in the mid-1990s. They moved partially due to Mr. Morris' job and because Rolling Acres was near where both Mr. and Mrs. Morris attended college. Like many other White respondents in my sample, the Morris' viewed Rolling Acres as a great place to raise a child. When asked about the best things about Rolling Acres, Mrs. Morris responded, "Diversity is the number one thing, there's not a group, not only race, that's not represented here and it opens our eyes to different ways of thinking and different ways of living. I think it... you realize the world's a much bigger place than your own little world." To most White families in Rolling Acres, the ability to meet people from different backgrounds: racial, ethnic, political, and class was often discussed as an advantage. They were particularly interested in the effect of this diversity on their children's social development⁴².

Mr. Morris was raised in an all White neighborhood in a nearby blue-collar city. When I asked about his son's school and his friends he said,

Look at the friends that they [Danny and his sister] bring home.... I look at their class pictures from their school and they look like the United Nations to me. And that is just so dramatically different from the world that I was brought up in and so I think from that standpoint what they get out of it, is they get the world that they will live in. I had no affiliation or association or understanding of it until I was dropped down in the middle of it professionally. So I think it is a good thing.

The image that Mr. Morris carried in his head of a multinational and multicultural friendship network was complemented by the public image that the River elementary administration promoted. The school's cafeteria/auditorium was lined with over 15 flags that represented the differing nations from which current students were drawn. The wide range of children, on the surface, did appear to represent a United Nations-like assembly. River elementary hosted a yearly international night to celebrate cultural diversity. Among White residents, this international night was consistently referenced as a yearly highlight and an example of Rolling Acres' diversity. Among my Black respondents, international night was rarely referenced and when it was discussed it lacked the enthusiastic tone with which Whites referred to the night.

⁴² Most families suggested this as an advantage, though a number of families suggested the "liberalness" and "diversity" of the city were concern-worthy. I further explore this in chapter seven.

River Elementary during the 2005-2006 school year was 46% White, 25% Black, 16% Asian, and 6% Latino. The presence of these 15 or so international students was diluted amongst a student population of 350 children. The view of the school that many White respondents had of River Elementary as a great melting pot was not reflected in many social spaces, including at the classroom level. Mr. Morris' son Danny was a student in Mr. Marks' classroom. Mr. Marks' classroom had 10 white students, 1 Latina student, 6 Black students, 2 multiracial students (Black-White), and 2 Asian students. While this classroom was diverse when compared to the average United States public school classroom, the degree that students from different backgrounds interacted across race and class lines was lower than what would be expected in such a multi-ethnic classroom. While observing school sessions, I found that students spent less than half of their time in school interacting with children from different backgrounds.⁴³ While Danny's classroom picture may have revealed an array of skin tones, Danny's life outside of school was rather homogenous.

Friendship Networks and Sports

The distance between Black and White students outside of school (e.g. residential segregation, extracurricular activities, etc.) is helpful for understanding distances that students maintained while in school. Though the Morris' and other White families cited diversity as a primary benefit of Rolling Acres, when asked about their personal relationships, their networks were largely race, gender and class homogenous. Mr. Morris believed that Danny's and his daughter's lives were different from his own upbringing because of their exposure to children from different backgrounds. Many of the parents of the children in my sample attended segregated elementary schools and by the time they reached middle and high school desegregation efforts were in progress and inter-ethnic tension in their schools was common.⁴⁴ Despite their children's increased opportunity for

⁴³ I take up the issue of curriculum differentiation and referral to support resources as it pertains to race and class based inequality in chapter 6. Children typically spent reading and writing instruction separated from other students, which constituted the largest part of instruction per day. In non-ability grouped classes, students tended to gravitate to friends when group work opportunities were created, which was frequent. These friendship networks tended to be racially and economically homogenous.

⁴⁴ White mothers from Rolling Acres provided the richest discussions of racial tensions in a local high school. It is important to note that when asked initially about experiences with racial tension and issues,

encounters with children from different backgrounds, this did not mean their children's lives were integrated and that issues of desegregation did not influence with whom children played. Among White parents, the interaction between their personal histories in school and contemporary observations of the student population produced overly idealized views of current race relations.

Friendships networks are important to children for social and academic development. While the influence of friends is mediated by how they spend their time, parental socialization, and other important social factors, there is a degree of constraint on young children's friendship choices. The fourth graders, both Black and White, drew their close friendship base from their neighborhoods and their extracurricular activities. Friendships are particularly difficult to study among children because of the constant re-negotiation of associates. Among the fourth graders in my sample, those who were considered a "friend", which could often mean as little as a playground playmate, did shift over time. However, the category of close friend was much more consistent. I found that over the school year, children that were identified as "close friends" were relatively stable.⁴⁵ These close friends tended to migrate with children from grade to grade and year to year, even if they were not in the same classrooms. In the case that children ended up in classrooms with few of their closest friends, they often saw their non-classroom friends in the neighborhood, after school, or on weekends.

Danny's friendship network in comparison to most other White students in the sample exhibited a great amount of interracial membership. Three of his friends were White boys, two were Indian boys and two were White girls.⁴⁶ The majority of my White respondents identified their children's friendship networks as all White or containing one non-White close friend. While Danny's friends demonstrate phenotypic diversity, his friends did not exhibit socioeconomic diversity. It is important to know that the Morris'

they informed me that they had not experienced racial mistreatment. In chapter three, I discuss the importance of this silence around ethnic tensions historically present in Rolling Acres and its role in contemporary race relations.

⁴⁵ During my initial and follow-up interviews, I asked parents and children to name the child's five closest friends. I found these two time points to be remarkably similar, with few exceptions.

⁴⁶ In my interviews I asked children and parents to identify the child's five closest friends. In the interview Danny identified two of his friends as African-American, but both of his parents identified the children as South Asian. Because of the level of description that Danny's parents provided on the children's background, I believe their portrait of the children's ethnic background to be most accurate.

identified themselves as upper middle-class and had an combined household income annually of over 125,000 dollars, all of Danny's friends came from a similar socioeconomic background. This is consistent with most of the friendship networks that affluent White families in my sample held. Because Danny, and most children in my sample, drew friends from their neighborhoods which were racially and economically segregated and extracurricular activities, thus segregation often foreclosed cross-group friendship options.

Stone Hinge

Danny's family lived in the Stone Hinge subdivision which was located in a census tract in 2000 where the median household income was approximately 130,000 dollars. None of the residents in the census tract received public assistance and none of the children in the tract fell beneath the poverty line. The median household value was approximately 370,000 dollars. Nearly 75 percent of the tract's residents over the age of 25 held a bachelor's degree or higher. The Morris' census tract was approximately 85 percent White, 4 percent Black, and 9 percent Asian. As a residential location, Stone Hinge and the neighborhoods that surrounded it were areas that families chose, not neighborhoods that families "settled on." These simple characteristics provide some insight into the affluence that families like the Morris' enjoy. These snapshots of the census tract cannot fully begin to uncover the structures of privilege that accumulated in spaces such as Stone Hinge.

The sports and extracurricular activities that Danny engaged in outside of school were costly undertakings, such as hockey and swimming at the local country club. While the Morris' had little trouble marshalling the funds for his participation on teams and attendance at camps, it is not likely that other families with much more limited resources would be able to play in his same or similar recreational leagues. Danny played on a travel hockey and baseball team. When queried about the importance of multiple leagues, his parents suggested the quality of play was important for Danny's skill development. Mrs. Morris in one interview commented,

[Danny plays] travel hockey but lacrosse was from the city, so that's offered to everybody and that's a whole different ball game but they [his children] don't know those different things.

Travel teams were generally more competitive and more expensive than the city recreational leagues. Maintaining a child in sports in Rolling Acres included registration, uniform fees, and equipment. Annually the cost of equipment and fees for a youth hockey player could easily exceed 300 dollars. While Danny did notice the difference in the quality of play between travel teams and city recreation teams, there were other important differences of which Danny was not aware. Mrs. Morris' concluded that Danny didn't notice the privileges that were necessary to participate in travel sports. By that same extension, it is unlikely that Danny realized these travel sports were overwhelmingly White and affluent. Though Danny never identified his sports teams as privileged spaces, even at the age of ten he was aware of the concept of privilege. When discussing his life goals he consistently referenced the need to help "the less fortunate."⁴⁷

Privilege and accumulated advantage were visible in many of the spaces that the Morris' traveled outside of Stone Hinge as well. When I observed Danny at one of his baseball games, I noticed that the team had custom uniforms, custom hats, and that the catcher was outfitted in the latest baseball technology. The team was composed of approximately 15 White children and 2 children of color. When I asked Danny's father about the league, he informed me that it was a costly endeavor, but that the participants were "more serious" about the sport.⁴⁸ Danny was constantly involved in sporting activities year round. Danny's love of hockey was also fostered by other families in Stone Hinge. During some nights, fathers and sons from neighboring streets would gather in the subdivision and block traffic from passing through the street and play street hockey until the hour grew too late. The ability to block the street off from traffic and play a neighborhood game demonstrates a couple of Stone Hinge's important features. First, within the Stone Hinge neighborhood, even though at times the area appeared sterile,

⁴⁷ Danny, when talking about his future career, indicated he wanted to help the less fortunate. This help the less fortunate mentality was supported by participating in soup kitchens or other forms of traditional community service with his family. However, I rarely heard these privileged families, like the Morris', connect their position of privilege to their less fortunate schoolmates or other members of the Rolling Acres community. These types of community service and framing of the less fortunate as homeless and other extreme forms of poverty allowed White adults in Rolling Acres to avoid their role in the relative deprivation of the economic and racial minorities in the city.

⁴⁸ While observing another student in Rolling Acres, I attended a city recreational league game. The quality of the game play and player uniforms were considerably higher in the league that Danny played in. That withstanding, the participants of the city baseball league were overwhelmingly White.

residents felt a strong sense of ownership over their homes and even the roads that weaved between them. Second, a feeling of constructed community was present even though there was great space between houses due to the layout of the subdivision. Contemporary urban planning generally attempts to engineer common space by creating parks or nature paths, but the families of Stone Hinge created their own space for community gatherings.⁴⁹ Third, the cultural capital, in this case hockey, that was valued in the neighborhood largely catered to affluent and White families. While a number of people from different backgrounds may have lived within or near Stone Hinge, their participation may have been obstructed because the sport of hockey is almost exclusively White and requires costly equipment.

Educational Expectations and Aspirations

During my observations, Danny was an average student. He was on reading level for his grade and by his parents' admission he was a good student, but not at the top of his class. During most classroom sessions you would find Danny concentrating on the task at hand and quietly doing his seat work. He occasionally would talk to his neighbors, but did most of his socializing in between exercises or classes. When I sat down with Danny and asked him about what job he would like to hold in the future he informed me that he wanted to be a police officer or "help the less fortunate." When I asked Danny about whom he spoke to regarding his job expectations, he informed me that he had discussed this goal with a retired neighbor in Stone Hinge.

He was a County Sheriff and a detective and he told me one time when I asked him, "How is it? Is it hard to become a police officer?" He said if you work hard in school and you pay attention you can mostly go to college and become what you want to be.

Though Danny did not receive specific advice about the pursuit of the job of law enforcement, the ability to ask a neighbor or family friend about the pursuit of a desired job could prove advantageous in the long run. While law enforcement is not a high prestige occupation relative to other occupational choices in Danny's immediate neighborhood, which featured lawyers, doctors, and engineers, the fact that these

⁴⁹ Stone Hinge did contain a private park within its confines, but I did not see this space used when I was in attendance.

neighbors were at easy disposal is the most important. In all likelihood, Danny's career ambitions will shift before he even enters middle school, so his pursuit of a career in law enforcement may become mute. Instead, his willingness and ability to interact with adults regarding career advice is paramount. Other White children in my sample discussed the ability to discuss work, college, and a host of other future opportunities with individuals both outside and inside of their homes, while Black respondents were less likely to discuss having such a wide range of confidants with knowledge. All children relied on their parents as primary socializers to opportunity, but the neighborhood served as a secondary zone of socialization that opened up opportunity and reinforced messages passed on the home front.

When I spoke to Danny about his educational expectations he told me that he wanted to complete college. He informed me that he spoke about this option with his father and mother who were college graduates and his cousins who attended a university on the other side of the state. The presence of college educated and professional neighbors are common features of affluent neighborhoods that provide subtle socialization experiences. Though each conversation that Danny had may not be a serious or direct one about the future, the milieu that surrounded him suggested that college and professional occupations were not only an option, but were the norm.

In addition to his neighbors, Danny's parents also stressed the importance of getting an education to Danny's future. Mrs. Morris described her role in Danny's education,

We'll guide them [Danny and his sister] when they tell us some of their interests, he describes some of his interests you know and so you might want to think about this kind of education or you might want to look at this kind of subject, you know guiding them maybe with some of their class work. Guiding them with maybe extracurriculars that may make a difference with what they want to pursue.

The use of sports to develop and incentivize Danny's academics was even identified by Danny. When I asked him about activities that helped him with his school work he commented,

Well hockey is a little. It doesn't sound like it would but it sort of says you have to focus because our coach says since they play travel and stuff he says, "You guys have to get [good] grades" or I might have to miss a game or something

cause there has been people who had to miss a game because they didn't finish their science project.

He continued,

So it is trying to say if you don't study you can't play on the team and if you really want to play on [the] team you got to [get] good grades. It is not like they look at your grades and no it is not like the high school teams but they want to know if you are doing good. Like everyone, once in awhile, they will say, "How are you doing in school?" And if we say, "Hhmmm not so good," he will be like, "well you better start working harder if you want to play every one of your shifts of the game and you don't want to sit one."

In the case of Danny's hockey team, he saw that his academic performance may be directly tied to his eligibility to play sports. While this type of reasoning is very common among high school and college athletes, by virtue of participation in these elite leagues Danny adopted this orientation early in his life. He, like most of his fourth grade classmates, was eager to get an education, but his everyday educational practices out of school suggested that without sports and parental supervision, his orientation towards school work would be lower. When I asked Mrs. Morris how much time she spent engaging in educational activities with Danny at home, she informed me less than half an hour a week. The Morris' wanted Danny to be a "self-starter" so they allowed Danny to do his homework on his own and they split the duties of reviewing his homework.

Danny's family did not stress education as much as some of the other affluent White families. By most accounts, they did nothing "special" to provide Danny with an educational advantage such as supplemental educational programs (e.g. Kumon, Sylvan Learning Centers, etc.). The community that surrounded Danny's family provided support and enrichment to Danny through cultural and social capital. Through his participation in exclusive sports, Danny was able to develop a cultural capital that was valued when interacting with adults and with institutions. The social capital of Stone Hinge will likely pay dividends for Danny because he has immediate access to neighbors and family members who have extensive information about the processes of completing higher education and securing solid white collar jobs. Between the Morris' and Stone Hinge, Danny was surrounded by social supports. The characteristics of Danny's community provided small advantages that accumulated overtime. In contrast, LeBron did not accumulate disadvantage due to his neighborhood's characteristics, rather he

experienced relative deprivation when compared to his classmates like Danny (Walker and Pettigrew 1984).

LeBron Downing

On most days I found LeBron wearing a baggy tee shirt with jeans or jogging pants slightly sagged. He stood a little taller than his average male classmates and had an athletic build. LeBron's complexion was the deep brown of espresso which contrasted with the all white fitted baseball cap that he liked to wear tipped on his head. Throughout the day you would find him toggling his hat between his hand and on his head, except when he was on the basketball court at recess. LeBron was passionate about sports, wrestling, and hip hop music.

I first had a chance to interact with LeBron at length on a field trip where I accompanied his class to a dance concert. LeBron did not seem thrilled at the prospect of watching two hours of dancing. As I sat next to him he slumped in his chair and played with some folded money and his hat. As I made small talk with LeBron he seemed uninterested in the dance performance and my conversation. I then asked him about the money he was twirling in his hand, he responded, "They call me money man!" Perplexed I inquired why and he responded, "I don't know, but I just be havin' money. I don't know." I asked him where the "money" came from and LeBron nonchalantly informed me that he "makes money" with little explanation. I probed him more, to which he responded, "I make money playing basketball and I have a team, so they make money." LeBron went on to explain that he played basketball for money and that he "set up" other "kids" up with opportunities for "work."

During the remainder of our conversation, LeBron was eager to tell me that he hoped to play basketball. He told me in the near future he would start to play in an elite local league that he learned about by his cousin's past participation. When I asked if he played organized basketball in the past, he told me that he played around his neighborhood, but hadn't played for an official team. Like many boys, Black or White, LeBron was addicted to sports and saw them figuring into his future plans. In his eyes, there was money to be made in sports. To him "hustling hoops" was a legitimate

enterprise and organized sports were on the horizon.⁵⁰ However, his participation in organized activities, not just sports-related, was beyond his control.

LeBron's participation in formal extracurricular activities occurred through his participation at a community center a couple of miles from his home. LeBron's father occasionally drove vans to bring children from the surrounding communities for the center. Sometimes he would shuttle LeBron to the free activities, when time and space allowed. Because of LeBron's travel was limited by his father's availability, the neighborhood of Vista Ridge became the place where he spent most of his time and thus was the location where he honed and pursued his future goals. When asked about involvement in formal extracurricular activities Mr. Downing said,

But you know Rolling Acres is more, more structured. There are more opportunities but you got to dig hard to get the opportunities here. You know in [the big city], you know, they got YMCAs. They have numerous programs that run there that your kids can get into. Here you know we have YMCA but can you afford to send your kid to the YMCA? You can send your kid there if you got enough money to keep them in the program.

LeBron's sparing participation in formal extracurricular activities was influenced by his family's budget and the excessively high costs of Rolling Acres. Coupled with unequal information, as discussed in chapter five, many African-American families informed me that they had difficulty locating appropriate low-cost or free activities for their children in Rolling Acres.

The Downing's lived in the Vista Ridge cul-de-sac. Vista Ridge was tucked away from main throughways. In 2000, it was located in a census tract where the median household income was 38,000 dollars. Four percent of the residents received public assistance and 25 percent of the children fell beneath the poverty line. The median house value within the census tract was approximately 93,000 dollars. 33 percent of the tract's residents had achieved a Bachelor's degree or higher. Racially the census tract's residents were approximately 50 percent White, 23 percent Black, and 16 percent Asian. Compared to Danny's neighborhood, Vista Ridge was considerably poorer. Most of the residents in Vista Ridge rented their houses, a number of them relying on assistance programs—such as section 8 vouchers. The demographic characteristics of Vista Ridge

⁵⁰ While I do not believe that LeBron actually played basketball for more than a couple of dollars, I do believe he saw basketball and other sports as legitimate ways to get ahead.

reflect greater social privilege than most “poor” areas, particularly poor areas in the inner-city. Residents of Vista Ridge, however, remained at a disadvantage to their more affluent counterparts. While this relative deprivation may not appear as distressing as the concentrated poverty which is a common feature of major urban areas, it contains its own perils when considering the affluence that proximal communities enjoy. While Danny was surrounded with neighbors with higher levels of education and wider occupational experience, LeBron had far less accessible capital.

