

**BLACK VISIONS THROUGH COLORBLIND FRAMES: OPPOSITION IN THE
OBAMA ERA – A DISCURSIVE EXPLORATION OF BLACK URBAN
ADOLESCENT IDEOLOGY**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Sociology)
in The University of Michigan
2011

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DEDICATION

To my kids for giving me faith to triumph over adversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge the students who tried to let me see the world from their eyes. I hope I have done justice to their words and perspectives in this modest work.

Dr. Al Young, without your guidance, patient commentary, and intellectual example, this work could never have come to fruition. Thank you.

Dr. Karyn Lacy, I hope one day to provide for another the kind of critical and enlightening insights you offered me.

To Scott and Steve, thanks for showing me how to wed my passions.

Chavella, I cannot express how important your constant encouragement, advice, and example has been. Thank you.

Shayla, for knowing when to turn it on, knowing your stuff, and knowing how to get the best out of me, I thank you.

Dave, thanks for keeping your eye on the light at the end of the tunnel, even when it got dim.

Jen, your (tough) love and support have been indispensable. Thanks for keeping me grounded.

Rachelle, thanks for the piece of mind.

To the Rosman family, thanks for allowing me to be part of the village.

Nate, you continue to be an inspiration. I continue to work toward developing your type of work ethic and visionary impulse.

Roxy, it's your turn. Thanks for listening.

Dumi, Thomas, Lumas – I am all out of excuses. I have never known a group with greater integrity, vision, promise, and drive. Let's go!

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

This research project explores the formation of racial ideologies among a sample of black, Detroit-based, high school seniors. I focus specifically on views of racial stratification – the dimensions along which these black adolescents understand oppression to unfold, their explanations of how racial disparities are maintained, and how they envision the future of racial (in)equality in the US. While the questions driving this inquiry have society-wide and international implications, the ideas that I am interested in are indelibly shaped by immediate experiences and the local context; the broader discourses around these ideas are necessarily filtered through a socio-historically specific milieu. The youth in this study are working through understandings of the advantages and disadvantages associated with racial group membership, the ways in which hierarchical relations are maintained, and the durability of racial group positional arrangements, with what has been dubbed “the margins of the postindustrial capitalist order” as the backdrop (Boggs and Kurashige 2011). This project ultimately aims to explore how a sample of black urban adolescents in the post-secondary transition navigate competing views of racial stratification, as this process is intimately mediated by, and reflects the experience of, coming of age in early 21st century Detroit.

The Eye of the Storm

In recent years, Detroit has been the subject of major national media attention. In addition to its political corruption, and the disintegration of its public schooling system, Detroit's perilous economy has led many to wonder if the city is an "outlier or the epicenter" of late capitalist urban decay (LeDuff 2010). The national recession topped off a statewide economic slowdown that had been unfolding over several years (Yung 2011), evincing record unemployment rates (USDL 2011a) and increases in the Detroit's poverty levels (Berube and Kneebone 2006). While deindustrialization has figured largely into the economic and social lows in Detroit, population loss and the erosion of the tax base has been ongoing since as early as the 1950's (Sugrue 2005 page xvi). And while Michigan was one of the hardest hit when the housing bubble popped in 2006 (El Boghdady 2007), foreclosure rates in the Detroit metropolitan area led the nation at 1 in 124 houses (Aguila 2007). Detroit also led the nation in declining home prices, dropping 11% between June 2006 and 2007 (Tong 2007).

Such macro-level crises could not bode well for the welfare of the city's young. Between 2000 and 2009, child poverty increased by 6% (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2010). Over the same time, youth homicides increased (AP 2009), while high school graduation rates plummeted. Even the recent rebound in graduation rates still finds the Detroit Public Schools at the bottom of the academic barrel. Education has been a particular sore spot, as low academic achievement not only bespeaks the failing of current political and educational leadership at the city and state levels, but also crystallizes

images of another generation being trapped in the decline that has racked the city for decades.

Detroit is emblematic of the battles and scars that mark the nation's racial legacy. Former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's "sexting" scandal was painted by some as a "high-tech lynching" a la Clarence Thomas (Detroit Free Press 2009). Attempts at regionalism still stir memories of a bombastic Coleman Young, Detroit's first black mayor, whose vocal criticisms of racism and white flight still make him a polarizing figure. And calls to recognize the racial conflict of 1967 as a rebellion and not a riot are issued anew, even as many Detroiters - black and white – parrot the myth that black incivility catalyzed white flight, urban disinvestment, and population loss.

Weathering the Storm

Writing in 1969 on the ramifications of the Civil Rights Movement's northern march, James Boggs asserted,

These urban rebellions heralded the emergence of a new social force inside the black community itself: the street force of black youth. This force is made up of the new generation of young blacks who in the past would have been integrated into the American economy in the traditional black role of unskilled and menial labor. Now they have been rendered obsolete by the technological revolutions of automation and cybernation and driven into the military, the prisons, and the streets. Outcasts, castaways, and castoffs, they are without any future except that which Black Power can create for them (208).

In the few years since this writing, many of Boggs' assertions have come to pass: technological advance, globalization, and shifts on the demand side of the labor market have made for a growing group of "obsolete" labor – a group that is disproportionately black (USDL(b) 2011). Moreover, that the black middle class might be developed as a

buffer between this street force and the rest of America, largely through economic and political concessions by the government and US corporations, has also materialized (209). And while we can never foreclose on the possibility that a Black Power-inspired movement might mobilize America's contemporary "street force", the question of the political relevance and exigencies of those most left behind by the post-industrial political economy looms large.

To be sure, the student-respondents in this project are not the "street force" of James Boggs' era. That is, they cling with great tenacity to the hope that they will gain the requisite educational qualifications to be integrated into the American economy. And most have expectations of advancing far beyond the ranks of unskilled and menial labor. But of course, they are not looking to join a 1960's labor market – one that had the capacity and need to absorb black Americans in numbers great enough to create the incredible growth in the black middle class occurring between 1964 and the early to mid-1990's (Landry 1987, USCCR 2005).

The urgency with which these youth associate education and mobility is searing. But having so fully embraced the "education is power" mantra, how might they respond to (perceptions of) a labor market still mired in our "jobless recovery"? Moreover, these young people are all one-degree of separation from people who are chronically unemployed, incarcerated, or living in destitute conditions – many of whom have completed high school. How are these contradictory views of mobility implicated in how they construct notions of racial stratification?

Structural changes such as those predicted by Boggs (Boggs and Boggs 1974) and emphasized by Wilson (1978, 2009) continue to spur new forms of social relations with wide-ranging racial implications. This project takes on the challenge of exploring what these changes mean for how black adolescents make sense of the current and foreseeable racial order. How do contemporary conditions, ranging from potential labor market obsolescence to Obama's presidency, impact assessments of America's racial hierarchy? How do local knowledges and broader discourses converge in the construction of racial stratification views?

Structure and Shifting Racial Views

The growth of the black middle class and concomitant stagnation of low-income blacks have precipitated studies of class-based divergences in racial views, some analysts hypothesizing that middle and low-income blacks may inhabit distinct cultural worlds (Wilson 1978). There is considerable debate on this topic; the varying degrees of heterogeneity in black racial and political worldviews (attributable to class or its interaction with other structure variables like gender) continue to puzzle analysts. Depending on the outcome of interest and methodological approach, findings range from modest but significant differences in policy preferences (Dawson 1994; Jackson 2000) and racial attitudes (Schuman and Hatchett 1974) to subtle but serious breaks along ideological lines (Dawson 2001, Hochschild 1995). Ethnographic studies have offered equally complex results, some delineating distinct patterns of cultural practice across and within class groups (Anderson 1992, 2000; Lacy 2007) and others suggesting that the black middle and lower classes continue to share residential space and shape one

another's cultural orientations (Patillo-McCoy 1999). Related research has identified cognitive structures and mechanisms that operate across class divisions ("African American racial belief system" Allen et al 1989; a black utility heuristic – Dawson 1994; "African cultural system" – Asante 1988).

Dawson, a pioneer in the field of black political thought, is one of those authors who find that blacks rely upon information regarding the group's circumstances as a guide for political decision-making (1994). Also intrigued by the potential impact of growing social divergence among blacks, he suggests that one reason little heterogeneity appears in their racial-political articulations is that,

[I]t is on the margins, namely the left of the political spectrum... On issues of taxes, partisanship, the role of government, fiscal policy, and the like, blacks remain on the left and unified – *more unified across class than whites*, but on issues of the strategy, tactics, and norms of the black quest for social justice, large cleavages can be detected even using the crude instrument of the public opinion survey (Dawson 2001 pp. xii).

He goes on to suggest that the complexity of black worldviews – that "individuals with similar interests, backgrounds, and experiences could follow radically different paths"

(xii) - is due primarily to ideological processes:

It was clear that ideological reasons were cited, usually from the standpoint of interests, for any given political position, but which interests were cited was endogenous or, to phrase it differently, *socially constructed* (xii, emphasis added).

Finally, returning to the significance of race in the formation of black racial views,

Dawson offers the following insight:

The great majority of blacks continue, my previous and current work shows, to see their fate linked to that of the race, but how that linkage gets interpreted is based largely on social position but also partly on *ideological orientation* (xii, emphasis added).

In other words, it is the variable nature of the term “black” in black Marxist, black moderate, or black neo-conservative that acts as the prism through which blacks see, understand, and react to socio-political phenomena. Its significance and meaning is key. But rather than subsume its interpretation under the umbrella of racial identity, the implication is that analysts should be more concerned with directly examining perceptions of racial group interests and the processes by which they are constructed. The black box should be approached within a group position framework. The ideological connotation of “blackness” is ultimately the lynchpin in how blacks recognize, explain, and envision changes in black group position vis-à-vis other racial groups.

So while there is partial evidence for the impact of social class on some racial and political attitudes, Dawson suggests that these attitudes are rooted in deeper-lying ideological structures. He marshals historical and large-scale survey evidence to sketch the broad contours of black ideological complexity. His invaluable contribution compels analysts to develop methodological and theoretical approaches to black racial and political views that can reveal the intricacies of this social construction process.

Black Racial Views: More than Attitude

That race is a social construction is something of a social scientific truism. Still, some observers suggest that the methodological choices made by many analysts of racial attitudes, including the selection of attitudes as a unit of analysis, create epistemological problems that hamper a comprehensive depiction of racial dynamics (Esposito & Murphy 1999). In my attempt to explore black adolescents’ views of stratification, I draw largely

on Bonilla-Silva's argument for the primacy of racial ideology as the conceptual object of study (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Before reviewing his criticisms of the traditional racial attitudes approach, I re-visit the pioneering contributions of Herbert Blumer whose work presaged contemporary approaches to the analysis of racial ideology.

Blumer's theory of race prejudice as a sense of group position represented a watershed moment in the sociological study of race (McKee 1993). Contrary to the prevailing sociological perspective, Blumer asserted that prejudice should not be understood as individual feelings or attitudes (the manifestations of innate dispositions, personality compositions, or direct social experiences), but as an outcome of how racial groups come to view themselves in relation to other groups within a given society. Accordingly, Blumer advocated that scholarly attention shift away from individual attitudes and instead focus on the "collective process by which a racial group comes to define and redefine another racial group"(Blumer 3).

Blumer's description of racial identification, a prerequisite for the development of feelings of race prejudice (or any "race" feeling for that matter, including pride, solidarity, and the like) underscores the significance of racial stratification views for overall racial dynamics. Blumer suggests that for feelings of race prejudice to emerge, one must first identify with some racial group, and then assign individuals who are the target of prejudice to another racial group (or groups). Further, to see oneself as a member of a racial group, and to see others as part of another racial group would require that one has some conception of who and what these groups are – an image that is formed "inevitably in terms of the relationship of such groups" (Blumer 3). Therefore, there is an

extricable link between racial stratification views and the actual structural relations existing between racial groups. To emphasize this point, Blumer states, “The dominant group is not concerned with the subordinate group as such but it is deeply concerned with its position vis-à-vis the subordinate group” (Blumer 4). That is, prejudice is not as much about negative affect as it is the negation of the privileges the dominant group reaps as a consequence of its status. Similarly, one may surmise that blacks are only secondarily concerned with whites qua whites; rather, blacks’ articulations of attitudes towards whites are based more squarely in ideas about whites’ position vis-à-vis blacks.

The sense of group position is described as “a general kind of orientation”, “a general feeling without being reduced to specific feelings like hatred”, “a general understanding without being reduced to any specific set of beliefs” and most tellingly for the present study, “it [the sense of group position] is not a mere reflection of the objective relations between racial groups. Rather, it stands for ‘what ought to be’ rather than for ‘what is.’ It is a sense of where the two racial groups *belong*” (Blumer 5, emphasis in the original). Though Blumer does not discuss this collective orientation as ideology, his conception of the sense of group position squares neatly with contemporary understandings of that concept (cites).

Bonilla-Silva (2003) stops just short of suggesting that the field of racial attitudes be usurped by the study of racial ideology. He holds that some quantitatively oriented analysts of racial attitudes have made gains in operationalizing Blumer’s framework, but a full delineation of the processes through which racial views are formed is not possible using survey methods. He states,

...because of the very nature of survey data, these analysts are hard

pressed to identify whites' contemporary racetalk (specific linguistic ways of articulating racial views), specific rationalizations for racial inequality, deep cognitive connections between frames and racial issues, and racial stories (Bonilla-Silva 64).

These concepts – racetalk, rationalizations, the cognitive links between frames and racial issues, and racial stories – he goes on to explain, are fundamental elements of the formation and articulation of racial views. Attitudes comprise one small and relatively surface element of this process. Like Blumer, Bonilla-Silva is primarily concerned with whites' racial views. And like Blumer, Bonilla-Silva finds that predominant research practices are unable to bridge the gap between whites' racial views and behaviors because of its emphasis on attitudes.

Blumer's criticisms of the orthodoxy on race prejudice in the 1950's and Bonilla-Silva's misgivings about the analysis of racial attitudes in the post-civil rights era share similar roots. There are parallel concerns with a lax approach to structural relations, methodological individualism, and an inability to frame racial views as an ongoing collective interpretive process. These concerns are interlocking. The theorizations guiding many contemporary quantitative analyses of racial views appear as sound explanatory devices in the contexts of their particular research designs, but pose epistemological puzzles that cannot adequately be addressed within those designs.

Bonilla-Silva begins by asserting that contemporary analyses of racial attitudes fail to connect whites' racial attitudes to the systemic practices of power and domination from which they proceed. This echoes Blumer's sentiments regarding racial identification – that taking on a racial identity and assigning racial identities to others is a necessary precursor to forming ideas about (one's own and others') racially marked bodies. Bonilla-

Silva takes the additional step of reminding us that those racially marked bodies exist in a social system that has been and continues to be marked by power differentials, dominance, and oppression. The absence of power in these analyses results in a depiction of whites' racial attitudes as somehow non-racial at worst, and as secondary to other structural forces (e.g. social class) at best. That is, in the absence of a framework that foregrounds the relations of dominance and oppression that exist between racial groups, whites' concerns with economic competition or with blacks' violations of American values and norms, for example, appear as just that – economic and/or moral-cultural concerns devoid of racial sentiment.

Removal of racial attitudes from the field of actual group based relations (i.e. the reality that in our society, we can describe and arrange racial groups in terms of their “holdings” in wealth, income, respect or social esteem, institutional ties and access to valued resources, control over knowledge-producing and disseminating mechanisms, etc.) denies the structural basis of racial views. This allows for an incipient methodological individualism steeped in positivist and neo-positivist assumptions to take sway. For Bonilla-Silva this is an unavoidable quandary for quantitative survey research, as it is required to make use of repeated items in order to detect trends over time and it relies upon analyst-driven interpretations of data. The former requirement lessens the ability to account for structural changes that make certain survey items irrelevant for understanding contemporary racial views. The latter requirement necessarily privileges the researcher's interpretive agenda over the sense-making process engaged by the respondent. Similarly, Blumer was highly critical of race analysts who assumed that their

externally imposed constructs could adequately capture social processes and moreover assumed that levels of these constructs were evenly distributed in the population. Such assumptions could only hold if one viewed society “as if society were only an aggregate of disparate individuals” (Blumer 1948, pp. 546).

The goal of delineating the *collective* process of definition and redefinition through which racial groups construct views of themselves in relation to others becomes a non-starter, once the structural basis of race has been excluded from the research design, and a soft form of methodological individualism has surfaced in its place. Despite one of the few points of consensus in the social scientific research community – that race and race-related phenomena are quintessentially collective in nature – Bonilla-Silva suggests that work done in the attitudes paradigm does not adequately conceptualize race as affecting all actors in a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva 1997), but rather treats racial views (e.g. racism) as a free-floating set of beliefs. From this stance, racial views, beliefs, and ideologies are not understood as powerful and influential elements of structure that are relevant for all social actors. Instead, they are randomly dispersed in the ether, predictably taken up by individual actors, based on individual social traits (explanatory variables) and/or psychological characteristics.

Blumer’s account of race prejudice and Bonilla-Silva’s explanation of the persistence of racism both succeed at elevating the collective and relational nature of race in their accounts of racial ideology. This is accomplished through a commitment to theorize the inextricable links between practices of domination and the social imagery that emerges with those practices.

Both analysts emphasize race as an historical product. Blumer asserts that a sense of group position “is set originally by conditions of initial contact” (5). Groups are understood to show up at the game with their own endowments of “skill, numbers, original self conceptions, aims, designs and opportunities” (5). Subsequent interactions that involve social claims will mold the sense of group position. As in any conflict, the outcomes are unpredictable and often incomplete; as a result, the sense of group position is necessarily multi-dimensional and highly variable. Similarly, Bonilla-Silva acknowledges that races are “socially constructed and thus permanently unstable categories of human identity and action” but maintains that once these categories have emerged, “they organize diverse forms of hierarchy that produce social relations of domination and subordination” (65). Racial groups are not real, but that they receive differential economic, political, social, and psychological rewards as evidenced through actual interactions substantiates their existence. Racialized interests emerge as a result of being positioned to defend social advantage or navigate social disadvantage. While Blumer labels this historical product the sense of group position, Bonilla-Silva sees this same logic as grounds for the analyses of racial ideology, which he defines as “the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo” (65).