When I asked the Downings about the role that education had played in their lives, like most of my Black respondents who did not attend college, they wished they had continued on to post-secondary education. This revelation was commonly followed with an urgent affirmation that their children would attend higher education. When I asked Mr. Downing about the role that they thought education should play in LeBron’s life he told me,

For his life, once again, you know like I say, you know, he has aspiration of going into, you know, the entertainment type stuff [sports]. But he must realize. I am trying to relay to him that education is you know number one key that he has got to have? Man if you can’t count money, then how much money do you know you have? That is you know the thing, the basics is the first thing that you got to grasp. After the basics everything else moves along pretty smooth.

Mr. Downing’s utilized an instrumental strategy for conveying the importance of education to LeBron. For many low income residents of which the majority were Black, the value of higher education was in getting a “good job”, keeping track of assets, or other outcome driven reasons. Among the affluent families in my sample of which the majority were White, the pursuit of higher education was discussed as a process of intellectual discovery, training or other process centered reasons. I attribute this difference in view of the role of education for their children’s lives to differences in life positions. For Black families, the ability to provide for oneself economically was paramount. With few of the Black families in my sample having attended college, wage labor and job instability were common. For White families, attending college was a time of discovery and change. White families in Rolling Acres enjoyed economic and job security, these accrued benefits would undoubtedly be transferred to their children. This

transfer of advantage and stability is uncommon even among Black Americans who reach middle class standing.

When I asked the Downings about how far they wanted LeBron's to go in his education, both his mother and father expressed high educational expectations. Both the Downings and the Morris' espoused a support for the pursuit of higher education for their children, but this belief was expressed differently. While Danny was expected to finish college, LeBron was expected to "go as far in school as he wants to." The rigidity of the expectation among the Morris' stands in contrast to the choice provided by the Downings. While college attendance was normative for most White families in Rolling Acres due to past attendance and surrounding milieu, attending college for Blacks in Rolling Acres was more a goal than reality. Without a regimented expectation, it is not likely that LeBron will pursue higher education for reasons other than its instrumental value for a prospective athletic career. On the other hand, Danny who was just as committed to using college as a means to reaching professional sports, also maintained a belief in education as normative and useful for careers other than sports.

The Downings also pledged allegiance to high occupational expectations for LeBron. Mr. Downing described potential future careers for his son,

Oh, a doctor, teacher, any... I would like to see him in any kind of a profession [where] he could help to serve other people. I would love to see that. I really would, cause I think that is what I have done a lot of my life is, you know, try to help and service other people. You know as far my knowledge, I have a lot of good hand skills carpentry, automotive, electrical, plumbing, heating. Those types of things. and I have always tried to you know help other people out you know as far as them needing that type of service. Once I started being involved with the neighborhood center, I started doing more things with service as far as drug intervention, teen counseling and this is nothing I learned at school or anything.

Mr. Downing's desire to have his son in a service related industry accommodates a wide range of career options. While Mr. Downing suggested any of the jobs he outlined would be acceptable, his limited knowledge about these careers served as a barrier. Having only graduated high school, Mr. Downing suggested his experiences working part-time with the community center exposed him to careers that served larger issues and needs. For Mr. Downing, his schooling and his primary job, supervising delivery trucks were important, but they were not what helped him discover the jobs he found

personally fulfilling, such as working with youth. Despite his formal lack of education in these types of jobs, his social networks were rich with people who could provide LeBron with information on the steps that lead to careers of service. Along with his ties to the local community center, Mr. Downing also had a nephew who recently completed a Masters degree in social work. While his nephew was located in Atlanta, GA he felt confident that he could contact him for assistance. By contrast, Mr. Downing was not connected to doctors or surgeons through work or in his familial network. Thus it was not likely that he could draw on his social ties to help LeBron navigate towards a career in medicine.

The social and cultural capital that the Downing family were able to rely on was considerably lower than the Morris family. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Downing had a college degree and few of their neighbors held one.⁵¹ While Danny Morris was able to tell me he wanted to be a police officer and was able to use his neighbors as resources for achieving this goal, LeBron was less situated. When I asked LeBron about his future career, he informed me that he would like to be a NBA star. He reluctantly conceded that if his career as a professional star did not materialize, he would be a lawyer. When I asked him about his conversations with adults about his aspirations to be a lawyer, he informed me that he talked with his father and his mother. He mentioned that his father told him, “if you can believe it, you can achieve it” and his mother told him that a lawyer was “a good backup plan.”

LeBron’s parents’ recommendations about the pathway to a non-athletic career were sparing, to say the least. The advice they offered was general. I argue this general advice was partially because they were unaware of the particulars of the processes that lead to these occupations. This is not to suggest they were unaware of the pathway to these careers, his father demonstrated knowledge of this path to becoming a medical doctor by accurately approximating the number of years after high school that were

⁵¹ As I mentioned earlier, 33 percent of the tract’s residents held college degrees. In Vista Ridge I was made aware of one degree holder in the community, Ms. Towles, Jeffrey Towles’ mother a classmate of LeBron’s. Unfortunately social relations between Jeffrey and LeBron and the boy’s parents were strained, so the Downing’s were not likely to access the Towles for discussions on higher education. With a scarcity of resources in the lower income neighborhoods, I saw interpersonal conflicts within these communities carry a toll on access to within neighborhood proximal capital.

necessary to complete medical training. However, knowledge of a path is a far cry from the ability to pursue and complete travel down a path.

The Downings were vocal about their commitment to LeBron's education and how it mattered to his future. While nurturing LeBron's dream of being a professional athlete they are careful to stress the need for continued education. However, these messages of educational importance were presented as secondary to the pursuit of LeBron's fantasized professional sports career. His mother jokingly confided that she wanted LeBron to "take care of her" financially when I discussed his potential as a professional athlete. Subtle messages such as these may serve to prioritize athletics over academics in LeBron's life. The messages that the Downings send LeBron are not solely based on words, their behaviors and the behaviors of people around LeBron matter for how he understands the value of education.

Active forms of socialization are characterized by spoken messages, while passive forms of socialization are characterized by behaviors. Most children in the sample learned about the pathways to education and career via active socialization, but grasped the processes contained within the pathways via passive socialization. At fourth grade, active advice about careers was thinner than the advice that youth would later receive in their development. Parents tended to discuss future education goals in general terms and reinforced these ideas through informal conversations. Active messages about attending college and holding high job expectations are only part of the process of socialization.

Among both Black and White children the goal of attending and completing college was common. However when I asked these same students with whom they discussed college and what types of advice they had received they would often boldly proclaim "no one really." I entered the field hypothesizing that affluent students would be more articulate about the processes that lead to education and occupation than lower income children. This hypothesis was based on the presumption that affluent parents having likely attended college would be vocal and explicit about the processes that lead to later life opportunities particularly via schooling. I did not find evidence to support this hypothesis when I asked children *directly* about the messages they received regarding pathways to future opportunities. Instead, I found that passive socialization allowed affluent and middle income children to discuss access to higher education in greater

detail than their low-income counterparts. Affluent and middle income children often mentioned having visited their parents' alma maters and playful rivalries about colleges that took place during family gatherings.

Even among these well to do families, there was another level of stratification among families with children who were high school or college-going age. Children in these families often had the greatest knowledge about the processes necessary to attend college (e.g. taking standardized tests, campus visits, financial aid applications, etc.). These details were learned via passive socialization. Among several affluent White families in my sample, the fourth graders traveled with their family to visit various college campuses during their vacation time. These trips often included stops at local museums and attractions, so the elementary aged children were exposed to the collegiate environment as well as entertained. Additionally, these trips served to instill the importance of education by establishing college attendance as an important rite of passage that family members participated in collectively. Unfortunately, LeBron did not benefit from these types of trips. While he was nested in a family with an older sibling who was a high school senior, his sister did not conduct a national college search. Both Mr. and Mrs. Downing enthusiastically told me that their daughter would attend college in the upcoming year at a local community college. Their tone and reiteration of this point in multiple interviews suggested that her attendance was important for the family as a whole, but her process of college going was distinctly different than the Downing's White counterparts. Unlike LeBron's classmates who visited multiple college campuses and learned about the application process, LeBron was unclear on how his sister got into college. Her acceptance to the local community college and receipt of local scholarships, truncated the college search process compared to LeBron's White classmates. This truncation will likely affect the knowledge that the Downing's can bring to bear later when LeBron gets ready to apply to college, while many of his White classmates and parents will be familiar with the process.

The Downing's active and passive socialization messages regarding work and opportunity were also complex. Wilson (1987) and others theorized that declines in employed Black men lead to a dearth of positive role models, particularly for Black boys. This dearth lead to the devaluing of work and the perception of closed opportunities in

work and education for poor young Black youth. However, this was not the case of LeBron who was nested in a family with a custodial father who was employed as a supervisor of delivery trucks. His upper rank blue collar employment and part-time work with the community center likely sent a positive message to LeBron about the value of work and commitment to community. This message was also tempered by his mother's unemployment. Prior to her unemployment, Mrs. Downing worked as a bus driver and was dismissed for administrative reasons. Her stint of unemployment was approximately a year old when I first interviewed her (03/06). Unemployment undoubtedly produced a financial strain on the household with two small children living at home, but it also sent a message to LeBron about the treatment of African-Americans in the workforce. Mrs. Downing attributed her dismissal to racial discrimination and used it as an opportunity to relay her feelings to LeBron about the limited opportunities that Blacks in Rolling Acres were given.⁵² Mrs. Downing identified herself as "looking for work" but ultimately hoped to regain the job she was dismissed from, but at our last point of contact (10/06) she remained unemployed.

As a team, the Downing's consistently voiced their belief in the value of education and work to their son, but their actions subtly transmitted a more complicated message about work, education and opportunity. In espousing an "American dream" mentality, the Downing's orientation appeared similar to other families in Rolling Acres, but their social location provided a powerful counter-narrative about opportunity. The active messages that LeBron received suggested that through hard work his goals were attainable and that he was only limited by his imagination and desires. These messages about openness in the opportunity structure however were mediated by the social realities that he saw at home and in his neighborhood each day. While college was discussed as an option, in reality he was surrounded by few college educated individuals, which make attendance more of an aspiration than an expectation. His potential job opportunities were also heavily influenced by the social networks that his parents were able to access. Their access to networks of doctors and other elite professions were much more limited than LeBron's White classmates. While the Downing's occupied a relatively advantaged position compared to most poor Blacks in America, in reality, their relative deprivation

⁵² In chapter seven, I take up the issue of race and gender socialization.

made each association and each message about getting ahead increasingly consequential. The messages that LeBron received at home were not his only socializing experiences. With a heterogeneous school population, the potential for friendship networks across race and class lines could lead to different access to networks and capital.

Friendship Networks and Sports

Much like Danny's associates, LeBron's friendships were drawn from his neighborhood and school. When LeBron named his five closest friends, he identified five African-Americans, four of whom he knew from his neighborhood and school.⁵³ The one friend that was not located in LeBron's neighborhood resided in a neighboring city. His parents confirmed this friendship circle. Typically LeBron informed me that he and his friends just "chilled" and "played." One of his favorite activities was playing basketball. In Vista Ridge, a basketball goal faced the cul-de-sac and provided a sort of "community court." The hoop's position allowed it to be used by the neighborhood children, which stood in direct contrast to most of the hoops that lined White subdivision driveways which were in individual families' driveways. This small landscape difference created a different sense of community amongst youth in the cul-de-sac. In some ways, this reflects a similar community phenomenon to the one present in Stone Hinge with street hockey, however there was an important difference. During my time in the field, I did not hear of or observe community-wide basketball games with fathers and sons. Basketball, when discussed by children or adults, tended to be pick-up games amongst children without adults present. Unsupervised time was the typical way Black male youth spent free time in Vista Ridge.

Sociological literature on urban youth suggests unsupervised time among boys is linked to violent or delinquent behavior (Anderson 1999). Among my sample, I found no evidence of this. This could be due to a number of reasons: 1) the Black boys in my sample, though unsupervised, traveled limited distances; 2) the boys I observed were prior to adolescence, so physical confrontations over "space" and "turf" were uncommon;

⁵³ When I asked children and parents to identify where they drew their closest friends from, respondents often suggested that neighborhood and school were not mutually exclusive. Many did not recall if the association began more in school or in the neighborhood. While it is intellectually interesting to know which was the primary field from which they drew. Unfortunately methodologically I was seldom able to distinguish the order of selection.

and 3) even though Black boys were located in or proximal to subsidized housing facilities, there was little violence in these settings, even among adults.

I found Black parents were aware of these potentially negative influences but seldom restricted their children from potentially negative associates. When I asked Mrs. Downing about LeBron's friends' influence she suggested that his friends' affect on his social behavior was moderated by her son's behavioral code.

They [are] too young right now to even influence him. Whatever they influence him to do, they doing that together. And he want to do it too. I always tell my kids no matter who you with, you could be with a person who is going to kill somebody. It is up to you. Do you want to stay with person or just get out of the situation? You got to use your own head. Do you want me a follower or a leader? It is all choice. Everybody has a choice in this world. There going to be a lot of times you make bad choices. You learn from mistakes.

From Mrs. Downing's perspective, LeBron's behavior with his close friends was a collective process. Instead of assuming there was a singular path of influence from his friends to her son, she understood peer influence as dialectical. From her perspective, the unstructured time that LeBron spent with his peers was his own time to make decisions about his behavior. The independence that LeBron exhibited was similar to other African-American boys in my sample, with the exception of Jeffrey who also lived in Vista Ridge.⁵⁴

For all children friendship remained a tremendously important aspect of social relations. Among Black and White families the process for identifying friends was the same, but the influence of these friends varied. Sociology has concerned itself with many of the negative effects of peers and how these may relate to children's orientations towards school (Horvat and Lewis 2003; Moody 2001; Ogbu 2003). African-American families in my sample consistently vocalized concerns about friends having negative influences on their children, but also suggested that these influences could be buffered by their children's characters. This reflects a larger parental socialization theme among African-Americans that individual responsibility is a strong buffer against negative influences. In contrast, White families in my sample rarely identified their children's friends as potentially negative influences and thus rarely discussed their child's moral

⁵⁴ Jeffrey's life was heavily scheduled with activities ranging from drama to martial arts, so he spent little time among the other boys in the neighborhood.

constitution and its role in buffering negative influences. This differential view of peers and influence can reflect naiveté as well as experiential differences. I label the rare belief among White families that their children's friends held negative influence as naiveté because most children maintained associates who misbehaved inside and outside of school. However, the extent of misbehavior potentially present could be greatly reduced by the amount of adult oversight that White friendship networks operated under. Among my white male respondents, playing between friends often occurred inside the house, in the house's yard, at scheduled play dates or in sports. Contrastingly, African-American male friendship experiences usually involved playing outside in pick up games, riding bikes, or "hanging out." This time spent with peers usually occurred during multi-hour blocks on weekdays or weekends and the activities were chosen with little parental influence.

Lack of supervision and lack of interaction with adults may have instilled a greater sense of independence in Black boys, but this also did not provide the cultural capital that many White boys developed through more regimented interactions (Lareau 2003). However, more important to my consideration is the lack of sustained access to spaces where development resources were present, whether that be a neighborhood community center or a neighbor's house where casual conversations about employment could be overheard. For Black respondents in predominantly Black neighborhoods, with less frequent association with adults in their neighborhoods, the neighborhood as a secondary zone of socialization reified children's already narrow conceptions of opportunity, unlike amongst the bulk of my White sample.

Envisioned Futures

For youth in Rolling Acres, opportunities to the casual observer are abundant. Access to quality schools, extracurricular activities, and a highly educated population would translate to great potential for children to engage their future selves with few reservations. However, the lives of LeBron and Danny remain largely segmented and their subsequent envisioned futures are equally segmented. Young argues that the constructive realm includes global ideas about the openness of the opportunity structure, in the case of LeBron and Danny, both viewed their future opportunities as open. These beliefs in the availability of options for career and education were produced via

socialization messages from parents, teachers, and other adults. This idealized portrait of the future appeared to be consistent across races, social classes, and genders.⁵⁵

This sentiment was also reflected in the projective realm, where both Danny and LeBron enjoyed similar future orientation plans for succeeding. At the core, they both believed sports could serve as future employment. They both saw doing well in school and practicing sports as successful ways to move towards their occupational goals. However, divergences in proximal capital, extracurricular activities, and the resulting social and cultural capital reduce LeBron's chances of being a basketball player or a lawyer. Additionally, Danny's participation in various activities and subtle socialization into guided development via sports teams, coaches mandating academic performance standards, and parental experiences, increased his likelihood to achieve his goals.

While both Danny and LeBron shared similar future selves, their envisioned selves were different because of their social location in Rolling Acres. While future selves are often based on individual interpretations of the future and partially informed by parental experiences (Neblett and Cortina 2006), there are few studies that address the ways that parental influence via social position affect the lives of children. The production of the envisioned futures for LeBron and Danny are a product of their individual ideas, their socialization, their location and their parents' capitals.

The lives and envisioned futures of LeBron and Danny demonstrate the ways that neighborhoods are important to all children but can hold different meanings, particularly for Black and White boys. While Danny and LeBron's demeanors, as well as love for sports were similar, their view on education and its future utility were divergent. This variation in outlook towards the future and what is possible was birthed from their social situation. Ecological models of social development argue that neighborhoods, family location, and the political economy of space influence behavior but few studies have looked at the links between space and conceptions of the future among youth.

The worlds that Black and White students in Rolling Acres lived in were very different. In reviewing the social distances between Black and White children it is apparent that close proximity to capital did not guarantee attainment of that capital. In the

⁵⁵ In chapter seven, I discuss the ways that Black parents socialized their children to the potential perils of race and gender. Despite this socialization, there were few occasions when children identified their own futures limited by their race or gender.

area of friendship networks, the ideal image of friendship that many White residents carried did not occur in real life. Few White respondent's listed more than one or two African-American close friends and Black respondents rarely mentioned White friends. The lack of interracial contact between groups due to economic and racial segregation led to segmented lives. This segmentation is increasingly important because it makes capital inaccessible across racial and economic lines. The resulting capital deprivations influence how youth understand the world that surrounds them and their futures.

For Danny, his location inside of the Stone Hinge subdivision gave him an opportunity to become connected to neighbors and sporting programs that made education a key component in his thoughts about the future. If Danny were left to his own devices, sports would be at the center of his current life and future plans. When I visited him in the summer and I asked him about what he read during his time off from school, he informed me that he only read hockey magazines. While Danny believed sports were key to his life, he also knew that if he wanted to participate in sports at the college and professional level, his scholastics would need to be a priority. These messages were conveyed inside and outside of his neighborhood via adults and extracurricular activities.