Social relations establish the context within which the social imagery surrounding racial groups - or the racially based frameworks that lie at the heart of ideological formation - takes shape. Again, these images have histories, embedded as they are in historical relations, but they also have the capacity to outlive the practices from which

they originate. The time-spanning character of racial ideologies are essential, as groups are engaged in a perpetual battle to define and redefine themselves vis-à-vis racial others. In this battle, both sides are armed – consciously or not – with the “sum of ideas, prejudices, and myths that crystallize the victories and defeats of the races regarding how the world is and ought to be organized” (66).

Both Blumer and Bonilla-Silva emphasize the distinctively generative role of the dominant group in this back and forth process. Blumer states, “the sense of group position is clearly formed by a running process in which the dominant racial group is led to define and redefine the subordinate racial group and the relations between them” (5). That is, having established its dominance through social relations, the dominant group is compelled to fashion images of the subordinate group that justify the dominant-subordinate relationship. Bonilla-Silva relies on an adaptation of Marx’s dictum, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” to support his assertion that the frameworks “of the dominant race become the master frameworks upon which all actors ground (for or against) their ideological positions” (65). “Ruling” does not negate the capacity of subordinate groups to create and circulate ideas, nor does it imply that all subordinate group ideas are merely poor replicas of the ideas of the dominant group. It does remind us of the link between actual social relations and the ideas that develop within them. It is not a simple matter of the dominant group’s control of the means of knowledge production that their ideas rule, but that once dominant-subordinate social relations are normalized, the ideas reflecting those relations take on the same normative,

taken for granted air. They are a major source of the ideational materials used to construct racial ideologies.

The talk of “ruling ideas” and hegemony are also not intended to suggest that non-elite whites or subordinate group members are passive recipients of ready-made racial frameworks. Blumer describes a process where “Leaders, prestige bearers, officials, group agents, dominant individuals and ordinary laymen present to one another characterizations of the subordinate group and express their feelings and ideas on the relations”(6). Again, it is critical to recognize that the public and inclusive nature of this process rests on the premise that race is structurally embedded, and so all members of society take part in offering, accepting, challenging, and modifying characterizations of their own and other racial groups. This does not entail calling a meeting that interested parties may choose to attend. Of course, these characterizations may be more or less deliberate, but they are in the final analysis, a product of the normal, i.e. taken for granted functioning of a racialized social system. Even to decide that no racial group enjoys any advantage in any way is to make use of the available racial frameworks. Even if elites are accorded a special role, cleavages within the dominant group, as well as ideational splits across racial groups will guarantee that no ideology is ever totally reflective of the sense making of every member of society.

While Blumer discusses the sense of group position as norm-setting, Bonilla-Silva’s articulation of the social functions of racial ideology goes much further in emphasizing how race structures society through the group-characterizing process. The limits of Blumer’s structuralism are apparent in his explanation of the influence of white

elites and interest-groups to shape the sense of group position, their abilities to manufacture “big events” to stage racial mischaracterizations, and their power in dismantling the sense of group position. To underscore the relative insignificance of direct experience in the formation of race prejudice, Blumer discusses the implications of the abstract nature of the characterizations of subordinate groups. Because all whites participate in the collective definition process, but most whites do not have experiences with blacks (or with most whites for that matter), the targets of these characterizations are necessarily abstractions. Hence, the role of elites and other reputable whites able to maintain a public audience is elevated. Consider this summary point:

The sense of group position dissolves and race prejudice declines when the process of running definition does not keep abreast of major shifts in the social order. When events touching on relations are not treated as "big events" and hence do not set crucial issues in the arena of public discussion; or when the elite leaders or spokesmen do not define such big events vehemently or adversely; or where they define them in the direction of racial harmony; or when there is a paucity of strong interest groups seeking to build up a strong adverse image for special advantage-under such conditions the sense of group position recedes and race prejudice declines.

With the exception of the first, each of these scenarios could come about without dissolution of the sense of group position or a decline of race prejudice. Moreover, the last few scenarios place a huge currency on the contents of elite messages. Rather than maintaining that the force of the sense of group position lies in its structural embeddedness, the above “fixes” seem to overstate the independent value of individual utterances.

Bonilla-Silva is not unaware of the importance of elite whites and interest groups in directing the public discourse on race. But his analysis suggests a far more nefarious set of mechanisms through which the racial status quo can be maintained:

[W]hite elites, because of their special location in the complex matrix of domination typical of modern societies, exert an inordinate influence on the ideas of white masses. However, it is a mistake to interpret whites' racial views as the *direct* effect of the ideological work of white elites. Poor and middle-class whites are not passive repositories of some 'objective interests' or supra-consciousness that tells them what to believe, say, feel, or do when in the presence of racial minorities. Instead, the white masses have some real agency, that is, they participate in the construction, development, and transformation of racial ideology since, after all, it is in their racial interest to maintain white supremacy.

Because all whites share an interest in maintaining group privilege, they will construct ideologies that reflect and draw upon something akin to the sense of group position, but articulate an ideology that comports with their specific set of social coordinates, life experiences, and interpretations of broader discursive materials. Perhaps in part an historical artifact, Bonilla-Silva's specification of the racial ideology paradigm maintains a number of nuances that may not have been available to Blumer.

Bonilla-Silva draws upon various strands in the discourse analytic approach to propose an empirical application of the racial ideology paradigm. Most central to this specification is the concept "interpretative repertoire", which he borrows from the work of Wetherell and Potter, two social psychologists most closely associated with the critical discursive psychology (Wetherell & Edley 1999) and discursive constructionism paradigms (Potter & Hepburn 2008), respectively. Most attractive about these approaches to discursive psychology is their attention to supposed "cognitive inconsistency and unreliability" in interview data. Proponents of discursive psychology assert that "when

interview responses were left in the contexts of their occurrence and examined functionally and indexically”, a different kind of coherence was present (Edwards 2005). That is, by paying attention to the social functions of utterances, we might make sense of statements that appear as otherwise contradictory or inconsistent. In their pioneering collaborative effort, Wetherell and Potter (1992) apply this approach to the analysis of ideologies. By analyzing the ways in which speakers “use systems of signification” to manufacture “versions of actions, self, and social structure” researchers could speak to the impact of broader social discourses informing interview talk. The attractiveness of this concept as a means of reconciling contradictory trends in what whites say (increasing tolerance) versus what whites do (challenge policies aimed at creating racial equality) is obvious.

After arguing that racial ideology could be studied as an interpretative repertoire, Bonilla-Silva goes on to propose three component parts of the interpretative repertoire: frames, racetalk or style, and racial stories (67). For the purposes of this study, I focus on, *“The first and most important element of an interpretive repertoire” - “its frames or topics central to the maintenance (or challenge) of a racial order”* (67, emphasis in the original). Frames are central to racial ideologies because they (1) identify the most salient social objects (as posed by the speaker); (2) associate those objects with knowledges that may be derived from the broader socio-historic discourse, local knowledges, personal experiences, or more likely, some combination of the three; and (3) suggest what practical use the utterance is being put toward. Accounting for these aspects of the process of group definition delivers a picture of racial views grounded squarely in social

interactions and the social construction of knowledge.

Bonilla-Silva emphasizes that frames “are rooted in the group-based life conditions and experiences of the races” (66). In analyzing these frames then, the researcher gains access to how social actors orient themselves within a set of implicit power relations. Based in structuralist assumptions, racial identification is posited as a mechanism that emphasizes for racial group members a common set of orientations based in their awareness of racial group membership and the attendant experience of designating others as racially marked. Individual racial identity, racial attitudes, and any subjectively experienced aspect of race are in a sense epiphenomena contingent upon the ongoing collective process of racial identification. This stance does not negate the existence of variations in racial identity or attitudes; but rather than see these variations as the result of any individual-level factors, frames allow the analyst to link these variations to macro, meso, and micro level interactions, avoiding the methodological and theoretical pitfalls inherent in the attitude paradigm.

Discussing the process of racial identification – where racial groups define one another, and in doing so implicitly locate themselves as belonging to a racial group with certain distinctive characteristics – Blumer reiterates how the public nature of this process implicates all social actors in a “vast and complex interaction” where “separate views run against one another, influence one another, modify each other, incite one another, and fuse together in new forms” (6). Again, this questions the analytic value of individualist approaches that focus on attitudes rather than on the collective process where all members of society, by virtue of their participation in a racialized social system

contribute to the articulation and reformulation of racial ideologies. To use Blumer's parlance, using frames to analyze racial views "gives the lie to the many schemes which would lodge the cause of race prejudice in the make-up of the individual" (6). Moreover, the use of frames privileges the epistemological positions of social actors, which is understood as being derived from their ongoing engagement in processes of collective definition and articulations of shared frames of interpretation.

The use of frames also allows the analyst to deal with issues of structural change over time in a way that the attitude approach cannot. The latter approach implies that the attitude object has a single, agreed upon, and invariant objectivity. Frames assume that social objects can be constructed in different ways by a single actor depending upon what social end the version is being put toward. Many factors can influence what end is being pursued, not the least of which are structural changes that engender changes in relations between racial groups. And frames also recognize that views based in previous social relations exude influence on current relations, views, and perceived ends. Bonilla-Silva quotes Jeffrey Prager to explain how this is possible:

[T]hese frameworks embody the cultural material of 'dead generations' and operate as 'public world-view[s], capable of being articulated, collectively arrived at, negotiated, and systematically organized through public channels' (66).

Through the collective public process of racialization, interpretations of past relations enter into the consciousness and shape interpretations of current relations. While attitudes can reflect immediate responses to previous ideas and relations, they do not allow for a dynamic assessment of the impact of past forms of knowledge on current

articulations. Frames account for changes in relations as well as the influence of past relations on renderings of present relations.

Finally, an emphasis on racial frames allows analysts to take purchase of the extent to which ruling ideas or dominant ideologies help set the terms of discussion around race. Frames help identify central terms and concepts, but even more importantly, they suggest the assumptions, the unspoken and taken for granted, culturally embedded pieces of knowledge that guide socially comprehensible thought and articulation. Just as work similar to Bonilla-Silva's has helped establish that whites rely upon what can be called colorblind racial frames (Bonilla-Silva & Foreman 2000), the racial ideology paradigm allows for the analysis of ideological formation across and within racial groups.

Can We Talk? The Necessity of Dialogic Approaches

As emphasized in the racial ideology paradigm and similarly discourse-inspired perspectives, a dialogic approach, whether in naturally occurring talk or in the interview situation, is a methodological necessity in forming comprehensive depictions of the process by which social actors articulate racial ideologies. Perhaps the most influential modern attempt to apply this insight to black youth populations is represented by Ogbu's body of work in educational anthropology and the voluminous responses it has generated. To be fair, his ethnographic approach did not have the goals outlined in more recent cultural approaches; but his work not only stimulated more research and theoretical advance in the cultural study of black youth, but also initiated a concern with the ways in which black youth thought about broader society-wide issues and processes. His limited

use of a dialogic approach to black youth ideas about race and society represented an early attempt to center marginalized voices, recognize their roles as cognizing actors, and build from the premise that there is a complex cultural logic underlying black youth views and articulations.

Ogbu's infamous cultural ecological model (CEM) hypothesized the lasting impact of minority status on cultural and behavioral adaptations; that is, black youth cultural and behavioral adaptations were thought to be indelibly shaped by their awareness of historical and ongoing racial discrimination. Recognizing the need to present a more variegated picture of black youth responses to this awareness, he and Fordham extended the CEM by asserting the central role of black fictive kinship (Fordham & Ogbu 1986). They posited a cultural imperative toward the formation of an oppositional collective identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference, both serving to devalue identification with the American mainstream.

Subsequent analysts pointed out that while this extended CEM or "acting white thesis" did reveal systematic variations in black youth responses to a racialized social system, it did little to illustrate the great variation in views of racial stratification. Put another way, the CEM and the acting white thesis both obscured the extent to which black youth racial ideologies - or racially based frameworks for making sense of racial stratification - varied. Without an appreciation of the varied frames black youth use to construct versions of racial stratification, attempts to delineate their responses to the structural and cultural conditions that hierarchical relations engender will be necessarily truncated. These analysts, relying upon dialogic approaches to ideological phenomena,

have developed an impressive literature revealing the import of racial frames in analyzing black youths' socio-political views.

Despite these advances, relatively little energy has been devoted to developing a model of the formation of racial ideologies among black youth with the explicit goal of exploring the influence of dominant racial ideological frames in this process. That is, given the tenets of the racial ideology paradigm, and the sage direction of Blumer and his adherents, analyses of the formation of racial views must take into account the pivotal role of dominant group definitions of racial groups, as well as the process by which subordinate groups respond discursively to such definitions. Moreover, in examining the latter issue, great attention must be given to the meso-level contexts and micro-level interactions where dominant and subordinate group discourses, knowledges, and assumptions collide. This project extends scholarly knowledge of black youth racial ideological formation by exploring the frames operative in the articulations of a sample of Detroit-based black adolescents, with an explicit emphasis on the ways in which dominant ideological frames are revealed in their interview talk. How are dominant racial frames implicated in how these youth understand oppression, explain racial disparities, and envision future race-based group positional arrangements?

The Colorblind Racism Thesis

Bonilla-Silva posits that a new form of dominant racial ideology has emerged in the post-Civil Rights Era (Bonilla-Silva & Foreman 2000, etc). This racial ideology is distinctive compared to dominant ideologies of the past as it is predicated on a set of frames that essentially deny the relevance of race as a determinant of life chances. As the

means of maintaining racial disparities have evolved, so too have the ideas about what if any relevance race has, how racial disparities are maintained, and what if any changes in the racial status quo are forthcoming. As follows from the racial ideology paradigm, the role of the dominant group in establishing and re-establishing definitions of subordinate racial groups is key to understanding racial dynamics in the US. Accordingly, the colorblind racism thesis has emerged through studies attempting to square whites' increasingly tolerant racial attitudes with a growing lack of support for racially ameliorative policies and programs. Though explaining the persistence of white supremacy served as the impetus for the studies culminating in the colorblind racism thesis, the racial ideology paradigm within which these studies were developed provides a general process through which racial frameworks come together. Therefore, we are able to assess the extent to which posited dominant frames are reflected in the ways black youth construct versions of racialized oppression, develop "folk theories" regarding the maintenance of racial group hierarchies, and make use of the available cultural resources to imagine the course of racial stratification.

As presumed by the racial ideology paradigm (and as supported by constructionist theorists more generally) racial views are outgrowths of actual social relations between groups who have been racially marked. And when those relations are built on foundations of dominance and subordination, the dominant ideas – the ideas that are most fundamental in the development and functioning of institutions – will reflect and express the dominant group's desire to maintain power. Omi and Winant (1994) apply Gramsci's notion of hegemony to describe the modern phase of racial rule in the US. They assert

that changes in social relations (i.e. black Americans' pursuit of freedom and white Americans' eventual concessions) necessitated a shift from coercive force to consensual manipulation as the primary means of exerting social control. The assumptions that ruled the day under previous forms of racial rule (e.g. black innate inferiority under slavery and black cultural deficiency under Jim Crow) would prove ineffective, or at least highly inefficient, in a modern society that decries human and civil rights violations and has formed its self-image as the purveyor of a global multiculturalist democracy. As a result, Omi and Winant suggest that we today live under racial hegemony.

Analysts of contemporary race relations face the challenge of identifying the machinations of white supremacy in a context where racial discrimination occurs in a “now you see it, now you don't” style” (Bonilla-Silva 2010, p. 25). Just as racial disparities are maintained through the normal functioning of seemingly race-neutral institutions, modern racial ideologies are backed by assumptions that reflect the “beyond race”, multiculturalist self-image of American institutions. As implied by the racial ideology paradigm, and Bonilla-Silva's exploration of white ideological assumptions, there really is no paradox between white (and non-white) Americans' pronouncements of full tolerance – nay, embrace of diversity - and their waning political support to ameliorate persistent racial disparities, given their rootedness in an image of the nation that has taken on and triumphed over pre-modern and backward notions of race and innate racial difference. Given this post-racial assumptive foundation, it is little wonder that any suggestion that race matters or that racism exists would be taken as an affront to

the nation's moral character, and worse, as a regression in the forward march of human history.

Despite the imperceptible nature of modern racism, Bonilla-Silva is able to apply a discursive method – one focused on the nested ideological contexts in which words are spoken with an eye toward asserting what social action (i.e. construction supportive or challenging of perceived social relations) is being accomplished by speaking those words. As touched upon above, Bonilla-Silva asserts that survey-based methods, while able to shed some light on different aspects of new racism, are not up to the task of capturing the constitutive components of modern racial ideologies. Drawing upon the discursive psychology tradition, he deploys the concept interpretative repertoire in order to describe the ideological elements and function of talk. By drawing out continuities between historically dominant ideologies and the frames or racial topics, racetalk or unique linguistic features of how racial frames are discussed, and racial stories or persistent and familiar narratives of racial experience, he reveals how modern racial ideologies are able to support contemporary racial disparities. With different degrees of intentionality, articulations of racial views among dominant group members express assumptions based in and supportive of continued white privilege.

Growing Up Colorblind?

Born between 1990 and 1992, the youth participants in my study grew into toddlerhood during what could be considered the peak of the post-racial era - and a period marked by a surge in racial backlash (Giroux and Searls 1996). The frames of colorblind racism have been with them their entire lives. These frames have dominated

the contours of their ideological landscape, and in ways unbeknownst to them shaped how they see the world. This is not to suggest by any measure that their worldviews are a simple reflection of colorblind racial ideology; but the conditions in which they lived (municipal jurisdiction), the institutions where they were socialized (churches, schools, community centers, etc), and the contexts where their significant others worked and played were all affected in some way by colorblind racial frames by dint of their location vis-à-vis a network of institutions steeped in white privilege and dominance.

Undoubtedly, many of the views articulated by these youth, even as middle school students at the turn of the millennium, probably evinced some sense of marginality due to some recognition of race and/or class inequalities, but as O'Connor reminds us (citing Giroux 1983), "such agency is never observed operating outside of the logic of social reproduction" (601). That is, even utterances that challenge what one perceives as an unjust status quo still rely upon the meaning structures embedded in those utterances and are reflective of the social relations in which they emerge, leaving the speaker vulnerable to other system-justifying meanings.

During the time I was conducting the interviews for this project, my interviewees – all expectant high school graduates - were at a point in their lives when they would be reckoning with dominant ideas about race in a conscious, confrontational, and consequential manner for the first time. According to Adelson (1972), sets of coherent and consistent attitudes on subjects such as civil liberties and social equality start to emerge for the first time during middle and late adolescence (Adelson 1972, Flanagan & Galay 1995). Moreover, research consistently finds that minority and poor youth face

unique difficulties making the transition to adulthood (Brooks-Gunn et al 1993; Ensminger et al 1996; Sampson 1997). Black adolescents from impoverished backgrounds are confronted with the challenges of the adult transition, which is then complicated by the necessity of weighing aspirations and expectations in light of perceived racial barriers.

A central finding from research in developmental psychology, which finds unquestioned support in sociological circles, is that the key factor shaping the political development and behavior of youth is the social context in which one reaches late adolescence (Torney-Purta 1990). This context is understood to extend from the immediate physical community to the broader social and historical environment. Above, I noted just a few of the economic, social, and political features of my interviewees' context. And if we are to accept the colorblind racism thesis, that context is imbued with an ideological system that justifies and props up disparities in life chances and social representations. Research on the concept system justification beliefs (Jost et al 2004) suggests that adolescent members of minority and/or impoverished groups are predisposed to incorporating beliefs that support the status quo. The implications of these findings in a time when ideologies supporting racial disparities seem to be more durable and pliant than ever suggests a need to increase scholarly attention to the political and racial views of black youth.

Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics (Cohen 2010) represents the most comprehensive analysis of black youth racial and political attitudes undertaken to date. In this much needed volume, Cohen culls through a plethora

of quantitative (two national surveys) and qualitative (40 in-depth interviews conducted with respondents from one of the surveys) data to expose the complexities of “the political lives of young black people because the political domain is a critical area that shapes many of the opportunities and barriers young blacks will face in other parts of their lives” (17). The data were collected between 2006 and 2009 from respondents ranging in age from 15 to 35 years. She is able to offer insight into what it means to be young and black during this era of racial paradox.

While she covers a number of racial and political views held by black youth, I focus on three areas that are of particular relevance for understanding how black youth participate in the discursive battle to interpret black status in the racial hierarchy. She introduces the concept “secondary marginalization” to capture the process whereby black elders and elites create moral panics around the “deviant” acts of black youth, buttressing media portrayals of an aberrant black youth culture. She finds that black youth are indeed aware that their elders accept this imagery as accurate, leading to internalization at the personal level, and validation of aspects of colorblind racism at the ideological level.

Focusing on views of the state and its institutional apparatus, she explores the extent to which black youth view themselves as “second class citizens who are treated worse than recent immigrants to the United States” (19). Drawing on interview responses on topics from Katrina to Obama, and using survey evidence, Cohen finds evidence of continuing political alienation among black youth, despite glimmers of hope that something approximating full political inclusion and protection might be extended to them, if they are willing to play by the rules. Interestingly, this holds across class

categories, leaving open the question as to why in this time of seeming expanded opportunity, do most black youth continue to question the fairness of the American political process. No definitive answer is forthcoming, but Cohen suggests that “systemic pathologizing of all black youth” (154) may be the culprit, suggesting the need to further inquire into how this aspect of the racial ideological landscape registers with differently located black youth.

Finally, she considers what Obama’s election means for contemporary black youth, who she shows continue to evince high levels of political alienation and a general distrust of our political system. Casting Obama as a representative of the “third-wave” of black elected officials, she questions if the ways in which black youth envision race square with the colorblind strategies “decentering race as the primary organizing unit for their campaigns, promising to change politics forever, and encouraging young people to reengage in the political process” (227) of today’s black politicians. Describing responses to survey items including:

“ Some people say that the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States suggests that racism no longer exists in American society and politics. Would you say – (1) racism remains a major problem in our society; (2) racism exists today but is not a major problem; (3) racism once existed but no longer exists in our society; or (4) racism has never been a major problem in our society” (236)

and

Do you believe “blacks (1) have achieved racial equality; (2) will soon achieve racial equality; (3) will not achieve racial equality in the respondent’s lifetime; (4) will never achieve racial equality” (237).

she offers, “whatever the genesis of their perspective, it flies in the face of those who have pronounced this the postracial era” (236).

Cohen's timely work makes invaluable contributions to the study of black youths' racial and political views. She aptly captures the paradoxes that constitute racial politics in the so-called "postracial era". She offers insightful socio-historically grounded theorizations of the role of black middle classes and elites in fostering images that deny the significance of race and emphasize the importance of personal responsibility. And perhaps most important, Cohen allows for the voices of black youth in stating and interpreting the impacts of this ideological context on their racial understandings. I wish to extend this analysis by focusing more narrowly on the frames that center these interpretations of the social structure, while more explicitly assessing the influence of colorblind frames in their talk on stratification. Assessing these frames is a fruitful way of beginning to illuminate the "genesis of their perspective".

Colorblind in Detroit

Again, of Cohen's many contributions, her attention to the structural and ideological embeddedness of colorblind frames provide a foundation from which to illuminate the multilevel interactions that converge to promote their contestation. By weaving together structural changes (e.g. major ongoing shifts in the political-economy), institutional responses in controlling and defining racially marked bodies, historically received counter-ideologies, and the local experiences and constructed knowledges of black youth, she points out a number of sites where the process of group definition and redefinition are worked out. It is possible to use her findings, based on a national sampling frame, as a benchmark of sorts, to enable an analysis of the impact of location-specific factors on racial views. As she suggests, national and international events and

conditions, such as Obama's presidency and its impacts on political alienation, black youths' attentiveness to the continuing disappearance of work, and black youths' awareness of the transmission of negative black imagery globally are all aspects of the socio-political landscape that lend themselves to shared interpretations of the social structure, across the country and across class categories. It remains to be seen if and how these constructions hold among sub-groups of black youth who necessarily view these same issues through the lens of their local experiences.

Similar to the youth in Cohen's study, economic concerns are ever-present in the minds of my interviewees. As alluded to above, Detroit is regarded as America's ground zero of capitalist decline. And today's youth are acutely aware of this. Cohen's discussion of the rationale behind black elites' responses to the "poor behavior of poor blacks" implies one reason for contemporary black youths' sensitivity to the labor market – despite how slow and long the decline has been. Today's postracial logic upholds the notion that the current generation of black youth should be reaping the benefits of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements' victories, in a big way. Feeling this pressure from black elders and mainstream America, but lacking the historical knowledge to understand why this has not been the case is surely a source of anxiety for black youth nationally. This anxiety is likely heightened in a city positioned at the center of this economic tsunami.

Related to this potential source of anxiety, the Detroit that these young adults have grown up with has always been majority black, administered by predominantly black civil servants and managed by black legislators and executives. The idea that black

Americans can achieve the highest posts in local governance is their reality. But so is the sense that ineptitude and corruption are rampant and typical characteristics of black politics. Even when this is interpreted as par for the course in terms of the behavior of politicians, Detroit youth are exposed to, internalize, and express the idea that such behavior from black officials, serving a majority black citizenry, is exponentially foolhardy. For some black youth, this is motivation to follow previous generations of blacks who managed to get out of the city, fleeing to inner-ring suburbs and further where there are fewer expectations of political corruption, and a sense that you get the most of your hard-earned tax dollars. But some others look at the current local political landscape and see potential. Amongst the latter, many can envision providing the kind of leadership “their people” deserve. Others believe that a successful city run for and by black Americans is possible, even if they cannot imagine themselves making the academic strides necessary to qualify for the positions themselves.

The narratives around black youths’ awareness of the import of education are all too familiar. At this stage, black youth nationwide articulate the necessity of an education in today’s economy (e.g. most see a BA as yesterday’s HS diploma – a minimum requirement for a minimum chance at economic security). Most can articulate the extant disparities in educational resources and experiences across race and class barriers. And among these critics of American education, some endorse education as the only way and pursue it as rigorously; others recognize its importance and pursue it half-heartedly; and yet others have very little hope that education can overcome the overwhelming odds they

face as black Americans, who are young, lack resources, and ultimately have to compete with better equipped blacks and *all* whites for a shrinking piece of the pie.

Again, Detroit reflects the extreme. Nowhere (perhaps other than New Orleans whose education system was eventually undone by a natural disaster) is the extent of educational failure so stark. In terms of the governance and administration of the system, its ability to get the most out of its student (i.e. to have student score high on state and national standardized tests, to graduate high school on time, and to enroll in college), and its capacity to provide safe and nurturing schooling environs, Detroit Public Schools is nationally recognized as the bottom rung on the ladder. And again, the youth I interviewed were keenly aware of this reputation and its reality.

Among my interviewees – all attendees of a relatively new public school academy, or charter school – the best of black Americans’ historical faith in education is alive and well, and undoubtedly spurred on by the school culture, its positioning in the local public discourse as an example of what Detroit youth can do if given the chance, and the students’ comparative experiences in other school districts. In short, while nationwide, black students in urban charter schools are often hailed as representing America’s new investment in educational excellence, this characterization is amplified tenfold for students in Detroit. Going away to college and returning to reclaim their city’s past greatness or getting out and as far away as possible on the strength of their academic achievements are real options that weigh on the minds of these youth. Academic success takes on a unique racialized tenor with great implications for constructions of and orientations to racial stratification.

Assessing the Influence of Colorblind Racial Frames

Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2001) conducted one of the few analyses attempting to directly assess the extent to which black Americans draw on and reproduce colorblind understandings of race. Unsurprisingly, the authors find that colorblind racial frames figure into blacks' and whites' articulations of racial views in different ways and to varying extents. They point out, following Jackman (1994) that,

“an ideology is not dominant by affecting all actors in a social system in the same way and to the same extent. Instead, an ideology is dominant if *most* actors (dominant and subordinate) in a social system have to fit their views vis-à-vis that ideology” (50).

Based on interview data collected from 17 black respondents and 66 whites, the authors performed a content analysis to identify when the frames of colorblind racism (abstract liberalism, biologization of culture, naturalization of racial matters, and minimization of racism) seemed to provide the underlying logic behind articulations of support for various specific policy and programmatic preferences. As the first analysis of its kind, this study did reveal that the colorblind racial frames are a constitutive part of America's contemporary discourse on race. However, in some significant ways, the analytic approach diverged from that advocated in the racial ideology paradigm (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2003). Moreover, the kind of comprehensive multilevel approach the original theorization advocated is difficult to bare out given the use of probabilistic sampling employed and the concurrent inability to contextualize the interview data.

In one of the earliest published accounts documenting the frames of the new dominant racial ideology, colorblind racism, Bonilla-Silva and Foreman (2000) relied

upon a similarly drawn probabilistic sample of white college students who completed the 1997 Social Attitudes of College Students Survey. A random sample of 41 students who completed the survey was selected to complete in-depth interviews. Depending upon the specific racial issues, the survey data displayed evidence of both tolerance *and* considerable levels of racial prejudice. After arraying students into categories based on the level of tolerance/prejudice on the varying issues (interracial marriage assessed using interview probes of five survey items; affirmative action assessed using probes of six survey items, and contemporary discrimination against blacks using probes of four survey items), interviews with representatives of each tolerance/prejudice category were conducted to reveal the discursive strategies students employed in explaining their responses. Based on this analysis, the authors were able to identify a number of key frames or assumptions underlying the students' articulations, presented in the table below.

Table 1. Central Elements of Dominant and Alternative Contemporary Racial Interpretive Repertoires in the USA (adapted from Bonilla-Silva & Foreman 2000)

Abstract Liberalism	This frame incorporates tenets associated with political (e.g., 'equal opportunity', the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy, etc.) and economic (e.g., choice and individualism) liberalism in an abstract and decontextualized manner. By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear 'reasonable' and even 'moral' while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with <i>de facto</i> racial
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	<p>inequality. For instance, by using the tenets of the free market ideology in the abstract, they can oppose affirmative action as a violation of the norm of equal opportunity.</p>
Naturalization	<p>Naturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences. For example, by claiming that ‘segregation’ is natural, that people from all backgrounds ‘gravitate toward likeness’, or that racially-based preferences for friends and partners are just ‘the way things are’, whites can present their taste for whiteness as a non-racial matter since ‘blacks do it too’.</p>
Biologization of Culture	<p>This frame uses culturally-based arguments such as ‘blacks do not put much emphasis on education’ or ‘they have too many babies’ to explain blacks’ position in society. Because this cultural rationale is discussed as something that is somewhat fixed (‘I don’t know why, but blacks are not able to do the right things in life’), I suggest that it has biologized culture: that is, it has presented minorities’ culture as something unchangeable.</p>
Minimization of Racism	<p>This frame involves minimizing the significance of discrimination in the United States (‘It’s better now than in the past’ or ‘There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there’). Therefore, whites can accept facts such as the racially motivated murder of James Byrd, Jr, in Jasper, Texas, the brutal police attack on Rodney King,</p>

	and other publicly ventilated cases such as the Texaco case, and still accuse blacks of being ‘hypersensitive’, of using race as an ‘excuse’, or of ‘playing the race card’.
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Compared to the original, the 2001 study (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick) has a few notable shortcomings. First, there is no set of survey responses used to make comparisons between survey-based responses and interview talk-based discursive strategies. The approach is valid given the content analysis applied, but this restricts interpretations of the interview talk to a pure assessment of the presence of the predefined frames. Without the survey item comparison, a dimension of the variability or inconsistency between attitudes and frames is not available. Still, the authors are able to make conjectures regarding the impact of colorblind frames based upon seemingly inconsistent statements made in response to the interview questions alone. Related to this, the content analysis employed yields results more limited in contextualization than the discursive approach advocated through the racial paradigm approach would find adequate. That is, it is difficult to interpret the processes through which particular respondents come to apply particular frames having not embedded their utterances in the corpus of interview talk garnered in the interviews (Potter et al 1990). A limitation of this approach to discursive analysis is its tendency to find the ideology one already knows to exist. Keller (2006) describes the methodological problems inherent in some approaches to discourse analysis:

The first problem is closely tied to interests in the ideological functions of language which all too often results in a rather reductionist “proof” of the presence of ideological notions and functions in a concrete set of spoken or

written language (discourse). There is no space for any interesting or surprising results or insights to be derived from such empirical research, because the discourse theorist *always* knows how ideology works in advance (emphasis in the original).

In short, the interactive process that results in different frames being articulated is not delineated.

One alternative to this content analysis-styled discursive approach is outlined by Talja (1999). In her piece, she suggests a modification of Wetherell and Potter's (1998) familiar notion of interpretative repertoires as "bounded language units" constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion" (467). Drawing on a Foucaultian reading of discourse as "a practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks" (467), she insists,

"Interpretative repertoires cannot be "bounded language units" consisting of a restricted range of terms, because the same terms are used in different discourses in which their meanings are constituted differently (see Foucault, 1972, pp. 34–35; 1981, pp. 100–101)" (467).

That is, because any given social object can be constructed in multiple ways, and what shape the construction takes will be contingent upon the social action the speaker wishes to accomplish (justifying a statement, positioning oneself as morally upright, distancing oneself from a stigmatized in-group, etc.) the analytic goal cannot be to list and interpret systems of terms that seem to have some internal logical coherence. Rather, to fully appreciate the social action implications of the multiple versions one might construct of a single social object, the interpretative repertoire must be conceptualized as "a limited viewpoint on the basis of which the objects, style, and themes of talk are selected and common concepts are defined" (467). Applying this modification to Bonilla-Silva's

concept, we can view frames as those central topics and their associated symbolic associations that serve as starting points or assumptions grounding particular utterances. That is, an identified frame points toward the foundational nugget of culturally derived and embedded knowledge that guides subsequent articulations related to that topic. The frame provides that unspoken assumption which carries an implicit social goal, limiting how a topic can and will be articulated.

Conceptually, I use the racial ideology paradigm as a foundation to identify alternative frames and assess the presence of dominant frames operative in the racial stratification views of a sample of black Detroit-based adolescents. Though interrelated, for the purpose of analysis, I distinguish among three dimensions of racial stratification views – understandings of oppression, explanations of racial disparities, and future visions of the racial order. For each of these dimensions of racial stratification views, I attempt to identify the frame(s) or assumption(s) grounding articulations on that dimension. Having identified alternative frames and revealed the ways in which colorblind frames surface, I consider how broader socio-historical discourses and knowledge born of more immediate experience converge to undergird articulations of racial ideology. In particular, I theorize how even slight differences of social location among these youth who all qualify as representatives of the urban poor, create considerable distinctions in the ways in which frames are articulated and combined, and therefore in the forms of social relations their words reflect and reinforce.

Without overstating the differences in approach to identifying the frames which undergird black youth's articulations around racial stratification, the focus in this project

is on the self-relevant topics, objects populating talk on those topics, meanings associated with those objects, and the experiential bases for the development and application of those meanings as made visible in these youths' narratives. Experiential basis is not used here in the conventional ethnographic sense. That is, the analysis does not depend upon observations of actual behavior, or even on the accuracy of the accounts the interviewees share. Rather, an attempt is made to isolate the social objects that constitute their narratives and derive from what constellation of meanings they have come to include certain objects as relevant to their construction of racial stratification. This is done to reveal patterns in the cultural resources and devices whereby certain objects and their associated meanings emerge.

For example, the relevance of the economy clearly emerges from a broad societal discourse involving America's location in a globalized labor market, domestic social mobility, and the role of labor in defining the social structure, personal identities, and quality of life. This discourse includes both dominant and alternative frames (e.g. status quo maintaining and challenging frames, respectively). At the same time, that discourse offers up specific topics and social objects that are reinterpreted in light of local dynamics and personal autobiographies. Depending upon the topic and the cultural resources brought to bear upon its interpretation, there are myriad possibilities for how members of shared social locations, with varying means of accessing these resources, and varying structural and ideological goals, will interpret and articulate these knowledges.

This conceptualization of the process by which black youth become privy to, engage, and modify ideological contestation emanating from multiple levels of

interaction allows for an analysis of the necessarily multiple and potentially contradictory ways they come to construct notions of oppression, explanations of racial disparity, and visions of the current and future racial hierarchy. The frame concept allows us to complicate how we understand black youth to interpret black status such that we may render more complete versions of their ideological moorings in an ever-shifting racial landscape.