LeBron's location in the Vista Ridge cul-de-sac demonstrates the larger amount of independence that Black boys experience in Rolling Acres. If LeBron was left to his own devices, his world would revolve around basketball and wrestling. He aspired to be a professional basketball player first and he saw lawyer as a "back up" career. His belief that his athletic prowess could potentially carry him to the NBA was supported by his parents' support of the idea, despite not having him enrolled in organized basketball. His family's economic situation and mobility issues limited his participation in formal sports, nonetheless sports were still important. Among his neighbors, athletics carried currency as he played on the neighborhood court with his friends. LeBron's belief that he could "make money" playing basketball or betting on basketball games was likely sparked by peers or older community members. His communication with older cousins and loose associates around him likely fortified these ideas for him. This is not to suggest that all Black boys prioritized sports over academics, but the messages and realities that these boys received in their immediate surroundings did not demonstrate higher education was an expectation, instead it was an aspiration with unknown returns.

The ideals and aspirations that Danny operated with were likely to become expectations due to social and cultural capital that he had accessible via Stone Hinge. Contrastingly, LeBron's ideals of sports as a career could potentially become aspirations with careful planning and enrollment in activities that provided development. Though he and his family operated as if sports were an expectation, there was considerable distance between what they viewed as likely and the potential that these occupations would eventually occur. Even though African-Americans in Rolling Acres, in comparison to large urban cities, had better than average educational credentials and incomes they stood at a disadvantage to their White counterparts. These attributes still produced segmented views of opportunity and envisioned futures for children in Rolling Acres. As LeBron and Danny come of age in disparate social situations and hold roughly equivalent ideals, their envisioned futures will hold the balance of their ability to actualize their ideals, aspirations, and expectations.

Policy Relevance

Past work on segregation at the city and school level has failed to discuss the ways in which social distance affects the interaction of children. Even as early as fourth grade, the different realities that students face shape their view of the world and opportunity. Residential and school segregation continue to be of paramount importance when considering educational inequality, but there is limited empirical evidence on the effects of school desegregation (Cook 1984) and busing remains a contested policy lever. This sparse literature is further handicapped by its concentration on student outcomes at the expense of looking carefully at socially processes within "desegregated" spaces. I found that the processes within these spaces make it even more difficult than initially perceived to reap the rewards of proximal capital. Black and White students who were raised in the same city and attended the same schools since entering school still had unequal access to capital amongst their own communities and rarely shared capital across racial and economic lines. This suggests that even Black and poor families that live in desegregated setting rarely receive the "fruits of integration" and "geographic opportunity."

At the core of the social distances between Black and White residents is segregation. With the rolling back of desegregation legislation in schooling it is

increasingly important to understand what is happening between students in heterogeneous schools. As Mr. Downing identified, the RAPS were once again desegregating, just 40 years after their initial attempt. While the barriers to interaction that Mr. Downing identified such as parents hurling racial slurs have disappeared, Black and White children and families remain divided. These divisions proved meaningful for how youth saw their futures. While popular discussions of segregation concentrate on segregation's ill effect on educational outcomes, the cases of LeBron and Danny demonstrate that segregation via the confluence of neighborhood and family characteristics can affect the way youth view their own future opportunities. This is arguably an even more insidious outgrowth of social distance than suppression of test scores.

Case selection

I deliberately selected Danny and LeBron for this case study because their personalities, academic orientations, and goals were similar. They lived only a couple of miles apart and attended the same school and had the same teacher. My evidence displayed large differences in the social characteristics of the neighborhoods that Danny and LeBron lived in as well as differences between the socialization of families. This would lead some to suggest that it would be more appropriate to select in-depth cases of a White boy and a Black boy of equal economic status within similarly desegregated neighborhoods. This type of matching is ideal and is often the gold standard of quantitative research that explores context differences. However this could not occur due to the structure of my sample. Among the families interviewed and based on information about other families in the schools that I observed, there were few students who would represent a racial counterfactual. Even though I was given greater latitude in selecting my classrooms than many other qualitative studies, I could not produce matching pairs.⁵⁶

In a space like Rolling Acres, it is possible that Black American would be closer to White Americans if we selected randomly from the general population, but even with the relative “prosperity” of Rolling Acres these populations did not overlap. In the Spring of the year, I stopped by the office of Principal Bell at Cherry Elementary. I asked her if

⁵⁶ Key ethnographic work in education like Annette Lareau's and Amanda Lewis' are based on classrooms that were selected for them.

she recalled many affluent Black families who attended her school. She responded quickly, “Sure!” She then proceeded to name a hand-full of families that were affluent and Black over the past few years. Her ability to rattle off these names was not due to a density, but rather a scarcity of Black families that fit this description. This dearth of affluent families was also present in River Elementary where Danny and LeBron attended. I am not suggesting that there were no affluent Black families in Rolling Acres, but I am suggesting that few affluent Black families tended to send their children to Rolling Acres public schools.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, I am unable to determine the degree to which this selection out of public schools affects our understanding of the role of neighborhoods on Black and White children in Rolling Acres as a whole.

In this chapter, I did not discuss the experiences of low income White families relative to low income Black families. I decided against this analysis because my maintenance of a natural sample provided me with few low-income White respondents. Even though I was not able to gain sufficient cases for systematic comparison, I am confident from the conversations I had with students, families, and school staff that there were fewer pre-conceptions about low income Whites in the RAPS schools. Families, both Black and White, overwhelmingly discussed the use of public housing and low income students in the school as Black. Additionally, the district had a very small share of poor White students.⁵⁸ In this sense, low income White students were largely invisible when discourses about poverty emerged.

A Note on Family vs. Neighborhood

My argument in this chapter is not simply about neighborhoods; rather it is about the segmentation of opportunity via neighborhoods *and* families. As small children, LeBron and Danny, as well as the other children in my sample, used their families as the primary socializing agents to opportunity and the neighborhoods and social networks they were nested within served as spaces to further explore initial messages passed from

⁵⁷ Through informal conversations with families from Rolling Acres, I learned that affluent Black parents were aware of the system-wide issues that Black students faced in RAPS and many exercised their financial option and sent their children to private or parochial schools.

⁵⁸ In attempting to select a classroom with a sufficient sample of low income Whites to fill in my pre-identified social categories, a district administrator personally communicated, “Sorry L’Heureux, we just don’t have a lot of poor White students.”

the home front. Residential segregation and segmentation of lives led to differing out of school experiences which were associated with different visions of schooling and opportunity. While some of this discussion suggests that Danny's family's social class was the key factor that expanded Danny's envisioned future, this is not wholly true. It is impossible to produce the counterfactual of placing Danny in LeBron's neighborhood or LeBron in Danny's neighborhood. However, a potentially suitable comparison between the Towles and the Huntings will help explicate the ways that capital nested outside of the family, often in neighborhoods or social networks, was utilized by White families to accumulate advantage and potentially affect outlooks.

Comparing two-single headed households offers an important demonstration of the ways that residential segregation was negotiated by White and Black families. The reader by now is familiar with the Towles family from which Jeffrey was drawn, which was headed by Ms. Towles a lawyer. I would like to also introduce the Hunting family, another family from River Elementary. The Hunting family was headed by Ms. Hunting a White woman in her mid 30s and her daughter Sierra who lived in an apartment complex. While the Hunting's financial means were limited in comparison to their more affluent White counterparts, they were still able to actualize proximal capital, and I argue this was in part due to their racial group membership.

Jeffrey experienced the bulk of his socialization towards opportunity from his mother. Having attended college and graduate school at locations that were relatively proximate to their home, she was familiar with the local higher education landscape. In a follow-up conversation with Jeffrey I learned that he had never traveled to his mother's closest alma mater. This was surprising to me. I later learned this was a due to Jeffrey's heavily scheduled extracurricular schedule as well as his mother's limited time at home, and limited social networks. Since Jeffrey lived in Vista Ridge along with LeBron, he had little exposure to adults with college educations and professional occupations outside of his own home. Despite Ms. Towles' habitual volunteering in the school and Jeffrey's participation in school and out of school extracurricular activities, Jeffrey had few friends at school with which he spent time out of school. Jeffrey's reliance on his home and inability to rely on his neighborhood or other social relationships for socialization towards opportunity was not mirrored in the Hunting household.

The Huntings lives were equally packed with activities and obligations. However, the activities and associations that Sierra maintained were with her classmates who were the children of other college educated and professionally employed adults. In conversations with Ms. Hunting about the times when Sierra was away from home, she often referenced Sierra visiting other White classmates in affluent areas. This initially surprised me, since I perceived most social relationships to be stratified by segregation in Rolling Acres. In reviewing interviews and notes from Ms. Hunting she discussed the ease with which she was able to befriend (White) families at River elementary and how Sierra often spent time at their houses and went on smaller trips with them. Sierra's participation in school-related activities and camps led to a greater access to capital than was present for Jeffrey. Though both families were "crunched" for time and geographically stratified from capitals, the Huntings had a much easier time accessing these spaces and networks of capital. On several occasions, Black parents discussed the lack of "friend exchange" between low-income and middle-income families in Rolling Acres. I initially interpreted this as largely a socioeconomic phenomenon, but in reviewing my notes and interviews amongst the three single headed White families in my sample with more modest incomes, they often had "friend exchange" across economic and geographic lines. In this way, race and class operated to segment the lives of Black families, but fewer barriers were present for White families in more relatively deprived social settings. Sierra, and other less well off White children, were able to experience other families which translated to more exposure to locations of opportunity, such as college campuses, networks of professionals, etc. Contrastingly, Jeffrey and other Black children's social circles were much more limited to their homes. These types of advantages became evident when looking over children's views toward the future and ability to discuss potential pathways. While this advantage was tied to individual family capital, in this case skin color capital, the subsequent gains via socialization came through the networks and spaces of opportunity they were allowed to experience outside of their homes.

Conclusion

Quantitative methodologists continue to dominate sociological discussions of neighborhoods and education. While quantitative methods can "control" for differences

in social indicators such as income, wealth, and other aggregate neighborhood characteristics, in reality making a Black resident “equal” to a White resident would mean a drastic shift not only in individual and neighborhood characteristics, but also in the social worlds in which these residents were situated. In my analysis, I largely discuss neighborhoods as racialized social spaces, but neighborhoods are equally spaces determined by social class. The segregation, in both economic and racial forms is closely correlated, which makes it difficult to discern the independent effects of each (Charles 2003). In my analysis of families in Rolling Acres I found that, with few exceptions, I could consistently characterize the neighborhoods from which White and Black children came from as demographically and qualitatively different.

My exploration of the relative deprivation of African-Americans in an affluent setting provides a unique contribution to the sociological literature on race and economic inequality. My case study of the Downings demonstrates though the Downings were more economically prosperous than most African-American families in my sample and in the nation at large, they remained disadvantaged when compared to their White counterparts in Rolling Acres. In areas of prosperity like Rolling Acres, Black families find themselves with few resources to bring to bear on their children’s lives. This is increasingly important considering the mobility patterns of an increasingly suburbanizing Black population. Being located in these affluent spaces has real and perceived residential and educational virtues, but there are also costs. The everyday experiences that many White families are able to partake in due to economic capital remain out of the reach of most Black families. Even in areas of life that should require little economic capital, such as friendship, I found little integration between Black and White families.

My analyses also demonstrated that Black and White boys’ out of school lives are different in terms of activities, supervision, and structure. These differences in experience influence youths’ thoughts about future opportunities, particularly about jobs and education. Families and neighborhoods provide important socialization messages to youth in both active and passive forms. Active messages about educational potential and high expectations for children’s career were common among both Black and White families. However, passive messages were the base for children’s understandings of their individual potentials and the processes to reach their goals. These passive messages were

transmitted via participation in activities as well as experiences within different social settings. A lack of desegregation and integration helped maintain the stratification of opportunities amongst youth.

While past research has demonstrated that the out of school context matters for small children and adolescents, I found that even in well-resourced settings, neighborhoods were important in middle elementary. The cumulative advantage that Danny Morris experienced cannot be distilled into demographic characteristics alone. Danny, and other affluent White children like him, in Rolling Acres were able to rely on networks of associates via their neighborhoods and extracurricular activities that provided considerable advantages. White families were able to marshal multiple capitals: economic, social, and cultural to provides support for their children's academic and social development. These capitals, particularly social and cultural, remained accessible to youth despite rarely spending large amount of times in the neighborhood.

I do not mean to suggest that economic, social or cultural capital were exclusively White possessions. However, it is important to distinguish that the most socially valuable forms of these capitals remained stockpiled in White communities. The ability to acquire these capitals was restricted but not wholly defined by residential and interpersonal segregation. The social distances that White families maintained in Rolling Acres were, in large part, responsible for the limited opportunities and envisioned futures that marginalized families developed in Rolling Acres. Among the children of both Black and White families, I found the same processes for determining friendship networks, but adults mediated the opportunity for meaningful interracial and inter-economic relationships by structuring or not structuring children's out of school time.

A serious consideration of the out-of-school contexts that youth come from creates a more nuanced picture of the terrain of education inequality. By carefully studying an area that is considered desegregated by quantitative standards, we gain a greater qualitative understanding of the failings of residential desegregation and interpersonal integration. The presence of economic and racial minority families in an affluent setting does not inherently mean that they will be able to access the rewards of concentrated affluence.

Chapter Seven

Inside Rolling Acres' Classrooms

While the out of school context has received much attention in this dissertation, it is important to look closely at the site where the bulk of learning occurs. Contemporary sociological inquiries into educational inequality seldom get inside classrooms, which is a major concern. Gaining access to classrooms via school approval, teacher approval, and review board approval is no easy task, so the dearth of recent work inside of classrooms is understandable, but it leaves a major gap in our understanding of what role student and teacher interactions have on educational inequality. I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the working of the Marks, Reno, and Jackson classrooms for a few months and document student-teacher interaction both ethnographically and systematically.

At the front of the classroom, Mr. Marks sits with a reading group composed of three students: Jimmy, Becky and Jeffrey. They sit quietly awaiting Mr. Marks' question about the chapter they have just completed. Jimmy, Becky and Jeffrey are the top three readers in their class of 22 students and ferociously tore through the reading in their seats moments ago. Finally Mr. Marks breaks the silence and asks, "So what connections did you see?" He turns to Becky, a blond White female, and she quickly responds, "Yes, in the story they mentioned mums and my mom has talked about mums before." Mr. Marks chimed back, "Yes, as a child I remember we had mums growing near our house." He nods to Jimmy, a White male, to solicit a connection. Jimmy thinks for a moment and offers that a connection about the main character in the story plays with family members. Mr. Marks nods in agreement and then turns to Jeffrey. Jeffrey, an African-American boy, brightly replies, "Yes! They talked about neon lights. And there are neon lights on the bottom of cars." Mr. Marks froze, hummed as he thought through Jeffrey's answer and replied, "No, that's not right." Jeffrey rebutted, "the lights on cars that are on the

ground.” Mr. Marks responded, “No Jeffrey, sorry that’s not right.” Jeffrey resettled himself into his seat and remained quiet for the remainder of the reading lesson.

To most casual observers the interaction just outlined represents an idealized learning environment with a committed teacher, a small group of students, and the facilitation of real life connections to reading materials. While it does represent all of that, it also typifies a much more subtle form of bias present in contemporary Language Arts instruction. In this case, Jeffrey, the only African-American boy in the highest reading group for his class offered a reading connection to a material object, a car accessory. Unfortunately, this connection was not only overlooked but also invalidated by Mr. Marks’ disbelief in neon lights on the bottom of cars. Jeffrey was referring to “ground effects” which are bright neon lights that are attached to the undercarriage of cars to cast a bright shadow on the pavement beneath the car. Jeffrey’s knowledge and experience were quickly devalued, in large part due to the Mr. Marks’ limited cultural vocabulary. However, I am not simply concerned with Mr. Marks’ relative cultural (in)competency. I am also concerned that traditional measurements of student-teacher interaction could not detect the importance of such an interaction for Jeffrey’s engagement and subsequent relationship to Mr. Marks.

In my previous chapter, I discussed the ways that students’ out of school lives shaped their outlooks and understanding of current and future opportunities. These distances between the lives and experiences of students outside of school are only a part of the tale of the inequality that Black and White, and rich and poor students in Rolling Acres experience. In this chapter, I now interrogate inequality in Language Arts and social behavior by looking at student-teacher interaction. My goals are two fold: 1) to advance dialogue on the unequal treatment of students in contemporary schooling and 2) develop a more nuanced description and understanding of how contemporary in-school practices relate to educational inequality. To this end, my intention is to gain a deeper understanding of how minority students, both economic and racial, are incorporated or not incorporated into the classrooms to which they are assigned. With more attention nationally being directed at school inputs, I maintain it is equally important to understand the processes within school to introduce a more refined conversation about the unequal schooling experiences of youth.

That data from this chapter are drawn from systematic and ethnographic observations of Language Arts and other subject areas during four months in Cherry and River Elementary. I have ethnographic accounts for all three classrooms, but have systematic data on student-teacher interaction for two of the classrooms. Cumulatively, these data utilize a wide range of methodologies to answer the central questions: 1) Are minority students, racial and economic, treated differently inside RAPS schools? 2) Based on evidence from three different classrooms, are there common features of unequal treatment?

Where does the responsibility lie?

Of the analyses in this dissertation, discussions of the processes inside classrooms are the most susceptible to a “dialogue of blame.” In gaining access to classrooms for observations a common concern among teachers and administrators was the fear that my research would attribute inequality to teachers or administrators. To mediate this tension I assured school personnel that I was interested in understanding how inequality emerged and or was combated both inside and outside of school. Throughout my analysis of the in-school data, my goal was to better understand the processes that yielded differential interactions between students and teachers. While it is simple enough to suggest that difference exists by relying on assumptions about motivation (e.g. prejudice), the task of understanding how these differences come about and if they are potentially able to be recorded is a much more central to this chapter. Ultimately, my data demonstrates differences in treatment between majority and minority students in RAPS, but there is some variation in the site of inequality (e.g. academic feedback v. behavioral discipline), though the process that produces these differences are intimately related. My concentration on teacher’s roles in student-teacher interaction is based on the belief that adults hold more influence over their interaction than do students. Additionally, if teachers are unable to interact with students in ways that are supportive, the academic and social development of students will be stunted. Teachers and classrooms do not exist in a vacuum. School as institution and the actors within them are susceptible to the forces of the larger social world. Thus, when looking at inequalities in education, it is necessary to

tie them to sociological and psychological literatures of inequality. Recent innovations in theories of bias and prejudice provide leverage for understanding these inequalities.