Dissertation Chapter Outline

Entire sociological fields are dedicated to exploring various facets of America's "race problem". But it is only in recent decades that attention has turned to the ways in which black Americans and black youth in particular interpret the socio-political landscape. In the next chapter, I review literature in the cultural ecological model tradition (Ogbu 1974). Ogbu's early work constitutes a seminal attempt to center the voices of black urban youth in post Civil Rights America. His concern with their views of the role of race in structuring the social hierarchy, and their subsequent reactions to schooling and the labor market provoked conversations spanning topics from racial identity, to individual mobility, to academic achievement. Many of these debates continue to this day. I contend that Ogbu's initial concern with how black youth interpret a racially hostile environment slowly receded and has only recently been revived through the application of advanced tools of cultural analysis.

In the methods chapter (chapter 3), I discuss the constructionist roots of the discursive method applied in this project. The strengths of the semi-structured in-depth interview to provide dialogic evidence of frames are further illuminated. I briefly

describe the socio-political and racial context in which my sample has come of age and which defines the specific contours of racial ideological formation in the city of Detroit. I also describe the emergence of the Urban Preparatory Academy Public School Academy District.¹

The three subsequent chapters present the empirical findings from a discursive analysis of the body of interview texts. The analytical discussion is driven by findings of a conceptual split in the social objects, associated meanings, and assumptive links emergent between two broad categories of respondents.² These categories are labeled based on the participants' differential educational trajectories. One group of students, dubbed HI-SET youth (high student educational trajectory) had plans to attend relatively prestigious 4-year universities, primarily in the Midwest. LO-SET youth had plans to attend less prestigious 4-year schools, 2-year schools, and a variety of professional licensing programs. This distinction does not represent absolute differences in academic ability or aspirations. Moreover, my imposition of the HI- and LO-SET categorization does not suggest that representatives of either group spoke about racial stratification in ways exclusive to that group. Rather, these groupings reflect general patterns in the types of social objects members of either group were more likely to emphasize in their accounts and arguments, as well as the meanings most consistently applied to those objects, and finally, to the assumptions that acted to link these object-meaning pairings to one another.

¹ This is a pseudonym for the school where the interviews were conducted. Urban Preparatory High School is a charter school; it is publicly funded, though not solely publicly funded, and is mandated to enroll students living anywhere in the state.

² The initial coding found no gender differences. That is, the views of HI-SET females were more like those of HI-SET males than LO-SET females or LO-SET males.

In addition to differences in post-secondary plans, other pertinent factors distinguished members of the HI- and LO-SET youth groups.³ HI-SET youth tended to have been reared in single-parent households by mothers (or female heads of household) who had slightly more education and occupations with slightly greater prestige and average income than their LO-SET counterparts. They were also slightly younger. LO-SET youth were more likely to have an adult male in household. However, those men were frequently unemployed or held low-wage, low-dominant capital employment. HI-SET youths' heads of household more frequently worked in fields that both required and would generate greater amounts of dominant cultural capital. HI-SET youth were far less likely to be employed than were their LO-SET counterparts. And HI-SET youth scored higher on subjective measures of neighborhood and personal safety than did LO-SET youth.

It should be kept in mind that the entire sample qualifies as “urban poor” (Wilson and Aponte 1985). The above distinctions are reminders of the differences that exist even within otherwise homogeneous populations. Such distinctions are noteworthy for the experiences they provide, the interpretations they enable, and the knowledge they engender. So while I do not posit that the SET designation is a cause of differences in how these youth discuss racial stratification, the SET label does provide a shorthand that captures a number of structural factors that are pertinent for sense-making. For example, the HI-SET youths' family lives in many ways contradict commonplace notions of urban life chances; despite being in largely single female headed households, they are on a

³ See appendices A-C for summary statistics, comparisons, and a look at all the factors considered.

“better” educational trajectory than their LO-SET counterparts from two-parent households. It may be the case that the HI-SET youths’ mothers provide concrete evidence of the possible, knowledgeable advice based on experience, and tales of overcoming racial (and gender-based) obstacles that are not available to LO-SET youth. This may foster a greater internalization of the school’s ideological positions on the purpose and practice of educations, which will have some bearing on the extent to which colorblind frames such as abstract liberalism become visible parts of one’s cultural logics. In identifying the frames that guide how these youth discuss racial stratification, and assessing the influence of colorblind frames on these views, every attempt is made to locate meaning-making processes in the context of these structural distinctions.

In the final chapter, I revisit the findings focusing on the primary social objects and associated meanings that are central to how my sample of black urban youth talks about racial stratification. I also consider the significance of colorblind racial frames for the ideological formation of these youth as they enter adulthood, as well as for the current and ongoing racial context in Detroit. The analysis reveals the import of socio-historic context for making sense of race and racism; that is, the influence of colorblind frames is mediated by Detroit-specific racialized images and structures. The viability of race-based and race-conscious political mobilizations remains unsure outside of more deliberate attempts to highlight and create understandings of the structured nature of racial and other forms of oppression.

CHAPTER 2

Relevant Literature

Introduction

With his seminal articulation of life behind the veil, W.E.B Du Bois placed front and center a challenge that would perplex analysts of the black American experience for the next century (Du Bois 1994). He asserted that black Americans maintained a “double consciousness” – a “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, *of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity*” (Du Bois 3, emphases added). To assess oneself based on one’s presumptions of the perceptions of others is a common and adaptive part of social life (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). I emphasize this second clause, for it expresses a unique aspect of the socialization process reserved for society’s most despised and vulnerable.

In the concept of double consciousness, Du Bois expresses quintessential sociological concerns: the existence/bounds of racial groups, the perception of race-based differences in collective and individual endowments, and consequent inter-group relations. He recognizes that the American condition is one of disparate race-based life chances. This condition creates the possibility for the emergence of a double consciousness, which in turn necessitates a “longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self”(Du Bois 3). The manifestation of this

longing in the ideas and actions of black Americans necessarily takes on different forms over space and time.

For his own part, Du Bois gives a retrospective account of his recognition of and response to the veil (perceived and actual racial difference):

Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. (Du Bois 2)

Here we see the melding of the psychological with the sociological. Du Bois articulates that the primary distinction to be made between himself and his white schoolmates is that he is “shut out from their world”, excluded - denied a social existence despite his likeness “in heart and life and longing”. Here is reflected a sociological assessment – a statement of the relevance of social groups and their relative positions in the social order. It is through such assessments that it is possible to develop individual desires, motivations, and action plans.

Du Bois sketches a range of responses to living in a social system structured in racial inequality:

With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? (Du Bois 2)

Even in this brief description of the adaptations to a racially exclusionary social system made by Du Bois as well as “other black boys” for whom the strife of double consciousness “was not so fiercely sunny”, a sense of the myriad forms of black reaction begins to emerge. For an individual actor, each response might hold true in degrees, with

permutations of each forming in response to macro-social change and micro-social experience, resulting in evermore-complex ideological formations. The notion of double consciousness articulates the chasm dividing black-white worldviews; as important, it anticipates the variety of ways black youth may perceive and orient themselves to a racially hostile terrain.

Only in the last four decades has there been a serious return of scholarly attention to the ways in which black youth think about and respond to racial stratification. One field in particular - educational anthropology - has spurred an interest in linking black youths' perceptions of the social structure to cultural orientations and behavioral adaptations to mainstream institutions (e.g. schools and the labor market). While these studies have provided useful models of black youth responses to normative institutional imperatives, their overwhelming foci have been on the effectiveness of black behavioral adaptations for the goals of academic achievement, access to high-paying careers, and individual status attainment. As a result, we have gained an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of the myriad ways black youth can and do manage to navigate a social structure that they recognize to be racially skewed against them.

However, these same substantive priorities have obscured an analysis of those very views that figure so prominently into theorizations of black youth cultural and behavioral adaptations. Until very recently, we have accepted rather over-determined notions of racial stratification and sought out those factors mediating between them and the various strategies taken up by black youth in their day-to-day negotiations of racialized social spaces. In short, I argue that we have not adequately complicated

conceptualizations of racial stratification views among black youth. Current theorizations linking perceptions of racial hierarchies to mainstream orientations support increasing analytic attention to the connections between black youths' constructions of race-based oppression, their explanations of racial disparities, and their notions regarding future positional arrangements of racial groups.

The Cultural Ecological Model (CEM) is perhaps the most influential modern attempt to address this issue of black youth orientations to American society. John Ogbu set out to explain academic failure among black (and Latino) students in an impoverished section of Stockton, California in order to theorize cross-cultural variations in the academic performance of various minority groups (Ogbu 1974, 1978). His analysis turns in part on interview data regarding youth perceptions of American stratification. In Ogbu's depiction, black students' views of American society centered a discriminatory labor market, where blacks were either locked out entirely, or locked into low-wage sectors of the economy. Ogbu suggests that their school-related behaviors aligned with their views of America's fundamental racism, leading to lowered levels of academic effort.

In the CEM framework, one's immigrant status is a catalyst for subsequent societal orientations, and these orientations in turn drive individual behavior. Ogbu distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary immigrants, the former having chosen to come to the United States, the latter having been brought to or incorporated geographically and/or politically into the US forcibly. Accordingly, voluntary immigrants develop favorable evaluations of American society, its ideological premises, and its

institutions, while involuntary immigrants are bound to oppositional orientations – worldviews that devalue American society, and behaviors, preferences, styles, and tastes that express their non/anti-conformist views. Compared to an urban ethnographic tradition that often made tenuous links between “exotic” black urban behaviors and (presumed) cultural values and beliefs⁴, Ogbu’s elevation of the ideational and cultural lives of black youth represented a monumental advance. He attains some level of success in rooting an analysis of black youth behaviors in specific sets of socio-political views.

In a collaborative effort Ogbu and Signithia Fordham introduced the highly provocative and influential “acting white thesis”, an extension of the CEM (Fordham & Ogbu 1986). Like the CEM, the acting white thesis attempted to explain minority school failure, and focused largely on black youth perceptions of racial stratification in American society. Couching their analysis in a discussion of racial identity development and schooling behaviors, the authors address criticisms that the CEM was unable to explain academic success among black students. Where the acting white thesis succeeded in presenting a more variegated depiction of black youth responses to mainstream demands, it still remained rooted in a monolithic depiction of black youths’ socio-political views.

Among the main criticisms of the CEM was that it relied too heavily on a structural-functionalist framework. The model was driven by what Ogbu refers to as “instrumental exploitation” and the attendant instrumental responses of black youth. That is, critics suggested that notions of exploitation over-determined cultural orientations and

⁴ See Young 2004 for a detailed explanation the urban ethnographic tendency to infer ideas from observed behaviors, and the impoverished depictions of black culture that resulted.

adaptations; there was a missing link between youth views of the social structure and their cultural responses. The acting-white thesis advanced the need “to examine the expressive dimension of the relationship between the dominant group and the minorities” (Fordham & Ogbu 181). This expressive dimension was captured in the concept of fictive kinship – the shared cultural symbol of black peoplehood.

Fictive kinship is a symbol of the oppositional collective identity formed by minority group members as a consequence of their subordination; it serves to highlight the central role of boundary-making/identity protection in motivating individual and collective behavior. As such, it was posited as a means of explaining variations in black youths’ societal orientations qua academic performance left unaccounted for by the CEM. By introducing the notion of fictive kinship as a cultural force compelling an oppositional identity and cultural frame of reference, Fordham and Ogbu were able to analyze school effort as a negotiation between black cultural imperatives to affirm and protect racial identity, and normative pressures to attain success as defined by dominant white standards. Conceptualizing the challenges facing black youth in this way enabled the depiction of a rich array of strategies they might take up, dependent in large part on their acceptance and/or rejection of the dictates of mainstream institutions (e.g. schools).

While this contribution hints toward a deeper concern with the import and impact of socio-political and racial views, I contend that the fictive kinship concept as deployed in the acting white thesis constrains the ways in which we can conceptualize the myriad possibilities for black youth constructions of an oppressive racial structure. That is, to develop a theory that accounts for the range of actual academic outcomes black youth

experience represented a significant improvement over the CEM, but these adaptive outcomes should not be conflated with the precipitating views of social structure that supposedly underlie particular adaptations. The identity profiles posited by Fordham and Ogbu suggest the importance of black youths' understandings of black group status vis-à-vis whites, but as the focus of these concepts is the negotiation of protecting/affirming a static notion of individual racial identity, the larger task of assessing the complexities of views of social structure is foregone.

The dual focus on identity and adaptation (or a singular focus on identity-driven adaptation) has spurred a cottage industry of quantitative research devoted to specifying and testing the tenets of the CEM and the acting white thesis in order to answer questions including: "Do you agree with the following statement about why you go to school? Education is important for getting a job later on" (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998); "(1) do blacks experience greater alienation toward school than non-Hispanic whites?; (2) do blacks incur social penalties from their peers for succeeding academically?; and (3) if so, are these "achievement penalties" greater than those for whites?" (Cook & Ludwig 1997); and how strongly do you agree or disagree that "I have to do well in school if I want to be a success in life" (Harris 2006). In order to "test" the acting white hypothesis, researchers developed a preoccupation with individual racial identity (its loss or preservation due to presumably contradictory drives for peer and mainstream acceptance), reasonably gleaned from Fordham's emphasis on the identity related challenges postulated to accompany being black in America. Unfortunately, this preoccupation doubled the extent to which scholarly attention was diverted away from

the fundamentally group-based nature of racial phenomena, including how to conceptualize and measure racial identity (Cross 1991).

Similar to my previous discussion of the critique of the attitude-paradigm, these analyses tend to square more with their methodological requirements than with the actual processes of socially grounded meaning making that are the key to analyzing racial dynamics. That is, if we accept the assumptions that the responses to the above queries really do exist as randomly distributed social facts expressed by black youth (who are rendered interchangeable carriers of these facts), we are able to validly and reliably determine the degree to which black youth behaviors are determined by the extent to which they perceive success as acting white. Interestingly, qualitative analysts have been far more conclusive in suggesting that the fear of acting white is not consequential for black youths' orientations to American society and school-related behaviors, as compared to quantitative researchers who have offered a mixed bag regarding the significance of acting white (Downey 2008).

My contention is that aside from the epistemological misgivings of the attempt to disprove the acting white thesis, these studies sidestep the essential issues that drove the CEM and the acting white thesis to prominence – namely, the impact of views regarding how race shapes American stratification processes. The extent of these analyses' concerns with this central issue is limited to individual-level observations of “feeling alienated from school” and the like. Unless we are to accept that the heart of the CEM and the acting white thesis was primarily to assess youths' affective responses to specific school-based experiences or to assert that black youths' views of the racialized nature of

the American social structure are reducible to their descriptions of how white people speak, what music white people like, if they believe that white students spend more time doing homework, and if their black friends discourage them from doing homework, we require a more serious approach to how black youth apprehend racial stratification and why it matters.

While the racial ideology paradigm guiding my research cautions against approaches that are susceptible to the reductionism inherent in methodologically individualist approaches to racial dynamics - and against any research design that does violence to human meaning making by decontextualizing cognitions - there are rare examples of quantitative analyses that have been intentional in delving into the complex ways in which black youth see racial stratification and understand the import of relative positional arrangements between racial groups. Mickelson (1990) distinguishes between abstract attitudes which “are ideologically based and essentially reflect the belief that opportunity through education is a core component of the American Dream” and concrete attitudes, which “are derived from a person's experiences in her or his family and community (‘People in my family haven't been treated fairly at work no matter how much education they have’)” (46).

Her distinction between concrete and abstract beliefs reflects a greater awareness of black youths’ recognition of the distinct ways America’s rules are applied across racial groups. By conceptualizing the duality of achievement attitudes in this way, she outstrips designs that focus on abstract attitudes intended to reveal just how “white” black youth find education to be, or how much identity loss black students (are willing to) suffer.

Mickelson's analysis demonstrates that in many ways, the question of black students liking or valuing school (or disliking and devaluing school as something "white") is moot. The ways in which actual experience challenge or reinforce dominant ideological beliefs is the more valid "predictor" of if and to what extent black youth attend to mainstream institutional imperatives.

Finally, Mickelson refers to concrete attitudes as a subordinate value system "grounded in the different material realities that people experience and can be identical to or quite different from the dominant belief system" (46). Even restricting ourselves to just these two continua produces innumerable possibilities in terms of views the racial hierarchy. That is, as both abstract and concrete attitudes are ultimately social constructions, it is rare that one would experience fully endorsing an abstract belief without qualification, or suggest a concrete experience that contradicts abstract expectations totally nullifies the validity and possibility of living that abstract belief. But it is the qualifications we impose on both our abstract and concrete beliefs that make for the great ideological complexity we manufacture on a daily basis. Add to this the notion of an historical a priori (Berger & Luckmann 1967) and we multiply almost indefinitely the cultural resources and interpretive devices available for the construction of racial ideologies – for the constitution of oppression, the explanation of current positional arrangements, and the visioning of changes in the racial hierarchy. Recent models of how black youth think about and articulate understandings of the racial stratification have given increasing amounts of attention to these varied cultural resources and to the practices by which they influence black youths' interpretations of the social structure.

O'Connor's work provided one of the earliest and most influential extensions of the CEM/acting white literature (1997). Building upon the dialogic approach already dominant in the field, and responding to the limited conception of culture pervasive in previous modifications and tests of Ogbu's and Fordham's analyses, O'Connor offered key insights regarding the breadth of cultural materials available for black youth to make sense of the origins and mechanisms of race-based oppression and the multi-level processes through which these materials come to influence black youth orientations and behaviors. Her work established one of the earliest attempts to theorize black youths' schooling experiences using a mature understanding of the embeddedness of racial identity in actors' views of society-wide hierarchical arrangements.

Her work takes head on Ogbu's contention that knowledge of racism in the social structure curtails academic effort. O'Connor finds evidence that perceptions of the limitations of the opportunity structure, understood to be based in whites' dominant position vis-à-vis blacks, could actually be empowering for black youth. This consciousness of racial stratification engendered notions of agency that came to define how these youth conceived of "blackness" (e.g. primarily in terms of group position), setting the stage for subsequent ideological formations (i.e. ideas about how blacks are oppressed, how this oppression is maintained, and what may be done to end it).

She explores the process through which differences in notions of agency – the "ability to imagine that Blacks could produce desirable social outcomes through their engagement in struggle" – "positively affect perceptions of personal life chances, academic performance, and achievement behavior" (596). O'Connor

attends to individual mobility, but emphasizes the centrality of a sense of black group position through her theorizations. Recognizing the insights of Mickelson's abstract and concrete beliefs distinction, O'Connor develops the notion "co-narratives" to signal the fact that

"[W]hile maintaining an ideological commitment to the fundamental elements of the dominant theory of making it, they [the students in her study] modified the character and structure of the story by incorporating mitigating factors and circumstances [such as race and class structurations] which mediated the efficacy of the individual and affected his or her probability of realizing particular social outcomes" (610).

Perhaps most importantly, her work implies a key source of variability in how black youth conceive of and interpret black group status. Ogbu's youth may have lacked notions of agency due to any number of socio-historic factors; the problem is his structural-functionalist and assimilationist leanings - and attendant underdeveloped notion of culture - limited his exploration of this facet of the black imaginary. As O'Connor suggests,

When Ogbu argues that the dispositions and behaviors which constitute "a Black cultural frame of reference" determine Black students' interpretations of their subordination and hence their orientations toward school, he casts culture as no more than a functional adaptation to the historical and social positioning of the group.

Until O'Connor, most analyses in this field suffered from similar limitations.

Carter's application and development of the notions "dominant and non-dominant" cultural capital advances theorizations of the role of culture in black youths' interpretations and subsequent responses to group-based limitations of the US social structure (2003, 2005, 2006). Her work maintains an interest in describing

the myriad strategic practices enacted by black youth, but she is equally attentive to the variations in how black youth characterize racial group relations as a foundation from which to develop these strategies. Her intervention makes very explicit the necessity of considering the multiple aspects of experience black youth might highlight in construction understandings of oppression. By continuing to emphasize the multidimensional and variable nature of these constructions, the field enhances its ability to develop a comprehensive analysis of black youth cultural orientations and behaviors.

Carter (2003) describes dominant cultural capital as corresponding “to Bourdieu’s conceptualization of powerful, high status cultural attributes, codes, and signals” which are the cultural currency of a society’s dominant group. “Non-dominant cultural capital describes those resources used by lower status individuals to gain ‘authentic’ cultural status positions within their respective communities” (138). Reminiscent of findings stated by Mickelson (1990) and O’Connor (1997), this conceptualization of the dual currencies held by black youth, representative of the dualistic ideological context they inhabit lays the groundwork to make sense of the complexities of black youth agency. One agentic use of non-dominant cultural capital is to “produce semi-autonomous and resourceful cultural ‘tool kits’ (Swidler 1986) with which to evaluate their own and each other’s social actions” instead of adopting a dominant interpretation of their group status (as the cultural frame of reference proposed by Ogbu) – mired in hopelessness and despair. In stark terms, Carter’s ability to reveal how black youth recognize the devaluation

of their preferences, styles, and other cultural codes in US society (explored here via schooling experiences) is a clear indication of the need to pay even more attention to the origins and structures of these frameworks.

Even as Carter is immersed in questions of ethnic identity loss and affirmation, her analyses clarifies how the basis of racial identity lies in understandings of group position, and that black youths' interpretations of group position are far more variable than the CEM/acting white thesis perspectives allow. Carter suggests that the default "oppositional" descriptions of black youth culture ignore the "the value of non-dominant cultural resources within low-income racial and ethnic minority communities" (152). By illustrating that non-dominant cultural capital can have both instrumental and expressive purposes, she dispels the notion that black racial identity (oppositional collective identity, oppositional cultural frames, or fictive kinship) serves the exclusively expressive (read cultural) purpose of compelling black youth to view US society in exclusively oppositional terms. Carter provides a means to witness the cultural sophistication of black youth, hitherto largely absent from the discussion of black youth's socio-political views. In doing so, she provides a tool with which to render the lives of black adolescents in their full complexity. Failure to develop this tool will not only lead us to incomplete portrayals of black life, but will also ultimately undermine the development of cultural analysis.

Many analysts have continued this trend toward eliciting more variegated takes on views of social structure – including understandings of oppression and

explanations of current and anticipated racial group arrangements - as a means of explaining variations in cultural orientations and behavioral adaptations. In different ways, these analysts have expanded the breadth of cultural resources they analyze as providing the materials with which black youth interpret social structure, and delineated the various contextual elements present across the macro, meso, and micro levels of interaction that we must take account of in explicating meaning making processes.

Similar to O'Connor's findings regarding the role of significant others relating experiences of individual and collective struggle (1997), Tyson's (2003) study of elementary age children reveals how black teachers' class-inflected admonitions of their students' behaviors influenced the students' imagery of the relative position of whites (as better than blacks). Akom (2003) demonstrates the heterogeneity of black female interpretations of the social structure by exploring the role of religious tenets in the formation of what he calls the NOI black achievement ideology. Turning to another dimension of context, Horvat and Lewis (2003) illustrate the impact of school racial composition on the interpretation and articulation of the opportunity structure. And Carter-Andrews (2008, 2009) finds that high achieving black youth in a predominantly white affluent school develop a black achievement ideology built on their interpretation of the low status of blacks in the racial hierarchy and the centrality of the historical and contemporary pursuit of education among blacks. For them, academic achievement and blackness are intertwined and mutually reinforcing identities. In their case, the impact of race, class, lived experience, and

historical knowledge converge in the articulation of a local black achievement ideology.

This brief review suggests a progression in cultural analysis, which has allowed for the recognition of the multidimensional and highly variable nature of black youth interpretations of and responses to racial oppression in the American social structure. Analysts in the CEM/(not) acting white tradition have taken seriously the need to augment the analysis of culture and cultural production in the lives of black youth. In a related vein, Young (2004), a pioneering contributor to the cultural analysis of black life in general, and of poor, black, urban-based males more specifically asserts that, “Ethnography has sustained the notion that what people do...conveys how they make meaning of themselves, other people, and varied aspects of the social world”. He goes on, “The flaw in this approach is that one’s behavior is not a transparent reflection of one’s underlying thoughts” (10). In response he issues a call for cultural analyses that does not presume to infer black men’s ideas from their actions or “simply from the adaptation of stretched values or alternative norms, but more fundamentally from the stocks of knowledge that they accumulate about how the world works, and how they might work within it” (13). Whereas studies of black youths’ perceptions of the social structure often assumed the content and impact of their ideas on the basis of behavior (e.g. despite what they say, if black youth liked, cared about, or understood the importance of education, they would perform better, academically and socially, in school), this project is an attempt to take seriously the ideas and beliefs black youth hold regarding the current and future location of black Americans in the US social structure.

The most recent and theoretically advanced studies in the field consistently illustrate that black adolescents penetrate dominant ideologies. They develop awareness that dominant ideologies tell one story about freedom, justice, and equality in American life; and they believe this story to be true in the main. But at the same time, based on an array of messages emanating from macro-level discourses through mundane local activities, they also learn that “all that glitters ain’t gold” - that there are gaps between American principles and American practices. In itself, this is not a condition particular to black Americans. What is particular to black Americans is the way in which race is directly implicated in their perceptions of the social structure. While the prism of race is able to cast a unique range of black interpretive devices (based in social location and lived experience), it does not automatically lead to full-scale rejection of all facets of the dominant ideology, nor attempts to develop new forms of social relations with the express intent of exposing and overturning the fallacies of reigning assumptions. O’Connor (1997) asserts that these penetrations are only partial. Further, “because their penetrations are only partial, these same resisters willingly accommodate other aspects of the dominant discourse and become active participants in their own subordination” (O’Connor 601).

The frames of colorblind racism represent a major cultural resource that black adolescents are likely to resist, but as likely to incorporate at least in part. If we accept that colorblind racism exists and functions as stipulated (e.g. that the ways in which we articulate racial knowledge tend toward minimizing the significance of race and racism), then it seems plausible that black youth may become more deeply implicated in their own subordination over time. It is also possible that black youth may incorporate colorblind assumptions into their interpretations of racial stratification in counter-hegemonic ways.

The literature review above has demonstrated the analytical power of a dialogic approach to highlight the interplay of structure and agency through a focus on the discursive elements of natural and interview-based talk. The developing conceptual apparatuses around culture have allowed for recognition of the diverse cultural materials black youth utilize to interpret group position and have encouraged more nuance in linking broader racial discourses to local experiences in order to understand what is produced when they collide. By extending current uses of the frame concept in studies of racial ideology, I contend that we can develop a more precise means of identifying the self-relevant racial topics, meanings, and themes which provide the assumptive grounds for articulations of racial stratification in a particular locale.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

The Qualitative Paradigm

This research project is guided by the epistemological presuppositions formulated in “the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse” (hereafter, SKAD; Keller 2006). In this approach, the author weds Foucault’s insistence on “analyzing discourses as ‘practices of power/knowledge’” to “a more sociological conception of actors and practices in discourse theory and research” (1). The standard-bearer for this “more sociological conception” is to be found in the constructionist tradition that comes out of Berger and Luckmann’s seminal treatise on the sociology of the knowledge (1966). Keller underscores how Berger and Luckmann deliver a comprehensive theory of the construction of knowledge, wherein “actors’ minds constitute the world not as transcendental subjects, but by using the knowledge devices at hand or, if routine interaction and interpretation is disturbed, by ‘creating’ new ones in extended processes of social interaction” (6).

Keller argues for a return to Berger and Luckmann’s emphasis upon the social processes of knowledge production. That is analysts who have taken up Berger and Luckmann’s mandate to gear sociological studies toward understanding how “all human ‘knowledge’ is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations... in such a way that a taken-for-granted ‘reality’ congeals for the man in the street” (Berger and

Luckmann 3), have taken a sharp turn toward studies that are micro-oriented, linguistics-centered, and dedicated to revealing “actors' interpretations of their everyday activities” (Keller 7); Berger and Luckmann’s initial call would have exacted at least as much attention toward the core concepts in their theory of knowledge production – habituation, typification, objectivation, signification, institutionalization and legitimation. Accepting these multilevel social processes as the basis of social reality, it is a small step to recognize the synchronicity of this notion and Foucault’s depiction of society as constituted by discourses, practices “that define[s] and produce[s] the objects of our knowledge” (Hall 1997). Both are decidedly centered on a macro-sociological understanding of social knowledge.

Given my reliance on Keller’s delineation of SKAD, the phenomenological and ethnomethodological underpinnings of this study should be clear. However, to underscore the divergence from these assumptions introduced by the synthesis of Foucaultian insights, I will re-iterate those assumptions, and then introduce the Foucaultian conceptualizations that move this study beyond earlier meditations on the centrality of subjectivity in explaining social life.

As summarized in Gubrium and Holstein (1998), the ethnomethodological tradition credited to Alfred Schutz grew out of an attempt to apply Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology to social life. The phenomenological approach centers subjectivity - the assumption that social objects do not have an independent existence beyond the meaning attributed to them by social actors engaging those objects - and intersubjectivity - the related assumption that social actors operate with the assumption

that fellow social actors engage social objects with roughly the same set of meanings. The researcher is primarily concerned with understanding the moment-to-moment interactions, including language use, which allow an intelligible social order to emerge. The key presupposition is that social order is not something “out there” that magically exists and enables the existence of social life. Rather, human beings create society through ongoing interpretive practices.

These practices, however, are made possible through the existence of what is variously referred to as the “common stock of knowledge” or “historical a priori” (Berger and Luckmann 1967), “knowledge devices” (Keller 2006), and “discourse structures” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998). Generally, these are institutionally embedded forms of knowledge, “commonsense constructs and categories”(Gubrium and Holstein 1998), with socio-historical origins. They are repositories of knowledge that emerge from the aforementioned multilevel processes re-articulated in Berger and Luckmann’s theory of the social construction of knowledge, in which objectified human knowledge - typifications of common routine events and related meanings - are stored. Schutz proposed that through bracketing, or withholding any assumptions regarding how the social world works, researchers could glance the interpretive practices people use to create social order. That is, rather than trying to proffer causal explanations of social behavior – an epistemological non sequitur – researchers should document the interpretive practices, the play between subjective and intersubjective realities, that culminate in what people see as a coherent and sensible experience of social life.

This is where the foci proposed by Foucault and sought by Keller create a divergence in epistemological grounding. The centrality of subjectivity to the ethnomethodological enterprise carries with it an equivalent primacy of context. That is, the goal of capturing the actors' interpretive practice turns on the contextual nature of meaning; meaning is literally made in interaction. And interaction constitutes the context by which interaction and other social objects, can take on meaning. The reflexive nature of meaning, a hallmark of intersubjectivity, privileges the interaction as the medium of meaning-making over and above the stores of knowledge which are essential to the ethnomethodological project. While this avoids reifying social objects, glossing over the contents of these stores of knowledge paints them as so ephemeral, it becomes difficult to make sense of any continuities in social interaction.

Extending this briefly to the discussion of method, the qualitative interview becomes a site of interaction, and the "pure" ethnomethodologist would rightfully be preoccupied with how a taken-for-granted sense of social order emerges within that context. This is not to say that the approach taken in this study neglects context, but given my focus on the nature of broader forms of social knowledge and how they are brought to bare on the interpretive practices of a particular discursive community (here, the black adolescents who comprise my interviewee pool), the accomplishment of symbolic order specific to the interview context is not an adequate focus of inquiry. Following Keller, I see the integration of Foucaultian discourse theoretical insights through SKAD as a worthwhile and necessary move, not because a focus on interactional context is unwarranted, but because the ethnomethodological approach on its own fails in some

measure to meet the promise of multilevel analysis implicit in Berger and Luckmann's contribution to the social constructionist project.

Foucault's notion of discourse is characterized as denoting "rules regulating what can be said" (Hall). This begins with the postulation of the *episteme* and moves to the conceptualization of the discursive formation (Foucault 1982). All suggest the value of identifying rules, which must begin with a look toward language (but need not take the micro-oriented path of the conversation analyst, or again, follow the interactional context obsession of the ethnomethodologist). Still, the basic phenomenological underpinnings maintain and flourish in pursuit of both the interpretive resources and practices through which people navigate the routine.

Discourse theory provides a way of analyzing changes in the stock of knowledge in a way that allows for more nuances in the process. It accomplishes this through the postulation of the *episteme*, which identifies the predominant rules of meaning-making as particular to a specific historical epoch, so as to make those rules all the more visible, *discursive formations*, which point toward multiple discursive realities that may exist in a single *episteme* but function at levels defined by the communities who partake in a particular discourse, and *discourse*, which theorizes the dialectical and reflexive relation of extant and local knowledge inherent in social interaction. That is, racial discourse is characterized by the racial *episteme* (e.g. colorblind ideology) – but local cultures – here, my sample of youth - will enact discursive formations that will definitely appear in the interview context and are likely used in similar contexts.

Assuming the basic dictates of a social constructionist understanding of the creation, circulation, and transformation of knowledge, we are called upon then to continually re-assesses these social processes in attempts to make sense of how individuals make sense of their everyday lives. Foucault's formulation of "discourse as social structure and discursive practice as social practice" (Diaz-Bone et al 2007, 2) provides a dynamic approach to such an inquiry. Keller suggests that while Foucault was unclear in specifying how his theory of discourse might guide methodologic procedure, there is a clear epistemologic direction discernible in Foucault's discussions of discourse and power/knowledge.

In the first instance, there is an over-abiding attention to "emergent problematizations of established regimes" (Keller 9), consistent with Foucault's resistance against the imposition of received historical continuity. That is, as opposed to the view of a smooth unfolding of pre-ordained major events, Foucault depicted history as the succession, gradual or tumultuous, of dominant ideas. Moreover, this succession of ideas – the butting up of new symbolic orders against entrenched symbolic structurings of the world – would arise as ordinary people negotiated problems, great or small, associated with mundane routines of day-to-day life. In other words, to observe and explain material and ideational changes over time, we need not turn our attention to powerful people or mass movements alone, but should look toward those subtle changes in interactional patterns that pose seemingly minute challenges to dominant modes of thought, for it is the reciprocating iteration of such alterations in social interaction and knowledge transformation that constitute social change. Following on Foucault's

postulation of the episteme, the discourse analyst should aim to look across multiple fields of knowledge and/or practice for those emergent problematizations. Just as the episteme acts to impose on all branches of knowledge “the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape” (Foucault 2005, 211), we should expect that individuals in a given epoch, whether dealing with problems of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, health, citizenship status, employment status, or any number of situations where new forms of interaction call for new readings of old concepts (or vice versa), will modify existing discourses through the negotiation of the routine. Finally, we are bound to cull our concepts and interpretations from these observations, as we depend upon these emergent problematizations for clues regarding the nature and direction of social change.

This reading of discourse is reflected in Keller’s proposal that SKAD take discourses as “structured processes of sign/knowledge production and reproduction in society.” [13] This definition is founded upon the phenomenological proposition of subjectivity as rooted in the stock of knowledge – that historical a priori that furnishes actors with ready-made concepts and categories. Discourses then provide a set of rules, in the first instance, by making those concepts and categories available. Not only do discourses, then, provide options in terms of what can be said, they also provide normative structures regarding how things can be said, rules of signification determining how concepts can be meaningfully linked, and, social and material resources for action (Hall, Keller). All of these are provisions, not injunctions. As such, discourses never perform actions, nor do they determine behavior. One goal of the sociology of knowledge

approach to discourse is to discern how members of any given discursive field are lead to choose between these options.

As Keller reminds us,

'Discourse' is not an ontological entity. In the empirical world, we can't collect anything but disparate elements or utterances, occurring at different instances in time and social as well as geographical space. Discourse so far is nothing but a theoretical device for ordering and analyzing data, a necessary hypothetical assumption to start research (8).

And that assumption is the point of departure for this research project.

Qualitative Methods

Given their ontological nature, in our quest to identify discourses/discursive fields/discursive formations such that we may make visible the underlying rules by which they condition thought and action, we are forced to assemble “disparate elements or utterances” as they offer our only clues to the working of discourses. That is, we require data on communicative acts in social interaction or the use of some form of language that reflects the interplay of subjective meaning and intersubjective understanding. Talk is not the only use of language to accomplish intelligible social interaction, but it is the most common and crucial.