The terms prejudice, discrimination and bias all have long lineages in the social scientific lexicon. In this chapter, I am concerned with identifying differences in treatment between groups of students. Historically, the residual distance between groups on observed outcomes were considered discrimination in sociological and economic research (Quillian 2006). In this chapter, I discuss observed differences in treatment, which would historically have been considered discrimination due to the observed inequality between groups. However, recent legal reasoning suggests the presence of animus and/or intent to discriminate is necessary to classify differences as discrimination. My project is not to classify differences as discrimination per the decree of the law; rather I am more concerned with the explicit or implicit thoughts and ideas that may inform the production of differences. I lean on social psychological literature to gain a better understanding of processes and motivation behind these in-school inequalities in treatment. These differences inform my framing of in-school inequality.

Allport's early work on prejudice and its more recent lineage provide a basic lexicon for uncovering the psycho-social processes inside these classrooms. In my discussion, I use bias as an overarching term because of its blend of individual and structural considerations. Hewstone and colleagues (2002) argue,

Intergroup bias refers generally to the systematic tendency to evaluate one's own membership group (the in-group) or its members more favorably than a non-membership group (the out-group) or its members (p. 576).

Bias provides some leverage for understanding the role of social group position in assessment. Additionally I chose bias as an overarching term which contains the separate dimensions of prejudice, stereotyping, and sometimes discrimination. There are some clear hazards to invoking the language of bias. First, the term bias has a historically loaded connotation that ascribes ill-intent to perpetrators of bias. In my use, there is no attribution of intent, but in the cases when bias is detected, I explore the potential driving forces or causes. Second, many historical and contemporary discussions of bias assume that a singular identity (e.g. race, class, or gender) assumes primacy in assessment of groups. For example, a common assumption is that bias between racial groups is high,

but within races bias is low. However, it is important to consider the intersections of the social identities of race, social class, and gender. Because of the reliance on in-group and out-groups dichotomies in social psychology more fruitful discussion about the meanings of social class and gender on race-related bias has been understudied. Considering how race and class and gender influence perceptions of out-groups as well as in-groups will be important for understanding the interactions within classrooms.

As a site of observation, classrooms provide a unique challenge and opportunity for exploring interactions between adults and children across the lines of racial and social class. Unfortunately, the Brophy-Good observation inventory constrained my collection and presentation of intersectional data on teacher feedback in reading groups. However, in my ethnographic analyses, I provide an intersectional approach to bias in behavior and curriculum stratification. Lastly, my interview data uncovers the ways in which group differences are individualized using counter-narratives that challenge group based perspectives on educational inequality (e.g. the Black-White achievement gap). My goal is to aid in bridging the tension that Maureen Hallinan (2001) identified in contemporary research on educational inequality,

Tension between individualistic or microlevel perspective and a structural perspective continues to be played out in these debates. An individualistic perspective attributes blacks' underperformance primarily to individual, family, and cultural factors associated with the black race, while a structural perspective concentrates on the impact of social structure on the black experience (p. 56).

I argue the individual and the structural are often inextricably wed, so individual actions must be understood within social structure, and consideration of social structure must include individual action. Thus, the differences in treatment that minority students receive do not occur in a vacuum and are not simply a result of animus. Instead, I suggest that as individuals, teachers, parents, and school administrators, are nested in a larger social world where race, social class, and gender hold meaning via scripts of which actors may or may not be aware (Bonilla-Silva 2001). These scripts about the social order operate at the level that Bourdieu would call beneath the conscious, but by observing the praxis of these teachers these scripts can be viewed, interpreted and understood. Thus individuals in schools are both susceptible to and responsible for the maintenance of inequality in schools, whether they attempt to or do not actively subscribe to beliefs of

inferiority of one group or superiority of another group. My discussion in this chapter concludes by demonstrating the ways that teachers locate the individual in the structural, which aids in the (re)production of everyday inequality.

Observing Language Arts

I collected data using the Brophy-Good Dyadic Interaction Scale in reading groups during Language Arts instruction in the Reno and Marks classrooms (Good and Brophy 1970). The BGDIS is designed to capture interactions between students and teachers, but is not designed to fully capture the dialogue and meaning of the student-teacher interaction. The BGDIS allows researchers to categorize the response opportunities afforded to students as well as the types of responses that teachers provide students. In each classroom, I attempted a minimum of 10 Language Arts observations using the BGDIS. These observations were useful but limited for two main reasons: 1) the scale simply provides the coder with differences in frequency of response between students and teachers, which provides some important information but it cannot capture the quality of these interactions and 2) the scale only documents a small set of student-teacher interactions and thus misses some forms of interaction that may be key locations where differential treatment exists. Language Arts included reading groups, vocabulary study, and writing sessions. RAPS utilized a program that was affiliated with Reading Recovery and utilized Fountas and Pinell's guided reading. Writing sessions contained a mini-lecture on the individual unit and then independent student work on writing and typing. On average, there were about 2 1/4 hours dedicated to Language Arts instruction, by far the largest share of time out of any subject area.

Earlier research on classrooms demonstrated that some differences in classroom interaction cannot be noted quantitatively, but can be observed qualitatively (Good and Brophy 2003). For this reason, I also utilized participant observation and ethnographic writing to round out my study of the classroom (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Through observation of the interactions between students and teachers I am able to speak to incidents of treatment that occurred within and outside of instruction.

Reading Groups

Prior research on differences in student-teacher interaction argued that teacher expectations were powerful determinants of student's performance (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). This research however was conducted under experimental conditions and when tested in non-experimental conditions there was not consistent support for Pygmalion effects (Brophy 1985). Brophy and others found that teachers tend to assess students' abilities accurately and their subsequent tailoring of interactions (e.g. call rates) were of little influence on overall educational inequality. The issue of differences in call rates initially motivated my inquiry into bias in the classroom setting, but my time in the field quickly shifted my concentration. My first observations of Language Arts included reading groups, writing session, and vocabulary sessions. These three different areas of instruction contained a significant diversity of structure. Writing sessions and vocabulary study involved students working independently or in dyads with limited one-on-one work with the teacher. Reading groups was the part of Language Arts that contained the greatest amount of interaction between students and the classroom teachers. I decided to observe for differences in student responses, and feedback. While I did not test differences in call rates, I still use the basic theoretical model of Pygmalion effect to inform my inquiry. For the purposes of my study, I was interested in understanding if there were differences in treatment between students that could be systematically observed and if these differences mattered for students themselves. While I do not suggest my observations demonstrate that differential treatment reduces student achievement (I do not have the data to make this argument), I do argue that teacher treatment of students varies by student background which serves to advantage majority students.

Ability grouping which began in the early 20th century, has trickled down to early elementary education. The pervasiveness of ability grouping in one form or another appears to be present in upward of 75 percent of elementary classrooms nationally. These groups, for the most part, are based on individual student performance (Slavin 1987). Even with a concentration on student skills a number of covariates such as student race, behavior, and teacher perceptions significantly affect reading group placement for students in early elementary school, which leaves significant room for inquiry into the processes of inequality of sorting as well as treatment(Condron 2007).

In the Rolling Acres Public Schools, students were assessed on reading level three times during the academic year: beginning, midyear, and ending. The assessment of reading level involved independent reading, evaluation of oral reading using a running record, and answering questions. At the close of their third grade year, students were “benchmarked” and during the first or second week of their fourth grade year, these same students were re-benchmarked. Teachers identified that students’ spring benchmarks were generally consistent with the fall benchmarks.⁵⁹ Within the first two weeks of school, students were re-tested to assure their placement in groups was consistent with the end of the year assessments. Beyond this test based assessment, all three of the classroom teachers I observed said they communicated with the year’s previous teacher about students’ behavioral patterns, particularly behavioral issues.

The process of sorting was based on test scores and informal communication. As a result, Black students were overwhelmingly located in lower reading groups, with few exceptions. Thus the groups that I observed were economically and racially segregated. Current educational policy debates on ability grouping primarily center on student achievement with discussions of student-teacher interaction as secondary. However the evidence on student achievement and teacher characteristics suggests student-teacher interaction may be key to understanding curriculum segmentation’s rewards and shortfalls (Pallas et al. 1994). As a result, I concentrated my scale observation on interactions between students and teachers in reading groups, while my ethnographic observations were conducted across all three parts of the Language Arts curriculum.

In both the Marks and Reno classrooms, typical reading lessons had students reading independently, while the teacher worked with a handful of students at a table near the front of the room answering questions for a guided reading session. These small group sessions, by casual observation, contained a very even amount of contact between students and the teacher. Mr. Marks tended to ask questions of the students from right to left to assure even coverage of students. Mr. Marks’ classroom was much more

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, I do not have access to the previous year’s benchmarks, so I cannot explore the correlation myself. However, in conversations with school staff who worked on reading, some suggested that the end of the year results for students were “cooked” to assure students were benchmarked on or close to their assigned grade levels, instead of reflecting their “true scores”. This would be particularly troubling if a gap in summer learning does exist among students from disadvantaged students, because it would suggest this cooking would present an inaccurate picture of reading levels as well as summer learning loss.

disciplined than Mrs. Reno's or Mrs. Jackson's classrooms. While he was seated at the front of the room working with a reading group he rarely had to utter commands of silence to other students in the classroom. The room remained quiet while he rotated around asking students questions that were designed to document reading comprehension, connections between the students' lives, as well as connections to other components of the Language Arts curriculum. This does not mean that he did not have students in the small group raise their hands or call out, but he generally moderated the groups carefully.

Mrs. Reno's class was vibrant with action during reading groups. While she was at the front of the room with students, she would consistently interrupt her questioning to bark, "Boys and girls! Please be silent!" Of the three classrooms, Reno had the largest population of students with behavioral issues.⁶⁰ Students constantly got out of their seats to visit other students' tables and rummage around in reading materials. Ultimately, this made her reading group instruction intermittent due to interruptions, which created an impression that her interaction with the students was less methodical than Mr. Marks'.

Mrs. Jackson's reading groups occurred infrequently and were sometimes assisted by a teacher's aide.⁶¹ She would gather students at a desk in the back of the room and inform students not seated at the table that they were responsible for locating and reading "appropriate" materials. The students in her classroom often took this time as an opportunity to read books, often not at a level appropriate to their abilities, until they were "caught" by Mrs. Jackson, or to work on other school subjects. While in reading groups, Mrs. Jackson would have students read aloud in a circular fashion and assist with mispronunciations and errors. Jackson, of all three teachers, appeared to adhere to the prescribed Language Arts curriculum the least due to her inconsistent conducting of reading, writing, and vocabulary sessions.

Though I found different styles of classroom management and application of the Language Arts curriculum in all three classrooms, I did observe some consistencies in

⁶⁰ This is both via classification and casual observation. Mrs. Reno also had a student who's behavioral issues were of such concern that the student was assigned an individual teacher's aid by the school for all academic courses.

⁶¹ Because of the small number of students in her classroom with special needs, a teacher aide would come to the room during instructional time to assist Summer.

their treatment of students, particularly minority and poor students. I will now turn to formal observational data of reading groups.

Student-Teacher Interaction Scale Data

The Brophy-Good interactions were collected during reading groups.⁶² I chose to document academic related contacts such as questions, answers, and teacher feedback. I did not record behavioral corrections or other forms of interaction in my scale data. While documenting all forms of contact would be advantageous, I was unable to do this due to limits of the inventory and time. Additionally, my student teacher interaction data only provides evidence of the contacts when students were called on or responded to by teachers. Thus my data does not fully gauge student engagement or teacher call rates. Despite these limitations, my data explores an important scenario of student response and teacher feedback.

My data demonstrated there were differences in the rates of feedback provided by teachers between racial and socioeconomic groups in both the Reno and Marks classrooms. In thinking through my ethnographic observations of student-teacher interaction, I did not estimate I witnessed unequal responses to students of differing backgrounds. However, my ethnographic eye missed these subtle patterns, but did observe differential treatment in areas other than reading groups which I will take up later in this chapter. My first area of concern was examining differences between racial groups within the Reno and Marks classrooms.

Figure 7.1 Teachers' Pos Feedback Race 1

⁶² I collected non-reading group observations also, but I eliminated them for the purposes of these analyses.

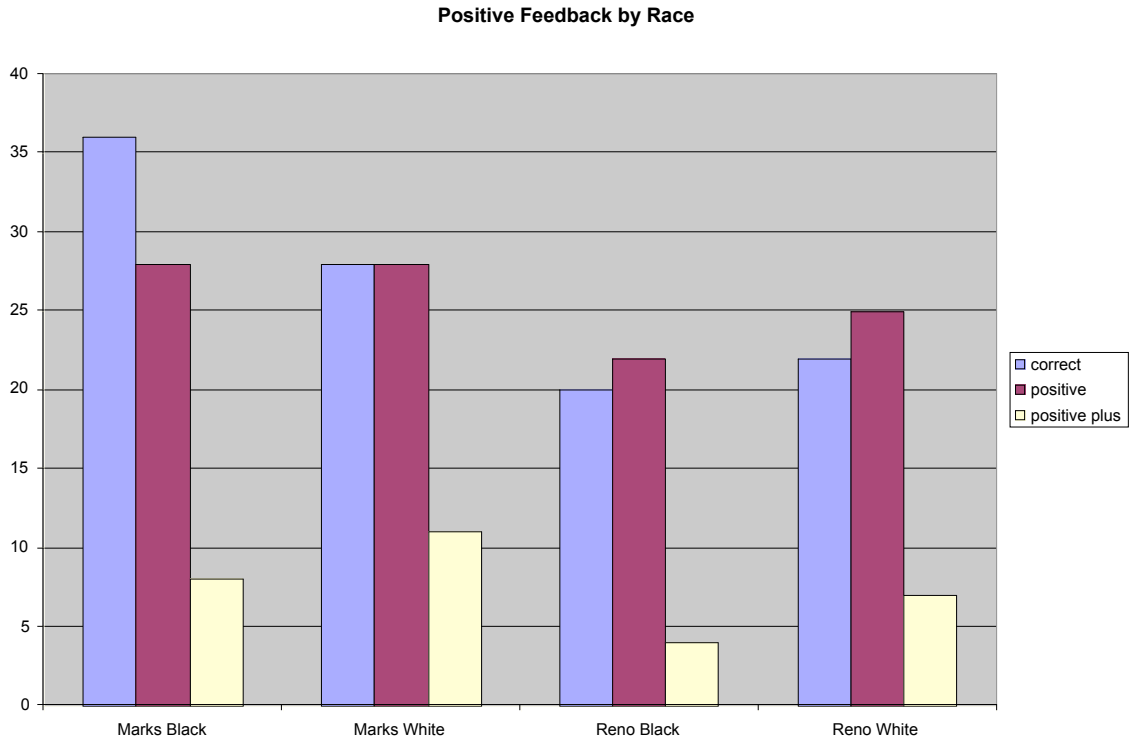


Chart 6.1 displays the pooled data for the two classrooms that I observed. The strength of the pooled data is the ability to locate differences between groups, but it is susceptible to outliers which may exhibit leverage on the overall data. Because my data samples are small, I was careful to make sure that a small number of students did not drive the overall pattern of the data. The pooled data reveals multiple patterns of difference between the feedback that Black and White students received. The first bar represents correct answers issued in response to questions in reading groups. The second bar represents a positive response or affirmation from the teacher. For example these included comments such as, “correct”, “that’s right”, “yes”, etc. These types of responses were common in both the Marks and Reno classrooms. The third bar represents extra positive feedback. Typical examples included “that’s great”, “well done”, etc. These extra positive feedback statements were not mutually exclusive of positive feedback. It was possible, and often common, that at teacher in response to a correct answer would comment, “That’s correct. Really good job!” This would be coded as positive and extra positive feedback.

Looking at the first classroom, Mr. Marks, a White male teacher, we see that Black and White students answered the same raw number of questions correctly. This

was because of the low number of Black students in the Marks classroom and the days that I observed. The reading groups that I observed were often racially segregated, so on some days of observations I would witness greater response and feedback opportunities for Black students. Thus the percentage of positive feedback may be a better indicator of student-teacher interaction. Among Black students in Mr. Marks' class he offered positive feedback on correct answers approximately 77 percent of the time. Mr. Marks offered White students positive feedback 100 percent of the time for correct answers. This is a difference of roughly 23 percent. For Black students who offered correct answers, Marks offered extra positive feedback approximately 29 percent of the time and White students approximately 39 percent of the time, a difference of 10 percent.

In the Marks classroom, Black students received less positive feedback for the correct answers that they offered. In attempting to understand this difference there are a number of potential explanations. First, one could suggest the large number of Black response opportunities made Mr. Marks less likely to respond with positive feedback. This is possible, but the difference in overall response opportunities between Black and White students was not very large, which makes this unlikely. As a teacher Mr. Marks prided himself on being even-handed. A former military man and born in a city with a sizable ethnic population, he considered himself a supporter of diversity and success for all students. Another potential interpretation is that the feedback rates differ because of differences in skills or responses, in the sense that not all answers "are equal." While this is plausible, the difficulty of questions between students across groups was rather homogenous. I did not observe a sizable difference in the types of questions that were asked between the reading groups and the relatively similar pattern of high amounts of correct answers across groups, which suggests that the questions issued in groups were level appropriate but of similar difficulty. When looking at extra positive feedback, there was a difference of 10 percent. While the sample size impairs extrapolation, the direction of the difference, favoring Whites, is important to note and aligns with the Reno classroom.

In Mrs. Reno's classroom, there was a nearly equal distribution of positive responses and feedback. Among Black students there was a positive response rate of 110 percent and among Whites 113 percent. Mrs. Reno offered large amounts of positive

feedback to all students, sometimes repeating positive comments. The equality of positive feedback however was not present when extra positive feedback rates were documented. Among Black students she offered feedback such as “that’s really good”, “you’re doing great today”, etc. to 20 percent of the Black students while she offered that type of feedback to 32 percent of the White children in her classroom. Unlike the differences in general positive feedback, this does not appear to be a statistical artifact of sample size.

In my observations of Mrs. Reno, she categorized herself as a “caring teacher” who was concerned about her students well being, especially the performance of her minority students. While this was her characterization of her personal approach, there was a disconnect between her ideal and her responses to Black students.