A focus on talk leaves open the entirety of the methods falling under the qualitative umbrella. To make sense of my choice of method, I would distinguish between routine and non-routine talk situations. While the pursuit of talk outside of routine interaction is deemed as troublesome for some, I assert that it is just this troublesomeness that makes the qualitative semi-structured interview ideal for the purposes of this research.

As alluded to above, what I am identifying as a “pure” ethnomethodological approach would take the interview situation as a particular site of social interaction and would explicitly seek to explain how the actors in the situation collaboratively create a coherent, intelligible, and dare I say, routine social interaction. That is, it would inquire into the ways in which we mobilize symbolic devices to arrive at a sense of intersubjective equilibrium. However, as this is not the endpoint of the research pursued here (though the emergence of intelligible symbolic ordering is a necessary starting point for any discursive analysis), I am not bound to abide by prohibitions against the collection of talk that occurs in non-routine settings. Arguably, because evidence of discursive change is in many ways most visible when social actors must maneuver the non-routine, or when actors must integrate knowledge borne of dealing with interruptions in expected events and processes, the interview situation represents a golden opportunity to explore knowledge production and transformation, due to the non-routine nature of the interview, and the interpretive challenge of bringing knowledge to bare on the specific issues raised in the interview.

Before moving on to the specific strengths of the semi-structured depth interview, I would first point out some general utilities associated with various qualitative interviewing techniques that are also based in the interpretive constructionist tradition (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 27). Shared meaning, which relies upon intersubjectivity, is a common concern of qualitative researchers of the constructionist persuasions. Such shared knowledge is viewed as a crucial interpretive resource enabling interpretations that actors can and do trust to be intelligible within a particular cultural group or setting.

It is the taken-for-granted nature of these shared knowledges and interpretive practices that captivate the constructionist researcher working from a phenomenological premise. However, because these cultural lenses are taken for granted,

It is difficult for researchers to directly ask about culture. Instead, researchers have to learn about culture by asking about ordinary events and deducing the underlying rules or definitions from these descriptions and pay particular attention to unusual usages of words and to the stories that convey cultural assumptions (29).

Likewise, the use of the qualitative interviewing method in this project is intended to elicit conversations that might reveal the discursive rules at play among a group of young people of a shared social location and organizational setting.

As compared to other forms of qualitative interviewing, the semi-structured depth interview I use in this project has a number of qualifications that recommend its use. Foremost, the semi-structured interview format allows me to take advantage of the non-routine nature of the interview situation. That is, in a non-routine space, it is not problematic to enter with a pre-selected set of topics to discuss. The ability to guide the conversation in ways consistent with a non-routine, yet not wholly foreign speech context simplifies the interviewer's process, while allowing for a degree of comfort on the interview participant's part as well. Some intersubjective agreement as to the propriety of switching topics already exists as part of the interaction.

However, the relatively loose structure of the interviewing format creates the space to pursue follow-up questions that allow the pursuit of the non-routine in the accounts offered by participants, as well as potential inconsistencies that emerge as multiple versions of a single social object are constructed. As described in the conceptual

model, such inconsistencies can signal distinct interpretative repertoires (or frames). Also, the semi-structured format is conducive to eliciting responses that reflect subjective processes (as opposed to generating data that are intended to accurately reflect the external “truth” of some social object). Again, the ability to hold up certain discursive fields, in this case, different areas of racial stratification, but pose follow-ups and probes based on the specific knowledge articulated by each participant, is an indispensable asset in ascertaining how these young people fit available concepts and categories of understanding to the immediate interview context, but also to their selections of episodes, events, and other social objects. Related, the chosen format allows for some level of standardization across interviews; in this case, asking questions that do not elicit elaborate responses or any response at all (e.g. “I don’t know”, assuming adequate comprehension of the question) still provides data on the interpretive resources and practices available to the participant. Finally, the semi-structured format, as opposed to a more open-ended format or routine “naturalistic” talk situation, creates sufficient intersubjective distance such that attempts at bracketing do not appear as disingenuous or otherwise make intelligible social interaction impossible. In short, the semi-structured interviewing format makes it easier to say, “Actually, I don’t know what you mean”, and unthreateningly welcome clarification.

Entering the Field, Sample Criteria, and Recruitment

I began working in the Urban Prep Public School Academy District (UPPSAD) in the summer of 2005, almost four years before official data collection would begin. In the

earliest part of my employ there, as a part-time program coordinator, I continued to do volunteer work at a three traditional public schools in Detroit's district. During those two years, I formed the impression, borne out by data I would later discover, that the populations in Detroit District, compared to that in UPPSAD were far more transitory, had far fewer opportunities to build relationships outside of their pre-existing, i.e. out-of-school, peer groups, and were much more likely to feel and act as if they were not an integral part of the school community. Yet, despite the unique organization within UPPSAD, the familiar cliques still obtained – nerds, jocks, “emo” (or alt), “goth” (more like “dark” among this population), preps, fashionistas, thugs, lone wolves – though with greater permeability of bounds and considerably less cross-group animosity. (In fact, most beefs were over positioning within a given group). Given similarities to other schools in many aspects of student culture (and some notable distinctions that I will elaborate below), and the stability of this population, I leaned toward focusing on the UPPSAD students as potential participants in the study. The students I would eventually interview were entering freshman at Urban Prep High School in 2005, while I was working exclusively with 7th grade students at the district's middle school.

Ultimately I decided to draw my sample from among the students attending Urban Prep HS, the first high school in the fast-growing public school academy district. One of the unique features of this PSAD in relation to its larger competitor district was the use of the advisory system, in which small classes stay with a single advisor or homeroom teacher for multiple years (two to three depending on the grade level), and that advisor delivers at least half of the content instruction to those students. The idea is to develop a

sense of community in the classroom – an ideal that met with some success according to many students. Also according to state law, Urban Prep HS and the entire Urban Prep district, is mandated to accept students statewide on a first-come-first-served basis. Still, most of the students who attend EPHS live within city limits and would have otherwise gone to one of the city district’s beleaguered neighborhood schools.

I could not foresee that three years later, in the fall of 2008, we would be embroiled in so significant a presidential election season. I delayed the data collection period to post-election; win or lose, I believed a less volatile state would provide a more productive interview context. In any case, it seemed more plausible to consider the impact of the election results rather than the ongoing impacts of the election ups and downs. By the dawn of the inauguration, I was a familiar face. Many of my prospective interviewees knew about my project through their siblings with whom I worked at the middle school and visited at the high school. The high school students themselves had been the focus of considerable media attention (which I will elaborate below), and were primed to talk about race.

To make analytic use of the small, interactive, and relatively close-knit learning communities formed by the advisories, my goal was to interview all the students in at least one advisory group. Again, this approach would allow me to consider the impacts of this quasi-primary group (many students referred to the advisories as “family”) relative the individual biographies of the interview participants in the knowledge formation process. That is, I might gain a sense of how experiential knowledge gained within and beyond the school setting was combined to produce race talk during the interviews.

Because the class sizes are small, at sixteen students per advisory, I sought out two advisory groups, similar in individual demographic characteristics (i.e. SES measures) and advisory-related traits (i.e. average duration of EPHS enrollment for individual students, advisor length of employment, advisor time with advisory, major changes in advisory composition, advisor characteristics). There were two advisories, both headed by female African-Americans in their mid-to-late 20's, hired in the same year, and going into their fourth years with their respective advisory groups. Across both advisories, only five students had not been in their current advisory groups all four years; all five of them (2 males in one, 2 females and 1 male in the other) had been in their advisories three years. The two advisories were typical of the advisories in the high school in terms of class composition, and the individual students were very similar to Detroit District's high school seniors.

Having identified the advisory groups I wanted to interview, I set up two informational sessions, one for each advisory. I described the project as focusing on the racial and political views of African American youth entering college, and explained that the criteria for participation was that you had to identify (fully or partially) as Black or African American, and that your racial and/or ethnic identity had to be an important part of how you think about yourself and your life chances. This piece of the sampling criteria may appear to lack rigor, but I would argue that the opportunity for open discussion and both public and private Q&A that followed the informational sessions actually allowed for students to think through what their racial and ethnic identities mean for them, at least in relation to participating in this study. (For example, presenting the inclusion criteria in

this way allowed me to address the concerns of students who maintained multiple racial/ethnic affiliations, who were unsure about the distinctions between race and ethnicity, and who wanted to qualify their “Blackness” with statements like, “I ain’t really with all that marching and stuff”). Moreover, this approach approximates the theoretical sampling procedures suggested for grounded theoretical study designs (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

The self-selection bias built into this approach seems more acceptable than the alternative use of a scale or set of indices that would impose the dimensions and depth of racial identification. Further, I did wish to eliminate youth who either didn’t identify as Black or African American, or did not view race and ethnicity as relevant aspects of self. Because students did not have to publicly state if they would participate (but would only need to turn in their informed consent/assent forms anonymously to a box kept in their advisory), I have no reason to suspect that social desirability might have prompted someone who did not meet the criteria to participate. For reasons discussed earlier on, this exploration bears on the knowledge formation and articulation processes of those self-identified Black youth who feel that their life chances are somehow shaped by the fact of race and the potential of racism. There is no a priori assumption that all low-income, ostensibly Black, urban-based youth must identify as Black or African American, or invest any sense of self in their racial/ethnic identities. Similarly, there is no assumption that youth who do not so identify or acknowledge the significance of race engage in ideological processes and speak about race in ways that are necessarily distinct from youth who do self-identify as Black and believe race is significant. The goal of this

work is not to compare ideological processes within this demographic across groups who differentially identify as Black or African American on the basis of some pre-defined parameters. The aim is to systematize the talk of self-identifying Black Americans who claim that race is significant to them to explore how they approach navigating a post-racial world. Such an exploration is a necessary methodological and theoretical step toward more deliberate comparative analyses.

Of the thirty-two potential interviewees, two (females) were not able to get permission, two (one male and one female) were not interested or did not feel like they could make time to be interviewed, and four (three males and one female) asserted that they were too ignorant of the issues to take part. The latter four were willing to participate after hearing about the interviews from their friends who had been interviewed, but it was too late in the data collection process to complete interviews with them by that point. The students who did not participate were very similar in terms of class and advisory-related characteristics. Given the theory underlying the methods of data collection and analysis employed, there is little concern that the resulting twenty-four interviews were at all deficient for the task at hand.

Given the premise that the interview can and should be treated as a species of social interaction where talk is produced, and that this talk should not be viewed as “unnatural” in any sense, I recognized that I would clearly be part of the social interaction that would produce the data I planned to analyze. Questions of my potential impacts on the interaction, the observations made of that interaction, and the limits to how I could interpret what had been observed inevitably arose (and I address them more fully in the

section on data analysis). Furthermore, my potential insider/outsider statuses posed another complication. While there are many more traits that create feelings of rapport between any two people, my ascribed traits and appearance, led me to safely assume that in some respects I could assume the role of insider in this research (Lofland et al 2005). I considered how my insider status might both positively and negatively impact the interview situation, and therefore affect the quality of my data and the robustness of my analysis and findings.

My insider status was presumably more easily assumed and established among the male interview participants, given my race and gender. I expected that this would serve to create a level of comfort that would encourage the young men to share honestly and openly. What they said to me was likely to mirror what they would say to others they are comfortable with, which is especially important, as the interview format would allow for regular elaboration. One danger associated with this race-by-gender-based insider status, perhaps intensified by my age (despite my youthful appearance), might have been the tendency for the young men to overstate certain things in attempt to impress upon me their maturity, to display that their level of understanding may have matched or surpassed my own - and so overstate things again, or understate them, assuming that I would understand, or simply fail to be expressive, assuming that I could not understand, lacked real interest in what they had to say, or simply expected to be told what I wanted to hear.

Ultimately, I could only safeguard against these things, and be prepared to limit my analysis in light of these challenges. Because all of the interviews did go well, I am lead to believe that any effect I may have had on the young men would lean toward

disclosure of many things they seldom had the opportunity to articulate, as well as emphasizing and underscoring aspects of their experiences and understandings that they felt most comfortable with and wished to share most emphatically. In either case, given the goals of this analysis, and the rationale for selecting the semi-structured qualitative interviewing method, both potential affects would actually enrich the data and enhance the value of the findings. Again, as the analysis turns on reconstructing the starting points of people's knowledges, as a means of gaining some purchase into how the outer limits of one's social perceptions are bound, even hyperbolic statements that suggest highly implausible assumptions reveal a great deal about social cognition and potential, if unlikely, courses of action.

My assumption of insider status with the female interview participants was made on slightly shakier grounds, but I had little reason to believe my age or gender would affect the data in a way that would inhibit its appropriateness for the proposed analysis. Given gender norms and dynamics, my maleness, if not creating for the most comfortable interviewing situation, at the least might have made for an overwhelmingly familiar normative situation. Inasmuch as the male body often intersects with an authoritative role (in this case as an elder and a researcher), the interview situation should not pose any sense of divergence from normative interactions of the like. That is, while my maleness might prevent certain statements, I was also very likely to elicit responses that might be made to any older black male that the young women felt comfortable with. As it turns out, the intersection of my age and gender may have prompted comments on cross-gender relations within their age-group that might not have been available to someone much

older, or younger (appearing). Again, all signs indicate that a good rapport was established with all the female interviewees, and if anything, they were willing to go into great depth to put across knowledge they held firmly, as well as to openly ponder understandings they had not had the opportunity to in the past.

With both male and female participants, I consciously balanced both emic and etic perspectives in the interview situation. That is, I would alternate between taking on the point of the view of the respondent, empathizing as best I could, and signaling this with verbal cues (e.g., “right”, “ I got you”, “uh-huh”) and physical gestures (head nods, smiles); and distancing myself from the participant’s point of view, typically by feigning confusion (though at times the confusion was quite authentic). The first strategy was intended to encourage further elaboration by supporting what had already been said. The latter strategy likewise encouraged elaboration by establishing that I misunderstood and needed clarity, or in some cases that I disagreed or found the participant’s statements to be inconsistent in some way. In this way, I intended to have the participants stake out their own grounds when possible, but also to share those grounds with them on occasion, to discourage any temptation to say what they may have assumed I wanted to hear. By fostering a sense of mutual symbolic realism in the interview context (Bellah 1970), I tried to emphasize the legitimacy of their words as well as mine through highlighting that words spoken from either side were neither “right” nor “wrong”.

An essential part of respecting the legitimacy of their worldviews is to adequately consider the ideological contexts in which their ideas were formed. Below, I briefly discuss the socio-political backdrop in which the EPPSAD was formed with an eye

toward exploring how the political and structural conflicts underlying the district's creation establish symbolic boundaries around how these youth locate themselves vis-à-vis national and local discourses on education.

Caught in the Middle: Redefining Education in the Post-Industrial Era

The state takeover of the Detroit Public Schools occurred in 2000, when my research participants were entering 3rd and 4th grade. This was perhaps the most critical event surrounding their educational careers, despite the fact most of them, understandably, have very little recollection of the events leading up to it. However, the political battles ensuing after the takeover continue to shape the local educational context and determine Detroit's place in a national and international discourse on public education.

The takeover, which proponents argued was initiated “by desperation over the district's poor academic performance, falling enrollment and dire graduation rate – then estimated at just 30 percent” (Mackinac Center for Public Policy 2005), replaced the locally elected school board with a mayorally-appointed board. Opponents provided evidence that the graduation rates were actually improving, that the district had managed to decrease its deficit in the years leading up to the controversial legislative proposal, and that the proposed takeover was little more than a ploy to pave the road for the creation of more charter schools in the city and statewide. While legislators tried to focus the debate on issues concerning student outcomes and the most effective means of administering the system to improve academic performance, the elephant in the room remained: an ongoing

ideological debate over “school choice”, school governance structures, teachers’ unions, and student assessment. Detroiters’ rights to elect their own school board became the political football between proponents of public education reform and supporters of “school choice” initiatives.

The racial overtones of this debate were not lost on observers. The effective disenfranchisement of Detroit’s electorate re-ignited racialized conflicts around regionalism, the city-suburb split, potential efforts to gentrify the city, and a perceived neo-liberal shift to privatize more and more services that had been provided by local and state authorities. The takeover was read as another instance of state (white) paternalism, a denigration of a black city’s ability to run its own business, and an attempt to allow outside interlopers (in the form of charter school authorizers and management companies) to steal public resources, building fortunes on the backs of the city’s majority black and poor youth.

Charter schools are controversial because even though they receive the same amount of state aid in per pupil funding, they are free of many of the administrative and pedagogical constraints faced by other state-dependent schools. This allowance for innovation is touted by charter school supporters as a means of cutting administrative bloat, while recognizing that schools need to be responsive to students who face unique educational challenges – that is, charter schools are free to experiment with ways of educating poor black urban students. Again, the antagonistic racial overtones are immediate. Some celebrate this openness to innovation because it allows deviation from a centralized, one-size fits all approach to education. Others see this as an implicit

endorsement of notions that black youth are by default incapable of being educated through traditional means. Still others welcome innovation, but do not see a transition from public schools to charter schools as a necessary way to encourage such advances.

Whether they agree that the public education in general has become mired in administrative red tape to be effective or that charter schools represent the most viable alternative to a system that is top-heavy and pedagogically unable to meet the unique needs of a 21st century globalized economy, EPPSAD families have voted with their feet. In so doing, they have come to recognize the district's place in a larger narrative about the role of education and the means by which an adequate educational experience should be delivered.

Filling the Void: Urban Preparatory Public School Academy District and the "Urban Poor"

"To prove that urban children can succeed in college through personalized learning and relentless commitment to their success." This mission statement adorns the handmade banners, stationary, business cards, and web destinations across the Urban Preparatory Public School Academy District. And the students planning to become just the third high school graduating class in the young district's history were proud to be that proof. Whether through a cold calculus of how to navigate the American status hierarchy, a firm belief in the liberatory potential of education, or a combination of both, the students of EPHS were committed to the notion that education was the only real alternative to a life of dead end jobs, subpar housing and city services, crime-ridden "hoods" that lack neighbors, and hopeless communities. They would indeed escape, but

like Robin Hood, would return with the riches of knowledge and civilization and resurrect their once great city. Unlike many before them, they would not forsake the future; they would not forget where they came from.