Figure 7.2 Teachers' Post Feedback SC 1

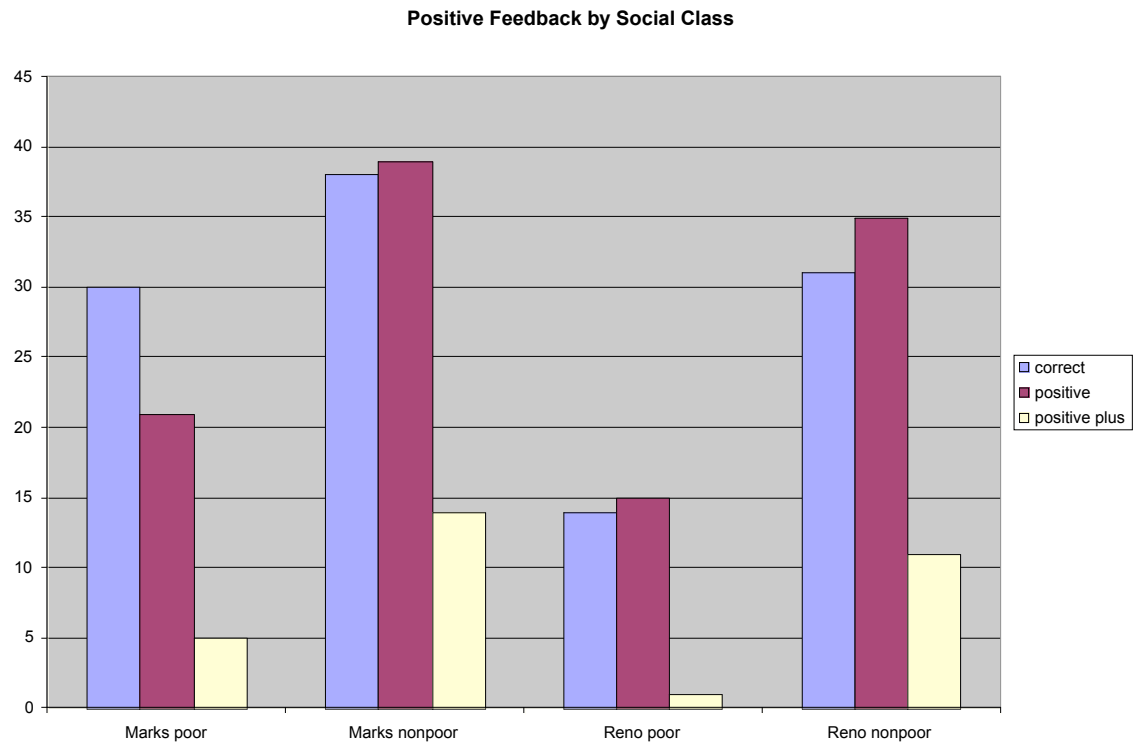


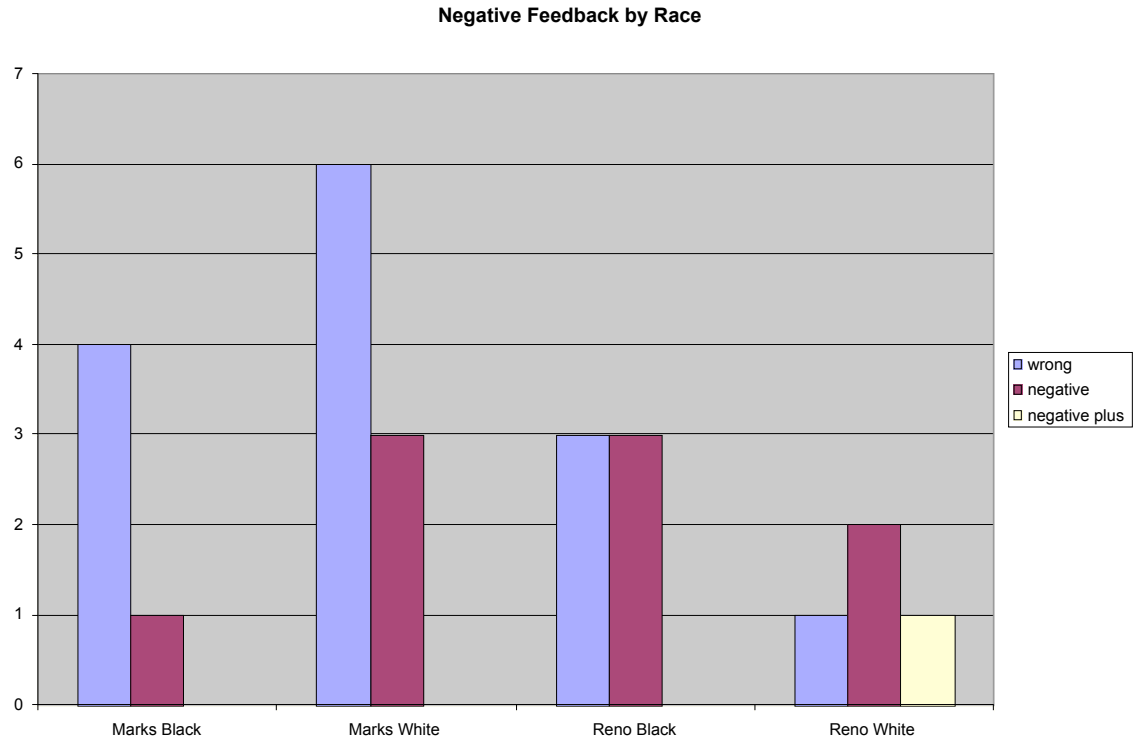
Chart 6.2 examines the same differences in positive feedback, but this time it compares the rates of positive feedback divided along socioeconomic lines. I used two simple categories: poor and non-poor. Student who qualified free or reduced lunch were placed in the poor category, while students who did not qualify were placed in the non-poor category. In Mr. Marks’ classroom non-poor students received 102 percent rates of

positive feedback for correct answers, while poor students in the Marks classroom received positive feedback 70 percent of the time. The direction of difference is consistent between these two differences, with poor and Black student receiving less positive feedback. This is in part due to the overlap in the poor and Black populations, since the vast majority of White students were non-poor and Black students were poor, there was only a small adjustment for these results. In Mr. Marks' classroom two Black respondents were non-poor and one White student was poor. In Mrs. Reno's classroom all low income students were Black, though not all Black students were low income. It is also important to note that the social class findings also include students who were non-Black and non-White but present in the classrooms I observed.

Among non-poor students Mr. Marks offered extra positive feedback about 37 percent of the time while he offered extra positive feedback 16 percent of the time to poor students. Mr. Marks' feedback, both positive and extra positive feedback, favored non-poor students. As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Marks' "fairness" with students was noticeable. His process of deliberately asking questions from right to left yielded relative equality in question coverage. This equal distribution of questions however did not result in similar feedback. This suggests that there was a process of differentiation that informed Mr. Marks' doling out of positive and extra-positive feedback out.

Mrs. Reno also provided more positive feedback to non-poor students, but also did the same for poor students. In both cases, an overrepresentation of positive feedback reflects more than one positive comment by the teacher. When we look at extra positive feedback, we find that Reno provided 35 percent extra positive feedback to non-poor students which compares to 7 percent extra positive feedback for poor students. In the cases of Mr. Marks and Mrs. Reno, I found that poor students received less extra positive feedback from their teachers.

Figure 7.3 Teacher's Neg. Feedback Race 1

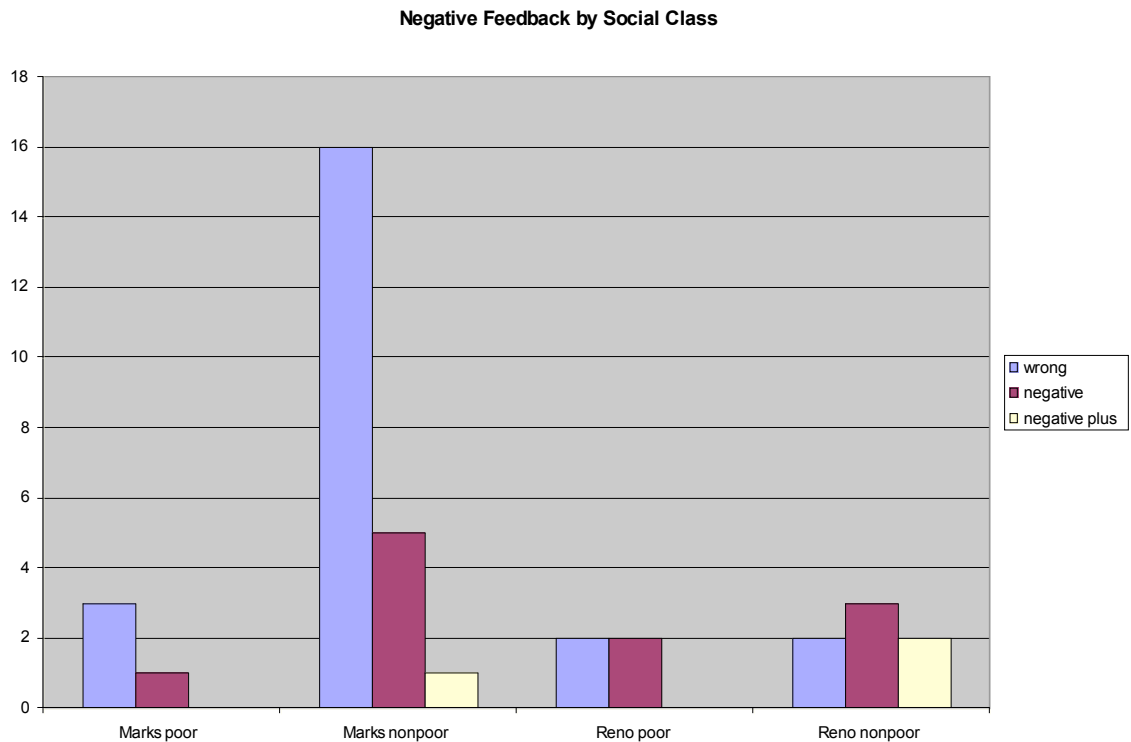


Across the three classrooms I observed, there was very little negative feedback offered related to academic content. In small reading groups, teachers tended to ask questions that were closely tied to content that students had just read. These questions asked students to make connections to their lives, summarize recently read materials, or read-alouds. This produced few incorrect responses and negative feedback in reading groups. Chart three displays differences between racial groups for incorrect answers. Mr. Marks offered negative feedback such as, “that’s incorrect”, “wrong”, etc. to Black students 25 percent of the time and to his White students 50 percent. Mrs. Reno offered Black students negative feedback 100 percent of the time and White students negative feedback 200 percent of the time. Mr. Marks offered no extra negative feedback to students.⁶³ In Mrs. Reno’s class she did not offer any extra negative feedback to Black students but did offer it to one White student. Though the differences in negative feedback in Mr. Marks class are low in number, the direction of the bias is nonetheless meaningful. My initial hypothesis was that I would find Black students received far more

⁶³ This finding may appear inconsistent with the chapter’s opening vignette. In actuality it reflects the different days that I observed. While I did observe the chapter’s opening scenario I was not using the Brophy-Good scale on that day, so it did not appear in my quantitative evidence.

negative feedback than their White counterparts, but my evidence points in the opposite direction. Chart 6.4 displays a similar tale of non-poor students in the Reno and Marks classroom receiving more negative feedback for incorrect answers. The greater negative feedback amongst non-poor students likely operated through teacher’s fear, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Figure 7.4 Teachers' Neg. Feedback SC 1



Limitations

The data presented is from two classrooms. Though I observed three classrooms during my time in the field, I was only able to gain reliable information from two classrooms. Due to scheduling issues and pedagogical choices, I was unable to consistently observe Language Arts instruction in the third classroom. Mrs. Jackson, the third teacher’s classroom that I observed, did not maintain a consistent teaching schedule with regimented times. Instead, she would extend other subjects into time allotted for Language Arts or skip over Language Arts if other subjects needed to be addressed. Thus, several observations resulted in rich field notes about other subjects, but few observations of Language Arts.

Ethnographic Evidence

The results of the systematic observations revealed a pattern among both Marks and Reno of favoring students from White backgrounds and privileged backgrounds. While each noted difference does not necessarily connote bias with ill intent, I am confident my findings of difference in the Mr. Marks classroom between Black and White students as well as differences in extra positive feedback in Mrs. Reno's class indicate a subtle process of bias in response to students. I argue that teachers' assessment of students' behavior and family backgrounds influenced their interaction with student during reading group instructional sessions. While it may be convenient or parsimonious to compartmentalize instruction from other areas of teacher-student interaction, in reality the boundaries of these classroom endeavors are constantly in flux. Each day teachers begin the day with lesson plans and sets of objectives, but these plans are renegotiated to be responsive to student dispositions, student comprehension, and administrative demands on scheduling (e.g. breaking for elective classes, fire drills, or impromptu conferences). As teachers negotiate these competing needs, their allocation of instructional time as well as their interaction with students can shift. Across the three classrooms, the teachers acknowledged revising their plans everyday to fit the needs of the student body and all mentioned times when behavioral issues caused them to discontinue lessons. The connections between teachers' assessment of students' behavior can thus easily bleed into teachers' perception of student engagement and performance. I conducted analyses of instruction related contacts and non-instruction related contacts separately and then looked at the intersection of these analyses to produce a more holistic picture of the classroom and the processes that create unequal schooling experiences.

Classroom management, student behavior and teacher assessment are key sites of inequality, but the connections between the three are seldom explored in educational ethnographies (Ferguson 2000). Because these areas are not mutually exclusive, I am interested in unpacking how the interplay of the three produces the bias documented above. In reviewing my field notes, particularly the non-reading group portions of Language Arts, I found Mrs. Reno and Mr. Marks tended to heavily reprimand non-White students with a greater frequency than White students. Alternatively they often offered audible compliments to White students on their productivity when working, while

Black students rarely received these public comments. Instead, Black students received one-on-one comments such as, “You’re working well today” whispered to them. It is possible that these behavioral and procedural comments outside of reading groups informed Marks’ and Reno’s affect towards children in reading groups or vice-versa.

Another possible explanation for this difference in feedback rates can be found in the ways that Mr. Marks and Mrs. Reno doled out extra positive feedback beneath the level of conscious. Outside of smaller reading groups, they both tended to use their personal experiences as part of their pedagogy. For example, Mrs. Reno returned from a family vacation during Spring Break and decided to use part of class time to show a slideshow of her trip. During the slideshow, she asked questions such as, “Boys and girls what’s that?” in reference to landmarks. During the slideshow she displayed pictures of herself and her family. She occasionally asked for connections that related to past reading students had done during the year, but this was infrequent. However, the bulk of communication between Reno and the students was about her family and White students relaying their families’ experiences on vacations. She responded to these comments positively and sometimes asked students to expound on their experiences. These types of connections strengthen the relationship between the participating students and the teacher. In a conversation with Mrs. Reno about the slideshow, she never referenced the fact that only White students participated, but she did acknowledge that one of her goals for the slideshow was to expose students to new locations and experiences. While this was a noble goal, she likely missed her target demographic of poor and minority students, the majority of whom spent their Spring Breaks at home in Rolling Acres. Cumulative experiences such as these between teachers and students support and promote a rapport among economically and racially alike actors based on cultural capital. Even with a conscious intent to treat students equally, Reno, Marks and Jackson allowed their cultural positions to develop closer ties with privileged students and families than minority families in their classrooms.

The greater degree of connections between teachers and privileged students would typically make one assume that in the area of negative feedback, these students would receive less than their non-privileged counterparts. However my observations demonstrated the opposite was true. This counterintuitive finding was contextualized by

Mr. Marks. In an interview when we discussed the achievement gap in RAPS he commented,

... There was a time when I would correct kids Black vernacular and say, "That's not standard Middle English and to make it in this world you've got to speak and write standard Middle English. When you go to the neighborhood you can say anything you want. When you go into the work world you know you have got to conform to this standard of communication. If you don't it will put you at a disadvantage." I have kind of pulled back on that a little bit. All I do is to do my best to move kids along in reading, teach them how to write.

He continued on,

But I never correct [Black] kids. When they say, there goes the doorstep. You know, "Where is it going?" I don't do that anymore because I don't want to offend anybody. I don't want the kids to think well this guy doesn't respect the way I talk. Who knows? I have some pretty perceptive kids. They might think if he doesn't respect the way I talk he doesn't respect the way my family talks because that is way my family talks. I mean where do the kids learn it? You know they learn it in their homes and neighborhoods primarily. So I'm real careful not to say anything to my students of color that would hurt their feelings or make them feel inadequate because of things that are part of the way they are.

There are a number of complex things occurring in Mr. Marks' commentary on correcting African-American students. In his own estimation, he is performing a balancing act between academic and social development. While he recognizes the necessity for students to speak what he calls "standard Middle English" he alters his natural inclination in correcting students under the guise of cultural sensitivity. As I discussed in chapter five, on multiple occasions I observed well intentioned teachers shift their standard praxis for the perceived benefit of their minority students. In this case, Mr. Marks wanted to assure his Black students knew that he did respect the homes they came from, but worried about their future opportunities based on their language use. As a result, he opted to virtually eliminate correction for language use when dealing with African-American students. The decision to employ this *sliding standard*, one could argue, will carry higher academic costs over time than the social alienation than an African-American student would experience for correction of his speech.

This balancing of culture and academics among the teachers in my sample was often posed as trade off between pedagogy and cultural sensitivity.⁶⁴ As prior research has demonstrated, it is possible to be pedagogically sound as well as culturally sensitive. However, this type of praxis was not prevalent in the classrooms I observed, whether the teachers were Black or White. While the district itself had training for teachers around cultural sensitivity, the everyday dealings with these areas of conflict were very complicated. These types of small changes in practice often go unobserved by outsiders and would not be detected by traditional forms of simple classroom observation.

Mr. Mark's fear of offending African-Americans was likely not unique to him and arguably could be found amongst many teachers in the workforce. Mr. Marks viewed himself as equitable and considered his response as culturally sensitive, but he never identified making an effort to discuss such changes in practice. As White teachers of diverse classrooms, Mr. Marks and Mrs. Reno made their own decisions about incorporating students of differing backgrounds, which could potentially be more a disservice than service.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, in Rolling Acres and in the United States at large, conversations around cultural sensitivity are often truncated for fear of offense or guilt. At the core of many troubled relationships in River Elementary and Cherry Elementary was fear of offense and maltreatment. While these teacher's jobs were not necessarily in jeopardy for maltreatment, their social reputations could potentially come under fire if they were found to treat students from different backgrounds in differentially negative ways. Shelby Steele (2006) argues that in the post-Civil Rights Era the rules around social relations, not simply racial relations, are regulated by fear of being labeled as a perpetuator of inequality. He argues this culture of fear and guilt has limited the discourse on potential responses to inequality while overly stigmatizing Whites who themselves may not be "guilty" of racial discrimination. While there are multiple dimensions of Steele's argument that I disagree with, he does describe an interesting

⁶⁴ The exception to this pattern was Mrs. Jackson. She did not view it as a trade-off, instead she rarely addressed the role of culture in her pedagogy and relations to students.

⁶⁵ On one occasion, Mr. Marks asked Jeffrey to select the story that they would read next in their reading group from a short list of African-American folktales. After his request, Jeffrey appeared mildly confused, but selected a story. This type of "singling out" is often a dilemma when students of selected identity are low in number and teachers interpret having their participation, via singling-out in ethnic related material, as being culturally sensitive.

political space where the political economy of race in contemporary America limits conversations and interventions around inequality.

While teachers were very careful to operate with consideration for race when it came to academic matters, there care was not exercised in disciplinary interactions. Marks and Reno were quick to discipline Black students for their social behavior. This was surprising considering the large literature on differences in punishment between minority and non-minority students and the district's historical documentation of differences in discipline rates between African-Americans and Whites (Skiba et al. 2002). None of the teachers in my sample suggested punishment of students was unequal or the process of student punishments in their schools was racialized. However, my in-class observations revealed that students from racial and economic minority backgrounds did receive different treatment when issues of behavior arouse. These differences were closely tied to the family background of the students. Among all three teachers in my sample, they tended to interpret the backgrounds of students and allow this to impact the manner in which they interacted with and reacted in their classrooms. These perceptions of family background, whether accurate or inaccurate, were powerful and reliable throughout my four months of observation.

Family Background

The Coleman Report demonstrated that family background was the single most important contributor to student achievement. This finding is often leaned on to explain the differences in student achievement between races. Additionally, it is often assumed that family background directly affects student achievement. While this may be true, I observed an additional variable of intervention, teacher's perception of family background. While observing teacher-student interaction, across all three classrooms, I found teachers used their perceptions of students' backgrounds to rationalize differences in social behavior and academic performance. While the Pygmalion effects research suggested that priming of academic evidence produced "self-fulfilling prophecy", I argue that teacher-based perceptions of family background affected student-teacher interaction and subsequent student behavior.

Mr. Marks often hosted a lunch time “study period” which was a time for students to get special assistance with material, but the bulk of participants were students who had not finished their homework. This type of arrangement was common at Cherry and River elementary schools. During the morning, Mr. Marks would request that students turn in their homework or walk around and ask each student if they had completed their work. If students responded positively, he would continue onto the next student. When a student answered in the negative, he would stop and have a small conference with the student. Though I was not able to overhear every conversation, I noticed that the tenor of conversations varied from student to student. I first noticed this difference when one morning, Megan, a White female did not have her reading log (the weekly log asked parents or guardians to sign to certify that their child had read independently outside of school) and he allowed her to go out for recess instead of mandating that she stay in to do her reading like he had done earlier the same day with Byron, an African-American male. Byron consistently did not have his reading log signed and he would tell Mr. Marks that his guardian had forgotten to sign the log. Despite Byron’s insistence, Mr. Marks mandated that he remain inside for the lunch study period. Later, Mr. Marks would comment to me that Byron consistently did not have his reading log signed and that he was unsure if he was reading at home, though he was a “strong reader.” Later that same week, I watched Jeffrey, an African-American boy, questioned on his reading log which was unsigned. Instead of quickly bypassing Jeffrey like he had done earlier with Megan or mandating his attendance at study time, he instead reprimanded Jeffrey and told him, “Jeffrey, you and your mother know this has to be signed! Make sure you bring it in tomorrow.” Initially I was puzzled by the difference in treatment between the three students, because each situation received a different response. However, Mr. Marks’ clarified his strategy for dealing with out of school work when he told me, “Jeffrey’s mother is a lawyer and is usually busy...” In Mr. Marks’ estimation, he weighed the “legitimacy” of excuses on past experiences with the students’ family and his perception of the strain present in the students’ homes. This strategy was employed in the Reno and Jackson classroom as well.

Mr. Marks’ attempt to maintain a fair and steady classroom contained small inconsistencies such as these, despite his insistence on “following the rules.” Over the

course of the year, teachers had multiple opportunities to gain information about the families from which students came. Having more knowledge of a family, arguably, leads to better relationships and responsive academic and behavioral programs, but these stockpiles of information can “cut both ways.” For Byron, his actual ability as a reader was not used as an indicator of the likelihood that he was reading at home, instead Mr. Marks’ perception of his mother’s inconsistent returns of the reading log assured that Byron would spend his recess reading rather than playing outside with peers.

Contrastingly, both Jeffery and Megan, enjoyed their recess times with little issue, largely by virtue of their perceived home environments. Small differences in treatment like this can lead to the accumulation of benefits for students coming from well-resourced backgrounds and greater consequences for students from less advantaged backgrounds. The above example illustrates Mr. Marks’ reliance on social class for determining his actions, but it is important to note on different occasions Mr. Marks would also use race as an indicator for action. The dynamic manner in which race and social class interacted within the classroom suggests that teachers were responsive actors, but not necessarily sensitive to the ways in which their treatment advantaged some and disadvantaged others.

In Mrs. Reno’s classroom, she also utilized background information to rationalize differences in student behavior. As, I mentioned earlier, the largest student behavior issues were in her classroom. When I asked her about changes in student behavior during the course of the year, she was eager to tell me about Adam, a White male student. Adam over the course of the year struggled with his interactions with other students and sometimes was contentious with Reno. She explained that in a meeting early in the school year with Adam’s father, he said, “Adam, we’re not in Russia anymore, you don’t have to fight for bread.” She suggested that Adam’s behavior eventually began to shift, which she attributed to Adam becoming comfortable with the classroom environment and the cultural adjustment from Russia. When discussing Adam’s life with his father, he informed me that Adam had never lived outside of the United States and was born in the United States while his father was in graduate school. Mrs. Reno’s mis-identification of Adam’s background and cultural transition issues provided him with more space for adjustment and few draconian interactions with Reno. However, other students, particularly Black male students, often found themselves with less disciplinary leeway.

Reno attributed Adam's positive transition in behavior to cultural issues and family transition; she attributed Scott's negative transition in behavior to family issues. Scott, an African-American boy, was Mrs. Reno's second largest behavioral issue in her classroom. Reno suggested that Scott began the year being very diligent and respectful, but his behavior began to transition downward over the second half of the school year. Mrs. Reno suggested that Scott's parents' strained relationship negatively affected Scott's behavior and lead to inconsistent messages about school behavior from his parents. When issues of discipline arrived, Mrs. Reno was quick to shuffle the problems over to Mr. Tyler the school principal. Mrs. Reno's had difficulty managing a classroom full of students who routinely milled out of their seats, engaged other students and did not respond to her commands of, "Quiet!" This resulted in a room that was often on the edge of chaos. To deal with these behavioral issues, she utilized a classroom behavior incentive system. The system was a three card program where students with a green card had full privileges (e.g. get drinks of water from the hall, go the classroom closet, etc.), students with a yellow card received limited privileges (e.g. travel around the room to others desk or the bathroom within the classroom, etc.), and students with a red card had no privileges (e.g. must stay in seat, could not leave room, etc). Each morning all students started with green cards and throughout the day when indiscretions occurred she would comment, "[Student's name] move your card." By having students move their own cards students were very aware of their behavioral standing, but this did not stop some students from debating Reno's decisions to "move cards." At the close of the day, routinely three boys, two Black and one White, reached red card status. Reno's attempts at managing her classroom were marginally successful, because they allowed classroom sessions to continue, but students who lost privileges seldom acknowledged the loss of privileges. Additionally, while the system was designed to be equitable, the students who routinely displayed more behavioral issues (those who commonly reached yellow or red status) tended to have their card standing deteriorate quicker than student who typically had few behavioral issues (those who commonly remained in green and occasionally in yellow).

Scott commonly closed the day with a red card status. On several occasions I witnessed Scott behave identically to other students, but he received more severe discipline. For example, on a spring afternoon, I watched Scott get in trouble and sent

into the hallway. On his way to the hallway he shoved an empty chair that skipped about 2 feet from him. Mrs. Reno shrieked, “Scott! Go to the principal!” She then commented to me, that she was appalled at his behavior and that it was endangering other children. Later that day, I witnessed another student Ricky (another student frequently receiving red cards) “drop kick” a chair that skipped about 3 feet from him. Mrs. Reno had little reaction, except to say, “Ricky, what are you doing?” While I did not discuss the difference in treatment with Mrs. Reno, it became clear that she often reprimanded Scott for his actions in a more severe manner than other students. One possible explanation is that Mrs. Reno’s relationship with Ricky’s parents was solid and his parents had already flexible cultural capital at the school. Ricky was new to the RAPS district the year that I observed. Upon entry, his parents lobbied the school to provide Ricky with classroom assistants to keep him on task.⁶⁶ When I asked the principal and teacher about the assistants, they informed me his parents were persistent and often persistence in RAPS was rewarded with having demands met. By having Ricky’s assistants in the classroom, Mrs. Reno was able to concentrate on the rest of the classroom, which she considered an advantage, which was in part due to Ricky’s parents lobbying.

Contrastingly, Mrs. Reno did not have a good relationship with Scott’s family. Near the mid-year mark, Mrs. Reno had a contentious interaction with Scott’s mother and then decided she would sparingly contact her to deal with issues of behavior with Scott. Instead she would only contact his father when issues arrived. When discussing the disciplinary plan that was developed for Scott, she commented that agreed upon plans did not have support from his home, so she hesitated to call home. Since she had a tense relationship with Scott’s family, she sent Scott to Mr. Tyler’s to “cool down” or for him to be picked up. The perceived severity of Scott’s actions was only exacerbated by calls from the principal and the non-desire to interact with Scott’s family. Reno used her perception of Scott and Adam’s home lives to structure how she interacted with these students. In the case of Adam, her perception led to greater leniency, in the case of Scott, it resulted in more principal visits, but few calls home from the classroom teacher.

⁶⁶ Due to confidentiality reasons, no one would reveal the exact behavioral issues that Ricky had, but school staff insinuated that he was not the only child in the school with behavioral issues that would warrant additional attention from school assistants.

The lack of relationship between Reno and Scott's family would to casual observers suggest that Scott's family was uninvolved, but in fact, Reno's inability to manage this particular relationship led to reduced contact, not parental negligence. As discussed in chapter five, interpersonal conflicts between teachers and families were serious factors in understanding who participated in RAPS. Across all three classrooms, I was told by teachers that some students' families were inaccessible and uninvolved. However, I was able to contact, speak with, and meet with the majority of these families. The majority of these families were low-income or Black. Teachers commonly referred to families in their classroom as "involved" or "uninvolved." These categories remained largely mutually exclusive.⁶⁷

Mrs. Jackson, despite coming from an African-American family, was not an exception to this pattern of using family background as an informant and sometimes justification for differential treatment. I originally selected three classrooms, two with White teachers and one with a Black teacher, so that I could observe if there were differences in thinking, teaching, and treatment of Black students due to teacher race matching. While research evidence on "race-matching" teachers and academic achievement is mixed (Ferguson 1998b), I hypothesized that a Black teacher would likely be more sensitive to the needs or issues present amongst the Black student population. In analysis of my observational notes and interview data I found very few locations where Jackson utilized her racial identity to forge additional bonds with Black students or families from her classroom. This is not to suggest that Mrs. Jackson's race did not sometimes aid in facilitating connection with Black families, these connections however were generally the result of parents' perception of her being more approachable. Of the Black families in the classroom that I interviewed, none of them found her to be more approachable than teachers in the past. Jackson expressed a clear desire to work in a school that served African-American students, but her behavior towards Black students and the ways she used family background to inform her interactions was consistent with the White teachers in my sample. In large part, I attribute this similarity in attribution of

⁶⁷ The one exception to this pattern was Ms. Spring who was the mother of Joey an African-American male student in Mrs. Reno's class. Mrs. Reno could not recall meeting with Ms. Spring during the academic year in an official capacity, such as a student-teacher conference. However, she felt that Ms. Spring was accessible because Ms. Spring occasionally worked as a cafeteria worker in River Elementary. Even with this perceived connection, Spring and Reno did not indicate this connection was actualized.

family background to her social class positioning. As a middle class Black woman with a young child, she spent limited time outside of the school day engaging school-related matters, instead she opted to be with her family. Additionally, she did not live close to the school and at the close of the day she would leave the building shortly after dismissal.

The bulk of Black students in Mrs. Jackson's class were drawn from the Mulberry Co-Ops. As I identified in chapter five, racial and class lines at Cherry Elementary were deep and served as boundaries between groups socially and professionally. Thus the majority of Black students attending Cherry Elementary were low income, while the majority of White students were affluent and drawn from wealthy subdivisions or well-to-do neighborhoods. In an attempt to deal with this racial and economic segregation among the school population Mrs. Bell, the school principal, hosted multiple school related events at the Mulberry Co-Ops but received marginal attendance at all of them. Mrs. Bell stressed the need to connect Mulberry parents to the school but this commitment was not mirrored by Mrs. Jackson. When I interviewed Jackson in February and I inquired if she had visited Mulberry Co-Ops she explained she had intended to, but had not by the time of the interview. When we discussed differences in student performance, she identified the students from Mulberry as her low performers. Mrs. Jackson's perspective on the underperformance of Black students' in her classroom relied on a family-based cultural rationale. She attributed Black student underperformance to issues of motivation, amongst the students themselves, as well as, their families. While she identified the lack of motivation as geographically concentrated, she had not taken the initiative to visit the housing facility. Her lack of relationship to students outside of school was consistent with her espoused approach to families, which was developed out of her past experience as a teacher.

L'Heureux: Are there some students and families that you interact with more than other? And if so how did that relationship come about?

Jackson: Nope. I leave here, I interact with my family. I didn't want to get too... I almost did that at my last school but it would have been a mistake I think. A student was like real sweet, my pet and her parents, her mom was really nice. She would come in to pick her student up and we almost developed a friendship there but it was too hard then after school in the summer to continue that. I don't want any kids to feel like, "oh no, she is not calling me anymore" so I just go home. Leave the kids alone.

L'Heureux: Have you found that some families are more willing to contact you than others?

Jackson: Not necessarily. There are just some that aren't as involved with their kid's education so they won't contact me. I have one student in particular, my learning disabled student, and she.... Her mom has the blinders on. She doesn't want to hear anything bad about her child can't learn like the others and so she really doesn't want to come up here.

Jackson, like the other teachers in my sample, tended to view parents and families as involved or uninvolved, helpful or harmful, or other set of dual categorizations. These binaries were consistent across my observations throughout year, even when evidence was provided to the contrary. These rigid categorizations of family background acted in some manners as self-confirmation for teacher's beliefs about students' family background. As mentioned above, when the assessments were inaccurate, teachers still maintained them as a way of explaining children's behavior and performance. It is reasonable to assume that a teacher's knowledge of families can serve as a positive factor for affecting students' behavior and performance, but with limited and/or inaccurate information this knowledge can be detrimental to developing relationships that are responsive to the actual needs or realities of student's backgrounds. This use of family background as a justification for differential treatment and behavior would be missed or mis-identified by quantitative analyses of educational inequality. Interpretations of family backgrounds association with student performance and behavior have been consistently unidirectional (i.e. background leads to performance). However, my research finds that background does affect performance, but there is also a feedback effect between teachers' assessment of family background and treatment.

Theorizing Difference

The data presented in this chapter demonstrate that racial and economic minorities in RAPS experience schooling differently. These differences in academic (teacher feedback) and behavioral (student discipline) cumulatively contribute to the marginalization and differentiation of minority students. I observed similar patterns of difference in treatment across my three classrooms. Recent research in sociology and

psychology on the roles of implicit and explicit biases on racial inequality provides some theoretical and empirical leverage for my findings. The body of literature that has received the most scholarly and popular attention are psychological experiments which use the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT is computer administered experiment used to test differences in response times to implicit association between races (e.g. Black or White) and attribute concepts (e.g. good or bad). Evidence from the Implicit Project concludes that across racial groups, there is substantial pro-White and anti-Black bias among adults (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, and Monteith 2003). These attitudes of pro-White and anti-Black sentiments are identified experimentally as early as 6 years old and shift in magnitude but remain in the same direction over the course of middle childhood and adulthood (Baron and Banaji 2006). There are a number of empirical critiques of the IAT, which I do consider to be meritorious, but I am concerned with the theory behind the test, rather than the empirics as performed in experimental psychology (Arkes and Tetlock 2004).

Theories of implicit prejudice attempt to capture associations that operate beneath the level of conscious. These associations utilized when thinking about groups. Implicit prejudices are related to, but distinct from explicit prejudices. Implicit prejudices are generally associations that individuals make without explicit thought. These association are manifest in the habitus of teachers in their pedagogy and classroom praxis. Dovidio and colleagues found explicit attitudes are more open to regulation than implicit attitudes (Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner 2002). Quillian (2006) in his review essay states,

This evidence suggests that for behaviors where conscious regulation is difficult, such as body language or decisions made under time pressure, implicit biases are likely to influence behavior even among subjects with neutral or positive explicit attitudes toward the target (pg. 319).

My research evidence on differences in student feedback and behavioral regulation align closely with areas that rely on implicit association, rather than explicit association. Past research on differences in student treatment have relied on call rates or other matters that allow for regulation of explicit biases. I did not expect to find these differences present after a set of ethnographic observations in the classroom. This suspicion was supported in an interview with a Language Arts specialist in the district. He informed me that during the Language Arts curriculum training that the need for equal contact across student

groups was paramount. Additionally for the past thirty years, teacher training has stressed the roles of expectations and contacts on student performance. For these reasons, teachers were likely primed to call on all students, but feedback to students is something much more spontaneous and in many ways unplanned. I also include behavioral regulation as susceptible to implicit prejudice because it often requires instant response to disturbances of classroom operation.

The associations, relationships, and treatments that teachers made with the children and families are complicated. While all of the teachers in my sample cared about the children's well-being in their classroom, their actions in some ways betrayed their intents. The actions that teachers utilized to create and maintain rich learning environments however are susceptible to bias between groups. Teacher's implicit association of group membership and desirable academic or behavioral performances perpetuated the lauding of some students and the chastisement of other students. This is not to suggest that these implicit associations are immutable or absolutely consistent across classrooms or individuals, instead I argue that each of my observed teachers were raised in similar class strata and likely carried a similar associations between minority students and performance, whether stated implicitly or explicitly.

Capturing explicit prejudice is a difficult task in the post-Civil Rights era because of its lack of social desirability. While I did not look at explicit prejudice directly, my interview based accounts delineate an interesting pattern of thoughts on educational inequality at the classroom level and its relation to the larger Black-White achievement gap. The teachers in my sample saw educational inequality in their classrooms as an individual student issue, rather than an issue related to larger social inequality and the Black-White achievement gap writ-large. Mr. Marks and Mrs. Jackson provided strong structural explanations for educational inequality in the United States, but when discussing their classrooms, Marks, Jackson and Reno, failed to provide narratives that were connected to the larger structural issues that they previously identified as major contributors to the achievement gap.

When I asked Mr. Marks about his thoughts on the causes of the achievement gap he responded, "I have been teaching a long time and it's a very complex problem. I think the problems of American society in general are by in large connected to the problems we

have with kids in school.” He continued on, “They need a whole family unit. It is not just American kids but in my experience there have been a much greater percentage of African American kids who come from single parent families than my Caucasian families. But I am not going to lay the whole thing on the family problems. That’s certainly a part of it.” His general remarks discussed family background, differential early childhood preparation, and test bias in standardized measures. The explanations are consistent with social scientific evidence and popular discussions of the gap.