This was the tenor of the school culture that officials at Urban Prep tried to instill. At the very least, the belief that education represented the *only* way up, if not out, tethered students to the school community, to their academic work, and most notably to a sense of hope that in many cases outstripped their academic output. Still, EPHS students clung to this exceptionalism, to their novelty, and were well aware of the high expectations that had been placed upon them by the EPHS staff, their families, and the city.

This is not the place to take up the tensions between the district's public façade and its internal workings, but the location of EPHS within a broader national discourse on urban education, the "urban poor" in post-racial America, and the discourse on the changing role of education in shaping the character of American stratification provide a socio-historic backdrop necessary to pursuing answers to the questions animating this study. In their own ways, students' reflections on these phenomena are intricately connected to how they talk about race.

The advisory-based organization of EPHS combined with the embrace of the district's mission certainly do distinguish EPHS and its students from their Detroit District counterparts in palpable ways. Still, the trends in educational policy and organization in and around Detroit suggest that these students are forerunners in what will become the new normal of urban education. Interesting, but beyond the scope of the

current study is the impact of these reforms on the further splintering of an already fragmented community. However, it is enough for our purposes to reflect upon the divergences present among those who are part of this early wave of educational change.

Given Detroit's current status as the exemplar of the failings of a post-industrial capitalist order, and the historical significance of urban centers in the story of Black American life more generally, it was important that this sample reflect the breadth of experiences constituting the lives of the "urban poor". This sample mirrors the geographic and economic features of the city as a whole. Definitions of "the urban poor" vary and some will disagree with its definition in this study (discussed in the data collection section below). While no assumptions are made about the impact of impoverished urban life on the cultural resources and interpretative practices of the youth in this study, this sample will allow for the investigation of claims regarding class differences in racial ideology (via a critique of studies asserting the unique qualities of worldviews among the urban poor), and a less pursued agenda to document differences in racial worldviews within the heterogeneous group classified as the urban poor.

Despite variations in conceptualization, measurement, and definition (Wilson & Aponte 1985), the term "urban poor" can be used to adequately describe this sample of youth, even as a goal of this analysis is to subject the term to further scrutiny. That is, we must be attentive to the variations in ways urban poverty is experienced. The designation of this sample as reflecting some segment of the urban poor follows from the basic parameters outlined in the census bureau 2010 release on poverty.

Due to privacy restrictions, I was unable to obtain students' household incomes from official school records. And I did not wish to rely upon the youths' estimates of the incomes of their household incomes. However, data on school-wide Title I funding (which acts a rough estimate of household income) and parental occupation and household size (which could be cross-referenced with students' reports) was available through the school records. Combined with census data on average income by occupation and neighborhood household income, I was able to narrow the pool of interview candidates such that the resulting sample would fall within acceptable parameters for "urban poverty".

A final concern in constructing this sample was to limit the extent of divergence in the articulation of racial knowledge that may have been due to large differences in life experience. At first blush, this may seem counter-intuitive in view of this study's primary objective of revealing the assumptions that underlie the ways in which the young, Black, urban poor talk about racial stratification. Equally important is the ability to consider the variety of ways these assumptions can be articulated and combined within an ostensibly "similar" population. That is, we are concerned with what the cultural logics employed among this sample tells us about the complex blending and pervasive nature of contradictory assumptions as a characteristic of racial ideological development in the US. How robust an observation this is may be better tested by considering ideological processes among a group that shares many social characteristics and experiences. Findings of considerable distinctions in cultural logics among such a group would surely warrant similar studies on groups that share less in common, and yet are often seen as

relatively homogeneous in the literature (e.g. undifferentiated “low-income” blacks or “middle class” blacks). This is an especially significant consideration in the study of race and youth where there is a tendency to over-aggregate data in ways that obscure the nuances of lived-experience. For this reason, it was considered a strength to seek a sample that might share fundamental experiences, thereby illuminating the limits of individual biography in shaping interpretations of shared cultural events, spaces, and interactions.

The creation of the interview pool was guided by the goal of yielding a vast universe of cultural resources and interpretative practices utilized by a sample of low-income, Black, urban youth. The sampling procedure employed strove to balance substantive interest in the content and meanings of racial knowledge among such youth, theoretical interest in the experience of urban poverty, and an interest in the added value of a particular discourse analytic approach to not only make sense of racial ideology among these youth, but to enable a basis for future cross-group comparisons. The group of young people who ultimately shared their stories provided just these kinds of insights into the broader cultural themes they tap in order to construct versions of racial inequality in the contemporary US.

Data Collection

Though the individual interview participants comprise the units of observation in this study, the sum body of text created from their interviews grants access to the frames used to discuss racial stratification – the proper unit of analysis. As Keller explains, “answers to the questions of whether concrete phenomena of language do account for a

particular discourse, and by what elements or “rules” and strategies the discourse is constituted, cannot be found a priori, but only in the process of analysis” (22). In this instance, I am concerned with concrete instances of language use in interaction – interview talk – as a means of revealing the interpretive devices and practices that constitute a discourse around racial stratification. In addition to this issue of symbolic ordering, I am also concerned with assessing the materialities involved in this discursive formation through the consideration of educational trajectory as denoting a subject position. That is, taking educational trajectory or post high school plans as a measure of institutional incorporation, I aim to consider how this aspect of social location influences the ways in which views of racial stratification take shape among this sample of black mid-adolescents.

The Interviews

I developed a semi-structured depth-interviewing protocol following the responsive interviewing model (Rubin and Rubin 2005). The full data collection instrument included the demographic sheet, a short survey, and an interviewer observation sheet that was on hand for me to complete as soon as the interview had ended (see Appendix). The survey, which I administered face-to-face prior to beginning the interview portion of the data collection, provided the raw data to construct the class measures and educational trajectory constructs. All students had post-secondary plans, but not all of them had learned of the outcomes of their various application activities at the time of the interview. In all such cases, follow-up contacts with the participant’s teacher confirmed the initial post-secondary plans; a listing of those plans can be found in

the appendix, sorted into the categories High Student Educational Trajectory (HI-SET youth) and Lower SET Educational Trajectory (LO-SET youth).

The geographic distribution of the 24 interview participants (12 females and 12 males) is displayed below (figure 1). Seven females and five males live in neighborhoods in the lowest two quintiles for household income, placing them in households that are at least \$4000 below the poverty line. This is consistent with data on the occupations, average income for occupations and household size collected from school records and verified by students. Table 2 (see appendix) lists the occupation of each head of household and contributing household member and local average incomes for both. The final column indicates if the student is eligible for Title I, a federally funded health and nutrition program, which subsidizes the cost of school lunch for students in families who fall below a poverty threshold.

Figure 1. Map of Detroit with neighborhoods shaded by average HH income

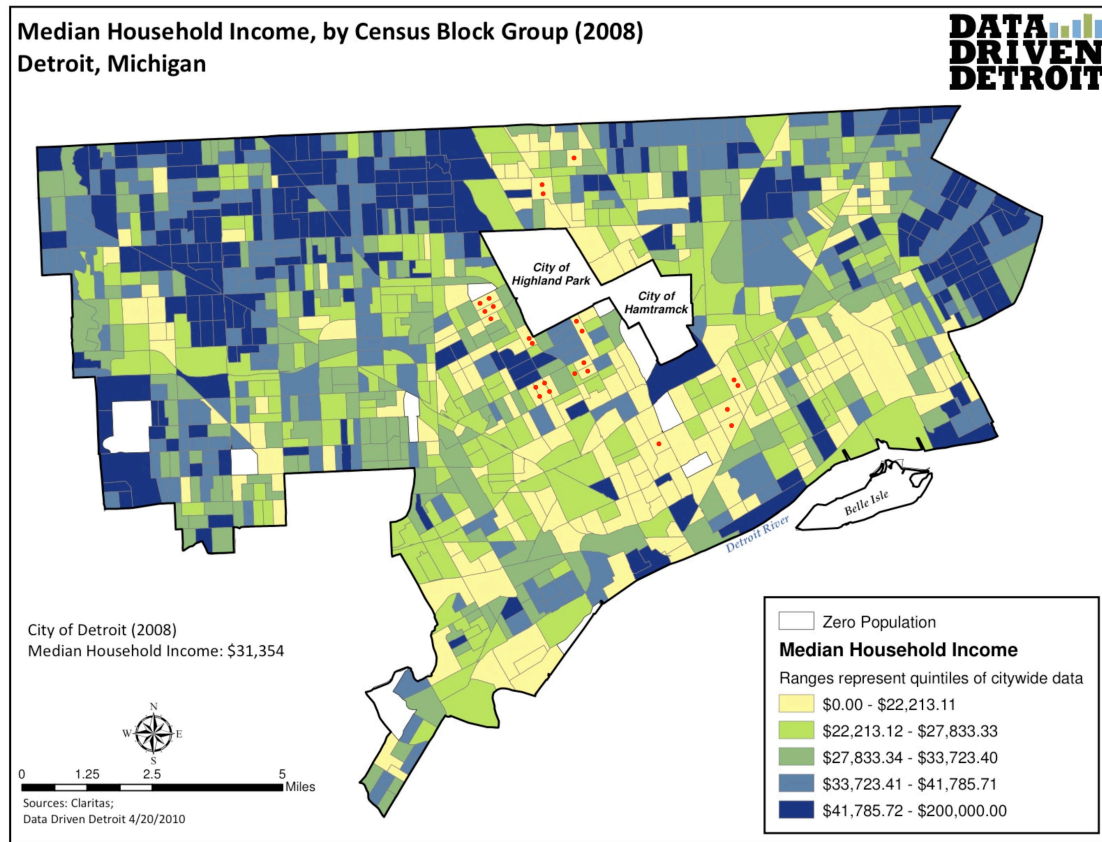


Table 2. Head of HH and Contributing HH Member Occupation, Average Income by Occupation, HH Size, and Title I Eligibility

The interview protocol itself conformed to the funnel structure (Oppenheim 2000) and was consistent with the recommendations of the responsive interviewing model, which “emphasizes that the interviewer and the interviewee are both human beings, not recording machines, and that they form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer” (Rubin and Rubin 31). On the relational aspect of the interview situation, the authors emphasize that while the interviewer sets the general direction for the interview, the conversational partner must be allowed to carve out more specific paths. They continue:

Initial questions are expressed in a broad way to give the interviewees the opportunity to answer from their own experiences. The interviewees' answers then suggest to the researcher what to pursue and what to ignore. The low-key and open-ended way in which interviewing is conducted encourages the conversational partners to suggest topics, concerns, and meanings that are important to them. During the extended conversations, the interviewer and conversational partner develop common understandings that differ from person to person. Responsive interviewers recognize that each conversational partner has a distinct set of experiences, a different construction of the meaning of those experiences, and different areas of expertise. As such, researchers create new questions for each interviewee *because they need to tap this distinctive knowledge* (34-35, emphasis added).

Therefore, I designed the interview guide to focus upon a set number and variety of topics, but I vary open-ended and narrower questions in order to allow the participant's knowledge to frame and constitute the experience to the greatest extent possible. I also include questions (and follow-ups) intended to elicit stories from the participant, which has the advantage of directing the participant to select biographical pieces that seem best suited to her interpretation of the topic and question at hand.

As addressed in the literature review, much stratification research has tended to proceed from the analyst's imposition of the dimensions of inequality that should be measured (Song 2003). My approach intentionally avoids the imposition of these dimensions by directly and indirectly assessing how youth constitute the socially desirable or valued social goods, the distribution of those goods along racial lines, their explanations of those distributions, and the strategies that might allow one to navigate a racially stratified social landscape. In addition to open-ended questions that speak directly to those concerns, I draw upon the vast literature on stratification beliefs and ideological responses to racial inequality to design questions that might elicit indirect information on

those same major topics. (See the appendix for a table displaying the origins of those topics and the questions proposed to gather data on each).

I made periodic visits, roughly one per week, to each of the advisories to retrieve returned consent/assent forms. The forms included student and parent contact information. In all cases, I was able to contact students via cell phone. All of the interviews were carried out on the school grounds after school hours. Each interview began with the survey, and at its completion I requested permission to begin recording the conversation. (There were no denials; students and parents of students under 18 years of age had signed and returned a separate consent to be recorded, see Appendix). At the end of each interview, the participants received their incentive gift cards and were given an opportunity to ask questions about the research. Most of them did ask questions, expressed appreciation for having been able to speak about these issues, as many of them admitted both during and after the interviews that they did not get to share ideas on these topics often enough; many volunteered that they felt like they had learned something from the experience.

Data Analysis

All of the digital audio recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were then loaded into Atlas.ti 5.0, an industry standard qualitative data analysis software package. The aggregated one-time interviews totaled over 1400 minutes of recorded talk, averaging roughly 59 minutes apiece, and yielded over 800 pages of transcribed text.

An extensive amount of time was taken in an initial review of the transcripts to incorporate notes I had taken during the interviews on observations including facial

gestures, body language, tone of voice, comprehension of interview items, and other cues that could be combined with the transcribed text to increase the interpretability of the interview data. A second pass of the interviews was made to ensure that the incorporated notes produced a version of the interview experience that best comported with my recollection of the general tenor of each conversation. A third pass of the annotated transcripts followed, in which I added summary notes regarding each interview. In the fourth and final pass, I began coding. The coding procedures follow closely the suggestions laid out by Talja (1999), and combine elements of the grounded theory approach to discourse analysis intimated by Keller (2006).

This study applies a discourse analytic technique that takes the interpretative repertoire as the basic unit of analysis (Talja 466). As discussed in the conceptual model, Talja's conception of interpretative repertoire can be used interchangeably with the modified notion of Bonilla-Silva's frames. That is, the goal of inquiry is not hermeneutical (to understand the subject's interpretative process given his or her understanding of broader cultural themes) or phenomenological (to explain how subjective meaning is constituted through and by lived experience); the individual's sense-making and narrative construction is not the endpoint. For this reason, I follow Talja in utilizing a conception of frames that destabilizes the reliance on common concepts, objects and styles of speech, and narrative structures as indicative of discourses. Rather, re-asserting Foucault's formulation, discourses *determine* the selection of objects, the meaning of concepts, the styles of speech, and forms of narrative, on the basis of the starting points or basic assumptions conceptualized here as

interpretative repertoires. Frames are the starting points or basic assumptions that create a limited viewpoint through which objects are deemed relevant, meaning develops, terms are related, and articulations are made (Talja 467). Given the multiplicity of meanings that can be associated with any object and the context-dependence of those associations, discourse analysts interested in the generation, circulation, and transformation of knowledge are best served by being attentive to the basic assumptions that link concepts, circumscribe meaning, and create the conditions for emergent interpretations of social phenomena.

In the method introduced by Talja, the author describes three phases of interview text analysis (467). It begins with the careful examination of the interview text of one participant, in which the analyst looks for and records seemingly contradictory or inconsistent responses. In cases where an interviewee does not attempt to resolve an inconsistency (whether brought to their attention or if they notice it themselves), this is taken as an indication that distinct interpretative repertoires are likely at play. That is, multiple, mutually contradictory repertoires can be operative in the construction of an object. This is possible because of the nature of discourses as systems of dispersions – as groupings of disparate and competing assumptions that can be used to develop versions of a given object (Foucault). Individuals are able to construct multiple versions of the topic under question. Moreover, each version can be built upon mutually contradictory assumptions depending upon the angle from which the object is being approached. Being attentive to internal inconsistencies and contradictory accounts across the sample aides in illuminating the building blocks of these various versions.

Next, the analyst identifies regularly occurring patterns across all of the accounts offered by the participants. Such regularities might include use of common terms, concepts, themes, or arguments, for example. These regularities point toward interpretive repertoires, but are not the repertoires themselves. Again, this is due to the nature of discourses as systems of dispersion. Within a field, and within language overall, there are only so many intelligible terms, relevant objects, and culturally recognizable concepts. In practice, the same term or concept or description of an object can be used to argue drastically different points, or their usage can be based upon widely divergent basic assumptions. Identifying the repertoires requires an additional step.

Finally, an attempt is made to name the starting point from which an utterance or group of similar utterances may have been articulated. That is, the analyst asks the question, what is a necessary condition for the validity of this utterance, description, argument, etc.? What limitation of perspective would yield these responses? The strength of the evidence for an identified interpretative repertoire lies in the data itself. The links between a response and its basic assumptions are made visible by considering the entire corpus of interview texts, rather than looking for or imposing a one-to-one correspondence between a response and a potential repertoire. Because repertoires are cultural regularities, publicly available forms of knowledge, their operation should be apparent across a number responses and texts. Ultimately, this exploratory study aims to provide an account of the interpretative repertoires that furnish the boundaries and possibilities for the imagining of racial stratification among a group of Black youth enmeshed in urban poverty.

I utilize a modified version of the analytic plan laid out by Talja. I began, as she suggests, with coding one full interview. And as is required in this method, I coded sentence by sentence (though it is permissible to code by passage, creating a larger analytical unit, but one that more closely resembles the participant's fullest meaning; more, the presentation of textual evidence from the interview most commonly appears as full passages). As I moved through sentences or passages, I took notes on various characteristics but concentrated on what each passage was a version of (i.e. what is the featured social object in the passage), and what aspects of the social object in question were most central to its essence. What attempts were made to define, classify, or otherwise characterize? I also noted if the passages narrated first-hand events or secondary sources, which were the key characters or message transmitters, and what kind of emotional response was associated with the account.

Then, still using that first interview text, I grouped all of the passages by the social object – event, process, interaction, concept, or social actor – and began to compare versions. That is, for each social object, a single version may exist, or there may be multiple versions of the same object. This procedure, and a face value check allowed for the identification of inconsistent or contradictory versions of social objects – a clue to the operation of distinct interpretative repertoires. I then repeated this procedure for all interviews.

With all of the interviews coded to the level of versions of social objects, I made a final check within interviews to make sure I had collapsed similar versions and not condensed any versions in a way that might obscure subtle yet significant distinctions.