The one set of explanations that were conspicuously absent however were in school factors such as teachers and curriculum. The role of teachers was not invoked until he mentioned an article in the Rolling Acres Courier where one of his former African-American students from a well-resourced background was quoted on the achievement gap. He told me that he was nervous that he would be mentioned as a source of the achievement gap. Marks was not mentioned in the article and noted that his former student did not identify any teachers or school personnel for the gap. He toted this example proudly as an absolution of his role in the achievement gap. Even with his complex explanation of the gap and absolution via his former students’ account, Marks still do not discuss the gap in classroom in terms of structural issues. When I asked him about the students in his classroom who were low performers, he suggested underperformance was the result of a lack of motivation and uninvolved families.

Mrs. Jackson shared a similar outlook on the causes of the achievement gap. Jackson’s family moved to a suburb from the city while she was in second grade. She said she was familiar with the achievement gap from that early age because her brothers who were a couple of years her senior underperformed relative to their White peers. Alternatively, Jackson suggested her academic performance was on par with her White peers. Base interpretation of this narrative would suggest differences in early childhood learning as driving the gap in her estimation. Instead Jackson suggested lack of motivation was the factor for her brothers’ underperformance.

My brothers, they started fourth and fifth grade in that district, they always had a gap. I think cause they are very capable and I think it is, the pressure didn’t come from home as much. The pressure from home from my parents was behavior. I don’t want to hear the teachers complaining about your behavior. It really wasn’t... I mean they weren’t pushed to exceed you know their performance or

improve their grades. So I think it was a lack of motivation from the parents in seeing their children succeed in my family.

This narrative about lack of motivation was also extended to her explanations of the underperformance of students in her previous school, which had a large share of African-American students. When I asked her if there was an achievement gap in her classroom, at the midyear mark, she was unsure if there was one. After walking to her desk and retrieving the most recent state standardized test scores she informed me that some of her lowest achievers were indeed African-American. As explanation for their performance, she then proceeded to relay an individual narrative about each of her Black students' and identified behavioral or motivational issues as the reason for underperformance.

When discussing the achievement gap in general teachers tended to suggest traditional theories or achievement disparities such as socioeconomic status, family structure, and time availability. However, when asked to explain differences within their classroom's performance the narratives became much more individualized and deviated from the explanations for the overall gap. By identifying educational inequality within their classrooms through an overly individual lens, the structured categories of social groups (e.g. race and class) became obscured.⁶⁸ Teachers' explanation of disparities in achievement rarely relied on the cumulative advantages that White and affluent students could draw from, rather it hinged on the individual failings of Black and poor students' backgrounds. By individualizing issues of student achievement teachers arguably could identify individual level levers for change. However, with semi-accurate information on student backgrounds, these individual-based interventions would likely not be successful. By categorizing underperformance as individual, lack of accurate information on families, subtle valuing of cultural similarity, teachers reified group based differences in treatment between Black-White and Poor-Non-poor students.

⁶⁸ I have limited discussion here to student underperformance which teacher individualized. When discussing student success, teachers also relied on individualized explanations, while never implicating community resources or factors in success. Despite the fact that many African-American students who were performing poorly were referred to after-school or weekend programming. Arguably these resources could have been indicted in discussion of success, but they never were.

Conclusions

Student-teacher interaction remains an important site where educational inequality is perpetuated in schools. While teacher bias in student-teacher interaction is not a new concern, questions of its prevalence have fallen from mainstream dialogue about educational inequality. In many ways this shift away from concentrating on the role of in-school treatment has refined the research evidence of out-of-school factors on educational inequality. However, without a careful consideration of the experiences of students inside schools, discussions of inequality remain mired in discussions of family dysfunction. Earlier social science research such as the Moynihan report suggested the inequality present between the Black poor and their affluent White counterparts was largely due to the failure of the black families. Among the teachers in the sample, a narrative of family failure also guided their explanations of achievement differences.⁶⁹ This however conflicted with the narratives that they used to discuss the achievement gap in the United States as a whole. The distance between their explicit conceptions of the gap and local explanations of it are revealed not only in comparison of their accounts, but in their treatment of students.

Teachers did not intentionally, to my knowledge, treat students differently to insure underperformance or over-performance. However, the interactions in their classrooms that were most likely to display implicit attitudes powerfully demonstrated that students from backgrounds different than their own were treated differently. Despite attempts to assure equality of treatment such as calling on students from right to left and implementing a behavioral reward system, etc. unequal treatment persisted. My observations of differences in teacher feedback rates following correct answers suggests that student background still matters. While student background is consistently influential on student achievement, it also appears to matter in a different way in my data. The background of students appears to be influential in the treatment that students receive. Because teachers rely on their own backgrounds to facilitate connections with their students and families, children and families from marginalized backgrounds seldom

⁶⁹ While indictment of family in school performance differences could be part of a structural explanation, their characterizations tended to center on the internal cultural dysfunctions of these households. Their explanations were akin to perversions of earlier culture of poverty theories which came to explain low outcomes as a result of cultural variation rather than cultural variation birthed from structural segmentation.

received the leniency or positive characterizations that affluent White families did. These connections are ones that are often based on class position, which is neatly tied to racial group membership, like it is in most of American society.⁷⁰

As a whole, the evidence in this chapter suggests that bias still exists in heterogeneous classrooms, even with the erosion of explicit teacher bias in call rates. The levers for altering classroom treatment are most difficult to affect due to implicit attitudes. However, the treatment that students received via sliding standards and misinterpreted home backgrounds can be altered by facilitating strong and accurate connections between teachers and families. Downey and colleagues (2006) research demonstrated out of all the observed ethnic gaps, only the Black-White gap increased during the school year. For this reason, inquiries into the classroom are necessary to parse out how this process occurs. If differences in student-teacher interaction are not taken seriously, the classrooms that are responsible for ensuring the achievement of all students, will serve as perpetuators of already present inequality.

⁷⁰ One important limit of my observations was the inability to systematically observe differences in student treatment in Mrs. Jackson's class, my only Black teacher. I hesitate to attempt to characterize the equality or inequality of her responses to students because in my observations of Marks and Reno I did not think I had observed differences until I tallied my data. This withstanding, I do believe that the processes of implicit bias towards students from minority backgrounds were likely present among all three teachers. This does not absolve Mr. Marks or Mrs. Reno as White teachers (or Jackson), rather it should help us understand that all are subject to the meanings of race in a racialized society. The ubiquitous association of Black and poor with negative characteristics matters for Black and White, rich and poor, and all others who deal with diverse populations.

Chapter Eight

Lessons from Rolling Acres

Schools, and the individuals nested within them, carry values and practices that can potentially constrain or encourage disparities between groups. In Rolling Acres, the most visible disparities are between Black and White and rich and poor. While RAPS held the potential to mediate the disparities that students walked into school with, they often were unsuccessful at this task. Instead the adults within schools, particularly teachers and principals, were left with the “heavy lifting” of the production of equality with insufficient set of tools. The result was continued inequality between Black and White, but importantly a form of inequality that operated silently until it was vaunted to the attention of the city via news media or concerns of national policy compliance. The inequalities in Rolling Acres Public Schools have become so common place that there are often asymmetric views of their reality. Black residents have come to take them as a “given” and treat them as a necessary condition of their children gaining a better quality education than from larger urban districts. White families often overlook them and when they do grapple with them, they see them as mere reflections of economic differences, not also as part of differences in treatments related to race. Between these differences perspectives lies the reality that poor Black students remain most disadvantaged in this system. Nested next to resources, but located distantly from full access to opportunity.

Educational inequality is far more complicated than a test score gap. Though attention to student achievement has overtaken studies of educational policy, in reality the tools necessary to address differences in academic achievement will not be realized until an equal effort to study the everyday processes that produce these disparities is undertaken. In this dissertation, I have begun the process of doing this by using a resource uptake perspective. A resource uptake perspective concentrates attention on the policies and practices inside and outside of school that influence the distribution of

resources, not simply the academic outcomes associated with resources. This perspective is increasingly important for understanding the ways that race and social class interact with the institution of schooling in the Post-Civil Rights era. While most contemporary work concentrates on the role of resources among institutions, it has fallen short in accurately assessing the condition of education and potential levers for change. My analysis, taken as a whole, highlights the roles of ideas, beliefs, and practices in the contemporary study of American public education.

Resource Uptake

Since the Supreme Court in 1954 opined, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” states, districts, and schools have sought to equalize the facilities of public education between schools. To date, these attempts have not resulted in equality of experience or outcome between Black and White, rich and poor students. While these interventions have not equalized observed outcomes, they have funneled resources to schools that have been historically underserved. However, this conundrum of increased resources but not increased performance has served to mire the commonly held assumptions at the root of rulings such as *Brown v. Board*. As a result, popular theories of inequality have identified bureaucracies (Ferguson 1998a) and the children themselves (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2002) as the root of underachievement. While each explanation may hold some merit, they also misidentify the important processes that occur within schools and between families. As a result, the questions that continue to be asked regarding educational inequality net similar responses, but no further ability to address observed disparities.

This stalling in knowledge can be addressed using a resource uptake perspective. Students and their families approach and draw upon the resource of education (e.g. classroom preference, curriculum choice, student-teacher interaction, perceived quality of instruction, etc.) differently based upon their social positions. These social positions are informed by their identities and past experiences. In particular, race, class, and gender are salient to accessing the resources tied to education. Because schools as institutions are not value-free, the means by which different actors engage schools can result in greater or lesser access to the resources of education. Thus in any analysis of resource uptake, we

must consider the identities of those engaging the resources as well as the silent values of the institutions that these actors come in contact with. The result is a dynamic dialectical model of resource uptake, which highlights the interplay of institutions and actors and the resulting distribution of goods. While resource uptake is not a novel concept, it is one that has too long been overlooked in recent educational studies.

In the study of educational inequality has largely been relegated to the study of hyper segregated schools which are resource poor. The measurement of resources between segregated schools has served to take the spotlight away from the processes of desegregation and integration which were also the focus of the Brown cases arguments. While the image of the Little Rock Nine became emblazoned in the memories of Americans, the experiences of these and other Black students in predominantly White spaces faded quickly from popular imagery and study. Following the Civil Rights Movement the meanings and operations of race began to further transform. The Jim Crow overt racism that engulfed a nation and challenged its moral constitution died in public eye. Vitriolic language hurled at Black and brown children dissipated, but the gross inequality in the experiences of Black and White students in school did not. Within schools that were desegregated, Black children continued to under-perform their White counterparts much to the chagrin and disappointment of advocates of school desegregation. This conundrum of increased access to resourced spaces, transformation of racial animus, and the continued success of White students painted a grim portrait of Black educational potential.

However, when looking at these circumstances using a resource uptake perspective a different set of observations and solutions may be derived. First, if we assume that the tensions that polarized the nation in the 1950s were actually rooted in resource competition, it becomes less likely that desegregated schools and their resources would be given up so easily. Instead, alternative ways of hoarding resources among White students and developing innovative strategies of stratifying opportunity emerged. Second, the transplanting of students from background with accumulated disadvantages to a better resourced school setting would likely not result in the uptake the utilization of resources as effectively as those families who have been drawing on these resources for some time.

From this perspective bureaucratic failure as well as the engagement of minority families is analyzed in a different light, one where the potential for change is high.

Cultural and Social Capital Revisited

The forms of capitals serve as very useful analytic tools in discussions of educational inequality, but to date, social scientists have failed to accurately represent the role of race within these capitals. In particular, Annette Lareau's work has served to advance the importance of the forms of capital but has neglected the importance of race on social and cultural capital. Lareau's concentration on social class comes at the expense of a serious consideration of race. In her article co-authored with Elliot Weinberger and Erin McNamara Horvat (2002) they states, "Briefly, she [Lareau] argues that the largest difference in the organization of children's daily lives – including familial networks and styles of interaction with institutional representatives- across lines of class, not race" (pg. 341). This theme runs throughout her work, though my data directly contradicts this. I found that a Black parent, regardless of class status' ability to actualize social capital to their advantage was roughly equal. Considering the cases of Ms. Towles and Ms. Martin, I found that cultural capital did vary based on each mother's background, but their ability to successfully engage the school for their desired result were limited. Across the African-Americans in my sample, a shared theme of intentional and unintentional exclusion emerged. This runs counter to Lareau's claims that middle class parents are able to gain their desired outcomes more actively than low income families. This is not to suggest that social class did not matter, the resources that Ms. Towles could draw upon were far greater than Ms. Martin, but still her inclusion in school activities and appreciation by school staff as lower than was found amongst White mothers of similar and lower status.

In the area of cultural capital my findings do align with Lareau and colleagues, to a degree. I do find that children from more affluent households contain cultural tool kits that allow them to negotiate institutional relationships more successfully, but this "objective" measure of cultural capital says nothing about the ways institutions receive their cultural repertoires. For example Jeffrey Towles while in class offered a cultural relevant and academically appropriate answer, but was negatively chastised by Mr. Marks. The teacher's response, paired with evidence in chapter seven, suggests that

minority students tended to receive treatments that were different than their more affluent and White peers. This suggests that the “objective” classification of cultural capital does not necessarily net desired outcomes, even with intention. Weininger and Lareau (2003) argued that cultural capital is not actualized until actors attempt to utilize it towards a desired end, but even this is insufficient. In the case of the Downings’ their cultural capital, social capital, and knowledge of the school system still did not allow LeBron to have an educational and extracurricular life that was comparable to his White colleague Danny Morris. For the Downings, despite their best attempts to utilize the cultural capital they acquired having attended RAPS for multiple generations, they were still not able to access the resources of schools like their White counterparts. The devaluation of their cultural capital occurred overtime in subtle ways which made the production of inequality insidious and difficult to detect through casual observations. While the Downings would likely suggest they were able to access quality education, in reality their alternative navigation of the system did not allow them the same access to schooling as their affluent White counterparts. While my observations are not longitudinal this unequal access could likely correlated to differences in opportunity to learn in later years.

My data also suggests that the assumption of desired end does not necessarily have to be clear to all participants in a social network. In the case of the educational petition that was circulated regarding Ms. Baker many signers were unaware of the full intent of the process or actual outcomes to the process, instead, each actor had a separate justification for their mobilization. These individualized understandings of the issues were then organized and aggregated in a collective response, which could be misinterpreted as a unified action with unified intent. Instead, parents were willing to acknowledge their own personal stakes in the action regardless of the collective action. These personal stakes however were also importantly informed by geographic spaces and social distance. Because information was passed informally through parent networks that were informed by geography (e.g. subdivision) and social distance (e.g. shared extracurricular activities) collective action appears to be a “middle class” response. By contrast, had parents allowed information to travel equally to all families, including racial minorities, a potentially more diverse collective response could be seen. Instead, racial and economic residential segregation served to disallow the participation of the Black

poor and other ethnic minorities. These exclusionary practices by informal parental networks serve to suggest that social capital, as tied to educational customization, is often further defined by the contours of race in addition to class.

Taken together this suggests that of social capital and should be carefully considered with regards not only to the identities of the individual actors or networks of actors, but also should consider the values and norms of the institutions as well as desired outcomes. While Lareau and colleagues argue that social class takes primacy over race, I found that social class and race actively intersected, thus making it illogical, if not impossible, to assign primacy to one and not the other. Instead, a truly intersectional model would incorporate the layers of race, social class, and field of engagement into investigations of social and cultural capital as they relate to educational inequality. In doing this, the functional value of capitals can be explicated in a given moment, which may lend insights into the production of cumulative advantage and disadvantage.

Schooling and Ideas, Beliefs and Practices

Schools are often assumed as flat institutions responsible for educating all that come through their doors. In reality, schools are just like other institutions, designed to align with consumers whose values most closely align. This argument has been advanced by numerous scholars, but the ways that this varies by race has been less explored. Traditional views of schooling assume that families utilize the resource of school to gain their desired ends. However in the case of Rolling Acres, affluent White families viewed their schools as a resource to be utilized. From this perspective, they engaged and manipulated the institution of school and its personnel to gain their desired ends. Through formal and informal lobbying, control of information, and other methods, affluent Whites customized the institution of school not only for individual gain, but the collective gains of White families.⁷¹ Affluent White families displayed ownership of schools through their threats of exit, disapprovals of policy changes, and other displays of power which operated inside and outside of the traditional channels established for family feedback.

⁷¹ In this case I suggest all White families because while the use of capitals was most concentrated amongst affluent Whites, poor Whites often benefited for the assumptions of good parenting and activism bestowed upon White families.

The RAPS schools and their personnel thus served the affluent and White, while the serviced the poor and Black families of the district.

Contrastingly, low income and Black families viewed the opportunity to be educated in Rolling Acres Public Schools as a resource. The personnel of the school treated low income and Black families differently in decision of classroom and curriculum treatment, parental participation, and grievance resolution. Because low income and African-American families tended to come from families with lower educational attainments and more disadvantaged school districts, the entry into a “well-resourced” school district was a welcomed change. Even among families that had been in Rolling Acres for more than one generation, discussions of the value of attending school in RAPS were common. This narrative of grateful acceptance was still accompanied with discussions of racism within the RAPS school from teachers, administrators and students. In this sense, unequal treatment did not go unnoticed but became part of the “normal terrain” that minority families negotiated in their attempts to receive the spoils of RAPS. Still these families were not able to make schools responsive to their issues or demands in systematic ways whether school level concerns or in district wide policy.

While resources were present and abundant in Rolling Acres beliefs about how these resources should be accessed and who should access them helped to guide the utilization of resources within RAPS. Teacher, administrators, and district staff remained aware of entrenched inequality between Blacks and Whites, but acted in ways that continued to privilege affluent White families. This is not to suggest that schools or the district used fixed characteristics to advantage certain groups, instead I argue that the district and the schools responded dynamically to the needs of RAPS consumers selectively. This suggests that there is potential for RAPS to respond to the needs of its minorities, but this would first require acknowledgement of differential valuation and response. I will next turn to potential steps for Rolling Acres Public Schools regarding the address of educational inequality.

Reframing Evaluation of Changes

The set of evaluations identified with reforms in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s all included a very short implantation and evaluation window of two years. While there is considerable pressure for schools and districts to improve performance, in reality the

complete implementation of plans would take longer than the two years identified for implementation. While achievement increases are important to see, these are unlikely to materialize in student achievement data instantly. Because student learning is cumulative, changes in performance are not the instrument by which policies should be continued or discontinued. Instead, student achievement should be used for national policy compliance but not the ultimate measures of success for the district. The district should concentrate on shifting non-achievement centered areas such as parental participation, student participation in extracurricular areas, disciplinary procedures, and other smaller scaled, yet important themes.

Evaluation strategies for non-achievement based interventions were often uneven and unclear. For none achievement based outcomes, timetables and deliverables should be identified and publicly reported. By identifying entities responsible for implementation and benchmarks for proper implementation failures in the process can be better corrected from inside and outside of the central administration. Currently the bulk of responsibility for benchmarks lies with the district's research office, but their limited staff and methods of evaluation make large scaled change unrealistic. For this reason, RAPS should consider developing a more comprehensive infrastructure for development and implementation of system-wide change.

To aid the implementation issues of buy-in across the RAPS bureaucracy must be addressed. In the past the central office was willing to prescribe policy and assume it's implementation. However, proper buy-in must be produced amongst building administrators, teachers, and other street-level bureaucrats. The teachers interviewed in this project suggested that the constantly changing policies made it difficult for them to fully invest in reforms, in turn teachers developed their own ways of pursuing equity in the classroom. While ambitious, this type of variation can be crippling to educational reform which aim at shifting practice across classrooms and schools. Without a sustained effort at building buy-in from school staff, particularly teachers, the effects of policies are unlikely to appear in evaluated results.

Shifting Dialogues on Inequality

Rolling Acres, like most American public school districts, has shown concern about achievement inequalities but framed this as an issue of the achievement gap. As I

have demonstrated, there are many things that stand between students' lives and academic performance. In the current high stakes environment it common for districts to look for "quick fixes" or "magic bullets" to shift student achievement, but the rapid changing of strategies and incomplete implementation has not served to rehabilitate Black student's achievement.

An appropriate response to educational inequality would begin with a comprehensive needs assessment of the populations that are considered "underachieving". This type of needs assessments has been hinted at or ineffectively attempted in Rolling Acres before, but never taken on as a sustained project. The reforms of the 1990s began this process by arguing for the collection of information on the experiences of minority families, but the distribution of this work, the scope of data collection, and its potential uses were unclear. This data collection strategy was further neglected by shifts in district leadership and public sentiments towards race-considerate policies came under fire.

As my data found, the experiences of minorities were mismatched with the policy interventions that were proposed in the 1980s and 1990s, suggesting that a process of backwards mapping may be necessary to refine not on the policies but the levers for these policies (Elmore). Because inequality between Black and White families became so commonplace, many people, including parents and teachers, spoke of it as inevitable. These stagnations in attitudes also were reflected in a "blame game" for the causes of inequality. A proper needs assessment would help focus attention inside and outside of schools to address the deep rooted district and school inequality. The connection between these domains are currently weak for minority families, this can be aided by developing better streams of systematic communication to and from homes. Ultimately, the address of RAPS issues of educational inequality will require affecting more than school-based education policies and will have to incorporate other domains of influence.

Acknowledging Race

Before a complete revision of the approach to educational inequality can be undertaken, Rolling Acres at large must engage the topic of race in a sustained way. Rolling Acres has maintained a public imagination that suggests that the city's diversity reflects a lack of prejudice and discrimination. From the experiences of minority families

in my sample and data from my observations, this is very far from the truth. A sustained dialogue about race within the RAPS schools as well as in the city should be developed. The goal of this conversation should be a dialogue around the continuing role of race within spaces like Rolling Acres.

White families in my sample were so willing to suggest the observed inequality behind Black and Whiter were actually income problems, not race-relations problems. This denial of race via proxy suggests a dialogue around race would likely be difficult but important to broach. The willingness to engage an economic proxy in part reflects Whites' attempts at absolution from discriminatory behavior. This type of behavior was demonstrated by parents, teachers, and administrators. This "fear" of being labeled "racist" or being accused of discrimination serves as a specter in Rolling Acres' race relations and America's at large. These fears operated in the background as Black families complained about their children's experiences within RAPS and received little redress from school staff. A professionally guided set of conversations about these fears and their ability to further entrench White privilege should be undertaken with staff during professional development sessions.

As a city, Rolling Acres has attempted to recently discuss race, but it was focused on the experiences of Black and racial minorities. For example, prior to formally beginning my study, the Rolling Acres Library had a campaign promoting Beverly Daniel-Tatum's Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? The library distributed copies of the books, posted billboards, pencils with the statement, "Can we talk?" During this time, this provided a space for dialogue on race, but from residents recollections these dialogues were full of liberal Whites who did not concentrate on the roles of privilege, as were highlighted in the text, but rather the experiences of Black students within Rolling Acres. This concentration of minorities can be useful, but only when couched within the context of White privilege and the competition for educational resources, which it appears to not have been.

In addition to demonstrating the ways in which race matters for Black families, a discussion of privilege and stratified opportunity will be necessary. Discussions of economic privilege were common in White households, but racial privilege remained silent. In data not presented in this dissertation, White families socialized their children to

a colorblind perspective, but never incorporated the ways that their families or children's individual actions could disadvantage their poor and Black counterparts. The absence of socialization on racial privilege was also reflected in the social networks that White adults utilized. These families used their social networks and geographic segregation to gain the most from schools, which was understood as a display of privilege by principals at both Cherry and River Elementary, but these issues were not challenged by individual administrators. Outside of recorded interviews, the principals suggested that the desires of affluent White families were often acquiesced to by the district's central office who feared the exit of affluent White residents. This demonstrates that even in the case that building administrators observed unequal treatment and wanted to respond to it, there were not institutional support amongst their supervisors. This type of bureaucratic power struggle is difficult to move, but still one that contributes to inequality.

Acknowledging Intersectionality

The acknowledgement of race as structuring factor will still be insufficient for addressing educational inequality. Because race and class are closely tied in Rolling Acres it is important to acknowledge their independent and intersectional contributions to inequality. There is not race-based nor class-based panacea to the issues of educational inequality in Rolling Acres. For Black families, both low and middle income issues of exclusion from schools mattered. This may suggest, *prima facie*, that the linked fate of Blacks across income categories could be achieved by providing the same remedies. However, this neglects the role of home and family background amongst RAPS Black population. In my observations, I found that the family lives of Blacks varied considerably by social class status. Not in the sense of orientations towards education, as some scholars would argue (Ogbu, Lareau) but most dramatically in family resources and strain. Amongst low income Black families, there was noticeably more financial strain due to costs of raising children in Rolling Acres and a lack of two adult income earners under the same roof. These families seemed to face the additional burden of engaging education around hectic work schedules, fewer resources, and larger numbers of school aged children. These factors, made children, even as early as fourth grade care givers, workers, and students. In a follow-up interview with a low income Black student I asked about his summer activities and what he did on his days off from school in leisure time.

He informed me that spent his summer selling water and other wares to at festivals and athletic events and on his days off attended his mother's job to help her get work done at a local Salvation Army. When compared to the experiences of his peers, Black and White with higher incomes, his out of school experiences were severely different. Because of the reality of financial strain as well as exclusion based on his families' racial background he, nor his family, ever felt fully incorporated amongst the RAPS. The social supports necessary to aid low income Black families exceed those of middle income Black families and cannot be forgotten when developing interventions.

Conclusion

When thoughts of educational inequality are conjured up, images of segregated, impoverish environments immediately come to mind, however in 2007 inequality comes in a variety of different forms. Districts like Rolling Acres, small, well-resourced and diverse often mask the imparity present within their picturesque facilities. While these setting do not elicit thoughts of prejudice, discrimination or other animus filled hatred in the public imagination, they reflect the next frontiers on which battles for equality must be waged. As American public schools become increasing racially and economically diverse, questions of opportunity, resources, and performance between student groups will need to be studied and addressed. To date, study and dialogue on these types of spaces have been limited and inconclusive about the sources of observed inequality. While the scale of these districts and school make some of the mechanisms of discrimination appear idiosyncratic, in reality, they are consistent with previous work eras and settings, but more nuanced given the contemporary moment.

Inequality is not limited to Jim Crow segregation or urban decay, rather it is present in the everyday lives of all who are nested within the racialized democracy of the United States. The dilemmas of race and social class presented in this text are new in that they often operate beneath the level of conscious for many of the actors within Rolling Acres. In the past, discrimination and maltreatment were overt and were intended to malign racial minorities, however in contemporary society there is little tolerance for such outward displays of hate. The new dilemmas of race and class operate beneath the level of detection and beneath the level of conscious and in turn have been allowed to fester and embed inequality in "desegregated" public schools. While these schools may

appear to reflect the dreams of the Civil Rights movements, for their minority inhabitants this is not the reality. The interpersonal spaces, both inside and outside of school, that could be assumed to be shared due to the district's racial diversity rarely exist. Minority and majority students increasingly find themselves in different classrooms, receiving different treatment from teachers, and in different activities outside of school. The "dream" remains deferred, despite the provision of resources.

In short, resources do not equal opportunity for all families in Rolling Acres. Resources remain stratified which serves to further cement differences between students early in the educational pipeline. While my data speaks to nearly a year of observation, I am unable to project that the observations of unequal treatment and experience will be reflected five or ten years down the line. Alternatively, it is not absurd to expect that the treatment that fourth grade students received while I observed will lead them to differing academic lives and life opportunities. The cumulative nature of educational development suggests that the inequalities of today will matter for the inequalities of tomorrow, even if students were to be treated equally from my point of observations forward.

The prospects for equality are not entirely bleak for Rolling Acres. In reality, the educational progress of Black students relative to their parents' past achievements is an improvement, but these improvements are small when compared in scale to their White counterparts whose families have attended college for multiple generations. If parity is the goal, there will need to be great adjustments made to the system of public education as well as deliberate steps taken to differentially influence the educational trajectory of minority students. While this research in this dissertation is comparative, I do not wish to endorse the behaviors or outcomes of White residents as ideal. In reality, many of the academic advantages bestowed upon White children were counterbalanced by lack of developmental balance in areas such as race relations. Together White and Black, rich and poor, must interrogate their relationships to resources in order to insure a higher quality of education for all children.

Appendices

Appendix A. Student Interview 1

This interview is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question at your choice without penalty.

Student Protocol

Background

- 1) What fake name would you like to use for this interview?
- 2) What year were you born?
- 3) What race are you?

Extracurricular activities

- 4) What in-school extracurricular activities are you involved in?
- 5) What out-of-school extracurricular activities are you involved in?

School perception

- 6) What do you think is the best thing about your school?
- 7) What do you think could be most improved at your school?
- 8) Do you think you have the same opportunities as other students in your school?

Peers

- 9) How many close friends do you have?
- 10) What are the races of your five closest friends?
- 11) How do you think your friends perform in their classes in school?
- 12) Do you ever study with your friends?
- 13) Do your friends tease you about how well you do in school?
- 14) How does that make you feel?
- 15) Do you ever do other activities with your friends?
- 16) Do other students give you a hard time for how you do in school?
- 17) Have you ever been accused of “acting white”? (Black students only)

Aspirations

- 18) How far do you want to go in school?
- 19) What job do you think you will hold in the future?
- 20) Have you talked to anyone about the job or school you want to go to in the future?

Meaning of race and class

- 21) What three words best describe you?
- 22) In your school, do you think your race is important?
- 23) In your school, do you think how much money you have is important?
- 24) In your school, which do you think is more important, your race or how much money you have?

Value of schooling

- 25) Do you usually complete your homework?
- 26) Do anyone help you with your homework?
- 27) Where do you usually do your homework?
- 28) Are you happy with how you do in school overall?
- 29) Have you ever felt like you were treated unfairly in this school?
- 30) How important do you think getting an education is to your future?

Opportunity to Learn

- 31) If you could remember, could you tell me how you did on your last report card?
- 32) Now I am going to ask you about some subjects you have in school. Would you tell me if you think you are doing better, doing the same, or doing worse than most other students in your class in that subject. For example, Geography: Doing better, doing the same, or doing worse.
 - Social Studies?
 - Writing?
 - Reading?
 - Mathematics?
 - Science?

Relationship to resources

- 33) Do you think your teachers are helpful? How so?
- 34) Do you think your classes are challenging?
- 35) Are there times when you answer questions in class based on things you have learned outside of class?
- 36) If so, can you give me an example of when this happened?
- 37) Do you attend any activities outside of class that help you with your schoolwork?
- 38) When was the last time that you went to a library?
- 39) When was the last time that you went to a museum?

Closing

- 40) Was there anything that you thought of during this interview that you would have liked me to ask?
- 41) Was there anything that you would like to ask me?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview.

Appendix B. Guardian Interview 1

This interview is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question at your choice without penalty.

Parent/Guardian Protocol

Background

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) What is your year of birth?
- 3) Where were you born?
- 4) When did you move to Rolling Acres?
- 5) What is your marital status?
- 6) What is the highest amount of education you have received?
- 7) What is your current occupation?
- 8) What income best represents your household's combined income in dollars?
 - _ less than 10,000
 - _ 10,000 to 19,999
 - _ 20,000 to 29,999
 - _ 30,000 to 39,999
 - _ 40,000 to 49,999
 - _ 50,000 to 74,999
 - _ 75,000 to 99,999
 - _ 100,000 to 124,999
 - _ 125,000 or more
- 9) How do you racially identify?
- 10) How does the other biological parent of your child racially identify?
- 11) Would you describe your house/apartment's living arrangement?

Valuing of school

- 12) What do you see as your role in your child's education?
- 13) What role have you seen your education play in your life?
- 14) What do you think the goal of education is for your child?
- 15) How important do you think a good education is to your child getting the job he/she wants in the future?
- 16) How much time do you spend engaging in educational activities with your child at home?
- 17) Has your child gone to a library recently?
- 18) Has your child gone to a museum recently?
- 19) Has your child attended another cultural location recently?

- 20) Can you tell me what your child has been learning in mathematics in the last month?
- 21) Can you tell me what your child has been learning in social studies in the last month?
- 22) Can you tell me what you child has been learning in language arts in the last month?

Perception of Rolling Acres,

- 23) Do you have any concerns about raising a child in Rolling Acres?
- 24) Would you say Rolling Acres is better, equal to, or worse place to raise a child than-Confidential, Confidential, Confidential?
- 25) What quality of education do you think your child is receiving in RAPS?
- 26) Do you think your child will continue to attend RAPS after elementary school?
- 27) Has your child ever felt mistreated in RAPS?
- 28) Would you say the average quality of education in RAPS is better, equal to, or worse than in- Confidential, Confidential, Confidential?
- 29) What things do you think your child's school could do to help support your child's education?

Child performance and aspirations

- 30) How far do you want your child to go in school?
- 31) If you could choose, what occupation would you like your child to have?
- 32) Do you know your child's five closest friends?
- 33) What races are your child's five closest friends?
- 34) Do you know their parents?
- 35) Do you think your children's closest friends have a positive, negative, or neutral influence on your child's academic performance?

Relationship to resources

- 36) Do you know how your child's school makes decisions about what courses students take?
- 37) Do you know when these decisions are made?
- 38) How do you generally get information about what is happening in your child's school?
- 39) Do you think your child is academically challenged at his/her school?
- 40) Do you think your child's school offers enough resources for your child's enrichment?
- 41) Which ones do you and your child use?
- 42) Do you think your financial status will help, hinder, or have no effect on your child's education?
- 43) Do you think your financial status will help, hinder or have no effect on your child's future occupation?

Race and class socialization

- 44) What have you tried to teach your child about his/her racial or ethnic background?
- 45) Have **you** ever experienced discrimination or mistreatment in school or on the job?
- 46) Have you shared these experiences with your child?
- 47) Do you think being a (race)(gender) will influence your child's chances of getting ahead in America?
- 48) Have you shared this view with your child?
- 49) Do you think the amount of money your child has will influence his or her chances of getting ahead in America?
- 50) Have you shared this view with your child?

Closing

- 51) During the interview, did my questions make you think of some other themes or things that were not covered, that should have been? If so, what themes?
- 52) Was there anything that you would like to ask me?

Thank you for completing this interview

Appendix C. Teacher Interview 1

This interview is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question at your choice without penalty.

Background

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) What year were you born in?
- 3) Where were you born?
- 4) Do you live in Rolling Acres?
- 5) How long have you lived in Rolling Acres?
- 6) What is the highest amount of education you have attained?
- 7) Have you undergone additional teacher training?
- 8) How do you racially identify?

Perception of RAPS

- 9) How long have you been teaching at your current grade level?
- 10) Did you teach at other schools before this one? If so, where?
- 11) How long have you worked in RAPS?
- 12) How long have you worked at this school?
- 13) What motivated you to teach at this school?
- 14) What do you find most rewarding about teaching at this school?
- 15) What do you find to be the least rewarding about teaching at this school?

Perception of and Relationship with Class

- 16) Overall, how would you characterize your relationship with this year's fourth graders?
- 17) Are there any particular problem areas?
- 18) Do you think classroom discipline is a large concern in your classroom?
- 19) Are there some students who participate less in your class than others?
- 20) Are there some groups of students who participate less in your class than other groups of students?

Perception of and Relationship with Families

- 21) On average, how much contact do you have with students' parents or guardians?
- 22) Who generally makes contact first, you or parents?
- 23) How do you communicate information to parents?
- 24) Are there some students with whom you interact with more?
- 25) Are there groups that are more willing to contact you than others?

Intra-teacher communication

- 26) When the school year began, did you consult with last year's third grade teacher about your incoming set of students?
- 27) If so, what was communicated?
- 28) How often during the average week do you communicate with other teachers about issues in your classroom?
- 29) How often, during the school year, do you have a chance to observe the classes of other teachers in your building?

Delivery of Services

- 30) As a teacher, what do you think your role in students' academic development?
- 31) As a teacher, what do you think your role in students' social development?
- 32) Please describe to me, an average day in your classroom from the day's opening to dismissal.
- 33) Ideally, how much time would you spend on teaching reading?
Mathematics?
- 34) How often do you revise your lesson plan based upon student skill levels?
- 35) In a school year, how much of the prescribed curriculum are you able to actually teach?
- 36) Inevitably, in every classroom, students enter with different skills and ability levels, how do you address the differences in background abilities with which students enter?
- 37) Do you use ability grouping? If so, what goes into the decision making process for placing children in different ability groups?
- 38) Do you think policies like No Child Left Behind impact the way you teach your classes?
- 39) How often do you refer students to remedial resources?
- 40) What goes into your decision making process of referring students?
- 41) How do you communicate out-of-school resources or activities to students?

Explanations for the achievement gap

- 42) In recent years, the gap between racial minorities and whites in academic achievement has received a lot of national attention, what do you think causes or explains these differences in academic performance?
- 43) Are you aware if racial minorities are underperforming white students in your classroom?
- 44) What do you think can be done to reduce the racial achievement gap (in your classroom)?

Operation of race

- 45) Do you think student discipline is a small, medium or large concern in your classroom?
- 46) Could you explain to me how students are disciplined in your classroom?

- 47) When more severe discipline is necessary, could you explain the process by which students are disciplined (i.e. sent to the principal, expelled, etc.)?
- 48) Do you think some groups are more likely to be disciplined?
- 50) Do you think some groups are more likely to be sent to the principal?

Closing

- 51) During the interview, did my questions make you think of some other themes or things that were not covered, that should have been?
- 52) If so, what themes?
- 53) Was there anything that you would like to ask me?

Thank you for completing this interview.

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