Once satisfied that I had categorized all of the passages accurately, I began looking across interviews, noting redundant codes and the actual passages to which they were connected. In this way, I was able to compile a master list of non-redundant, unique versions of social objects, linked to their original passages. This enabled me to see all of the quoted interview passages associated with a particular version or versions of a social object.

Finally, I combed this master list, using ordinal coding of each object-version pairing to determine the extent to which each pairing was related to each of three pre-defined areas of racial stratification talk: goods identification and distribution, explanations of inequality, and strategic goals to negotiate racial stratification. Due to the interrelatedness of these categories, object-version pairings could often fall into more than one area of racial stratification views, but rarely were they equally pertinent to multiple domains. Keeping in mind the racial stratification domain to which each object version pairing was assigned, I then turned to Talja's step three questions: what does this pairing assume such that this pairing and the utterance that made it visible "make sense"? Pursuing the answer to this query for each of the pairings within the context of the specified racial stratification domain allowed multiple face validity checks on the answers that emerged. Following Talja, those answers were used as labels identifying the interpretative repertoires constituting the ways in which race emerged in my conversations with this sample of youth on social stratification.

Verification

Talja suggests that discursive analyses of interview data do not seek to present “generalizable descriptions of how things are” but instead strive to produce findings that capture “how a phenomenon can be seen or interpreted” (472). The goal of this analysis is to come away with a clearer sense of why a specific sample of black adolescents articulates a particular set of understandings around racial stratification. More, it should be clear that these individual youths should not be thought of as the seat of their racial stratification views (or as transcendental subjects, to borrow from Foucault). Rather, their words must be taken as reflecting an interpretive process whereby trans-historical knowledge devices are brought to bare on local contexts. The interview situation is not taken as an opportunity to give these youth “voice” in the traditional sense. That is, the words they speak are not, and need not be taken as indicative of either the “true” version of the events they recount, or even as revealing the specific meanings they make of certain social objects, events, and/or processes. These kinds of connections between the social actor and reality - the former a naturalist stance, the latter situated within the phenomenological paradigm - are not assumed, and do not provide a basis to assess my observations.

That the frames I identify are present in other texts is attested to by the existing literature that attempts to describe and explain why black youth think and talk about racial stratification as they do. Those knowledge devices that I identify as central to the formation of subsequent views and speech related to racial stratification have a high degree of face validity. That is, they are credible depictions of racial knowledge given what we know about racial ideology in the US, and the ways in which this knowledge is

likely to be enacted in social interaction. What this analysis attempts to add is a means of illustrating the nuance and complexity created by the recombination of these different pieces of knowledge, and an exploration of one aspect of the material basis that may capture how some of these variations in interpretive practice emerge.

Assessments of reliability, notwithstanding the criteria noted above, present a very different problem for the SKAD analyst (as compared to other qualitative researchers). As the reliability test would describe what happens when the methodic steps I take are applied to the same or similar data by another, the reality that my findings truly are my own – they reflect what I find to be the strongest case for identifying interpretive devices and interpreting interpretive practices – is unavoidable. Logically speaking, with or without the benefits accumulation or triangulation, that one individual might use the model of knowledge interpretation presented in my findings is validation enough. The proposed models represent possibilities for the production and interpretation of racial knowledge – possibilities, the impact of which, depend largely on who takes them up, when, and under what socio-political conditions. But again, my intent is to reveal possibilities, no matter their breadth of their emergence across peoples or contexts.

Interestingly, verification issues related to the role of the researcher, while important, must be viewed and dealt with in a way that appreciates the specific assumptions, goals, and processes of discursive analysis. For example, during the data collection phase, my biases only matter to the extent that they are not revealed during the analytic phase. That is, even if the question I pose is biased and in some way sways the response garnered, that response still reflects the application of some cultural form,

knowledge device, or mode of interpretation, to the question I posit. Eventual judgments of the validity of the interpretative repertoires induced from responses elicited in such ways ultimately turn on knowledge of the initial “biased” question. It is not a matter of rigor that the discourse analyst in this tradition utilizes a sentence-by-sentence approach with the interview text. Biases in my questioning would be made visible by the presence of utterances and my interpretations of those utterances that seem out of place in the context of a particular speaker and vis-à-vis the corpus of texts under study. Again, transparency is the main safeguard; it allows for the emergence of complexity in interview data that mirrors the complexity of interpretive endeavors in social reality.

The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse along with the modified discourse analytic method, allows for the heterogeneous, multiplex, and apparently paradoxical by recognizing that the words these young people speak are discursive creations – they are derived from institutionalized, historically unfolding ways of thinking about the social world. Talja explains,

Established ways of conceptualizing and approaching phenomena do not, however, vanish as their validity begins to be questioned. Novel interpretations gradually become established, and alternative discourses exist side by side in the same field of knowledge (468).

Put in the context of my research, even among the presumably homogeneous low-income, black urban youth population, there is the great possibility that myriad forms and expressions of racial knowledge exist; that on what is perceived as a relatively barren field, or at least one where a mono-crop yield can be presumed, there are in fact vast varieties of ideas, many of which betray their hybrid-ideological roots. And while hints of these possibilities are made visible through the use of more blunt analytical instruments -

while working in paradigms given to invidious forms of methodological individualism obscure seeing those possibilities - there is more. My approach to conceptualizing racial knowledge, the data that reveal racial knowledge, and the analytical choices that best explain variations in the articulation of this knowledge provides a means of re-thinking what we know about racial ideology and explaining its apparent paradoxes in ways that shed light on more general understandings of the pace and nature of social change. I hold, the extent to which this approach renders a depiction that compliments, yet unravels the paradoxes in our understandings of racial knowledge production and transformation, suggests the best measure of its scientific value.

Plan for Presentation of Findings

My presentation of these findings aims to accomplish a few interrelated tasks. First and foremost, I provide the words of my interview participants to support my assertions that the frames I name do exist and conform to the structure I describe. I go on to link their emergence to the sample's differential educational trajectories and the implications of these educational trajectories for the interpretive materials they use to construct versions of aspects of racial stratification. Again, this distinction is used to locate the interview participants and to allow a deeper consideration of structural location for how low-income, black urban youth talk about racial stratification. No claims are made regarding structural location as a causal factor.

Further, given my epistemological entry point and goals of analysis, I cannot take the participants' descriptions of various events as "true", but will take account of certain

features of those descriptions that point toward structural variables of significance. For example, in a description that features peer interracial contact, analytical interest lies with the choice of that particular account qua knowledge resource/device to create a comprehensible answer. The account matters to the extent that others also believe tales of peer interracial contact provide an adequate set of symbol-meaning pairings to say something that “makes sense”. Still, several appearances of similar accounts among this sample and across others might provide reason for future studies to focus more closely on peer interracial contacts as bearing some structural-causal relation to particular modes of talk.

Connections between talk and structural location are then integrated with explanations that interpret the influence of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic knowledge resources and local/experiential knowledges. By illuminating the tenuous cultural logics that underlie the ways in which we speak about complex social issues, these findings confirm much of what we take for granted concerning ideological beliefs and the discursive formation of knowledge. This general knowledge finds support in my analysis of the ways in which low-income, urban-based black adolescents think and talk about racial stratification. That is, while the literature abounds with claims of the paradoxes of black political thought in general, and the specific complications that attend racial ideological thought for young people coming of age in an era of colorblindness, my analysis attempts to add some substance to these claims, while illuminating the processes by which black youth engage and modify race-knowledge.

In general, while there are variations across the educational trajectory-based sub-

groups in terms of the repertoires backing how these youth discuss racial stratification, the differences are slight. Of much greater import is the subtle and nuanced ways in which their discourses differ. We should not expect to find drastic differences across these sub-groups (especially given the similarity across groups in terms of race, age, geography, and class). As Talja reminds us,

There are simultaneously several more-or-less conflicting discourses existing in a particular field of knowledge or a particular institution at a certain point in time, because novel or alternative interpretations emerge as corrections to prior discourses. These earlier discourses appear in some respects erroneous or one sided. *Changes in social experiences and possibilities slowly render historically strong discourses less valid and accurate.* These discourses seem to misinterpret some of the essential features or the “true nature” of the discussed phenomenon. Established ways of conceptualizing and approaching phenomena do not, however, vanish as their validity begins to be questioned. *Novel interpretations gradually become established, and alternative discourses exist side by side in the same field of knowledge* (emphasis mine, 1999:468).

Of greater consequence is that despite the structural similarities within and between these sub-groups, the knowledge resources and devices these youth employ differ enough to help explain the ideological richness and complexity that increasingly has come to characterize black racial thought.

CHAPTER 4

What's Really Good: What Blacks Lack and Why it Matters

In this first of three empirical chapters, I identify the framing beliefs that my interview sample used to construct understandings of racial oppression and I consider the extent to which these framing beliefs are influenced by the frames of colorblind racism as presented by Bonilla-Silva (2003). A distinct framing belief is operative within each of the student educational trajectory sub-samples.

The HI-SET youth construct understandings of racial oppression around a notion of *unfair barriers to economic parity*. That is, much of their talk regarding black-white group distinctions, the relative positions of blacks vis-à-vis other racial groups, and the dimensions along which palpable experiences of racial oppression align center issues related to occupational prestige, labor market participation, the denial of blacks' historical contributions to the nation's wealth and status, and attempts by whites – individually and collectively – out of fear of displacement and/or beliefs in black lack of motivation, to lock blacks out of economic competition. Negative stereotypes and stigma appear as secondary concerns; HI-SET youth perceive the widespread and easy acceptance of negative stereotypes of blacks as an indication that whites and others do not recognize black youths' commitments to education, hard work, and social climbing.

Conversely, LO-SET youths' construction of racial oppression relies upon the framing belief *assumed inferiority*. Issues of stigma and negative stereotyping predominated in the ways they discussed racial group distinctions and relative positioning in American society. The main features of racial oppression for these youth were the seeming onslaught of negative imagery and the unceasing questioning of the moral character of all blacks – regardless of class background or aspiration. LO-SET youth also perceived economic issues less in terms of parity with whites than as barriers to full social and cultural inclusion. That is, beyond focusing on barriers to fair competition, they highlighted constraints on where they could live and go for entertainment, and on the quality of goods and services available to them for consumption.

Racial Oppression in the Minds of HI-SET Youth

For the Love of Money: Race and Class in Constructions of Racial Oppression

It's racism. There is economy, class. So you say, for instance, you know, the rich help the rich get richer and everybody else just pay taxes. Far as the U.S. goes, it's not really about race. It's a big part of it because we are a large amount of middle-class people, but the U.S. is more so about money. They have their -- people have their own opinions about racism, but it's like well whoever has the most money that's who I'm rolling with.

The above passage is characteristic of the deep contradictions riddling HI-SET youths' attempts to discuss the intersection of race and class as systems of stratification that shape American society. I had asked the speaker to explain why she believed the US to be fundamentally unfair and racist. As seen, she very clearly states that there is racism; almost in the same breath she declares that “it's not really about race...the US is more so about money”. Finally, she concludes, somewhat decisively, “people have their own

opinions about racism, but... whoever has the most money, that's who I'm [most people are] rolling with”.

We might draw from these statements that the respondent believes that both race and class matter, that class matters more than race, that race does not matter at all, or that race only serves to create meaningful divisions within class groupings. Each of these conclusions, I suggest, would reveal a partially valid reading of the speaker's “truth”; also, taken separately, each would misrepresent the cultural logics underlying her response. Instead, I assert that by analyzing these words with the goal of identifying the underlying framing beliefs guiding their articulation, we are able to make sense of this speaker's meaning making process. Rather than accept segments of her words as “true”, or simply accepting that she is expressing confusion, we can come to appreciate the complex knowledge formation processes she engages in order to deliver her understanding of inequality in the US social structure.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I suggest that HI-SET youth rely upon a framing belief I label *unfair barriers to economic parity*. In the first instance, this label is intended to identify that set of topics that are central in the consciousness of the speakers as they articulate their understandings of racial stratification – and in this chapter – their understandings of racial oppression. Moreover, I contend that this framing belief, in conjunction with the influences of colorblind racist frames, social location, and local knowledge converge to enable these understandings.

The above passage poignantly captures recurrent topics in HI-SET youths' constructions of racial oppression – that issues of labor market placement, occupational

prestige, earning potential, and buying power are at the forefront of how they perceive racial oppression to play out in the contemporary context. Despite the centrality of economic issues, race is not dismissed as insignificant. However, the role of race is characteristically ambiguous (e.g. “people have their own opinions about racism), especially compared to the straightforward manner in which economic power is understood to define American social structure (e.g. “but it's like well whoever has the most money that's who I'm rolling with). Still, these youth do not see stratification as an either-or situation. This speaker astutely calls attention to the fact that much of the US is middle class, and therefore race matters as a marker of difference, at least *within* the middle class if not as a means of constructing classes.⁵

A different interviewee had trouble making sense of what I meant by “status of blacks in the US”. I asked him to imagine that aliens from another planet came to earth; they know nothing about race, but they look at the US and notice that people live differently depending upon the color of their skin. I asked how he would explain that situation – some people living differently than others?

Well, they would need to understand that white people here, lighter people here control, have controlled everything here for a long time and don't want that to change. So they do whatever they can to keep things how it is, with them having more than blacks.

⁵ Other comments from this speaker, as well as by other HI-SET youth reveal that race is understood both to shape the overall class structure (e.g. they believe that blacks are disproportionately located in the lower classes) and that class also shapes intra-racial hierarchies and dynamics. The above passage is meant to illustrate that even as HI-SET youth focus on class/economic issues, they express an awareness of something called racism. In the subsequent chapters on how black youth constructed explanations of inequality (chapter 5) and visions of racial equality (chapter 6), the ways in which race and class intersect in their construals of racial stratification are further fleshed out.

Of note is his reliance upon a historically grounded explanation of current conditions (e.g. that “lighter people” have “controlled everything here for a long time”). Also, the distinction between lighter people and others is based in control. The result of control is whites “having more than blacks”. At this point, the referent of “more” is unclear. In his response to my follow up to elaborate on what he meant by “more”, the centrality of economic parity is made abundantly evident. “Who can have - who can buy and sell what; who gets paid what, being the big boss, up top- things like that”.

In the next passage, the speaker is explaining what is unique about blacks compared to other ethnic or racial groups in the US. This response is characteristic of most HI-SET youth in that, while I intentionally avoided specifying what kinds of differences I was interested in, they tended to make comparisons that highlighted differences in occupation, income and wealth, or labor market position.

In a way we're still -- we do the cheap labor most. You know, I know that they make jokes about Mexicans doing gardening, but we still do cheap labor. Working in the factories instead of owning the factory. We're still working for people. We're under someone at all times. We're not getting out there doing our own thing and making our own money and making jobs. We're just working for someone.

Spoken in true neo-Marxist fashion, race and class are treated almost synonymously; that is, the speaker equates the collective black “we” with a set of subordinate class positions – “cheap labor”, workers (as opposed to owners), and employees (as opposed to employers). “Under” is a direct reference to relations to the means of production. “Making our own money and making jobs” is a direct corollary of “getting out there and doing our own thing” as a race. The positioning of racial groups, including in this example, Mexicans, is built around notions of economic parity.

A final piece of evidence supporting the identification of *unfair barriers to economic parity* comes by way of an unexpected set of responses to a question asking what makes blacks as individuals similar. As in the modal response to the above question (what makes blacks as a group distinct from other groups), HI-SET youth often used their responses to highlight features of blacks as individuals that conferred a sense of under-recognized economic competitiveness. Again, this response pattern stood out against my expectations, and against the responses of LO-SET youth.⁶

We're inventors. We create things. We don't always get our credit for it, but we create a lot of things in this world and develop a lot of things and people don't know that because we don't get the praises that somebody would get for sending a spaceship off the planet, into space. You know, we don't get the credit for what we do. And so a lot of Black people don't know that, oh, yeah, your race is successful, they did a lot of stuff. You might hear about it only during Black History month.

This speaker is affected by the historical lack of recognition accorded black contributions to the nation's prosperity. Moreover, she intimates that contemporary blacks are negatively impacted by this lack of recognition – that negative assessments of blacks are all the more difficult to repel in absence of knowledge that “oh, yeah, your race is successful”. Some LO-SET youth began with pronouncements of pride similar to that above (e.g. “We're inventors. We create things”). But only HI-SET youth would regularly link these cultural attributes to larger issues such as blacks' role in the economy. I suggest that, guided by the *unfair barriers to economic parity* framing belief,

⁶ LO-SET youth tended to discuss performative aspects of culture as well as styles and tastes in response to questions about black group uniqueness and black individual similarity. Because those answers did not fit my criteria for inclusion in this chapter, they are not analyzed here. They do however figure prominently in discussions of how racial inequality is maintained. Also, the fact that HI-SET youth interpreted those questions as they did says much about how they construct racial difference in relation to the economic sphere. The cultural differences LO-SET youth cite in response to the same questions are significant in their own right but are not the primary ways in which racial oppression is understood.

HI-SET youth are disposed to orienting a good deal of their ideas about race and social structure to such issues.

The Greatest of All Hardships: Stigma and Mobility in Constructions of Racial Oppression

The centrality of economic issues in HI-SET youths' constructions of racial oppression should not be taken as evidence that other issues were not important. Stigma - the psychosocial challenges associated with the developing self-concept given perceptions of the societal pervasiveness of negative in-group stereotypes - has been conceptualized as a key dimension of the felt experience of racial oppression (Du Bois 1903; Loury 2002; Oyserman and Swim 2001;). These youth are not immune to the impact of stigmatization. However, much of the impact of stigmatization is channeled through a view of racial oppression dominated by an econo-centric understanding of the racial hierarchy. The following passage evidences this complex combination of psychosocial trauma filtered through the prism of competitive inter-racial relations. This participant gave an example of the worst racial disparities.

The main one is in education. It starts pretty much with education. Because I'm like -- for example, my friend, he was valedictorian of Highland Park High School, a predominantly Black school. When he went to Michigan State, he had to take all remedial classes because he didn't have the proper education. *He was valedictorian*. He had a 4.0. But when you go to another school and you're suppose to seem like you're ready and prepared, you have to take a lot of remedial classes. There is an unfairness in the education system. The facilities -- I can go out to a school in Ann Arbor and then come to a school here, the facilities are completely different. They keep it clean. They will make sure that, well, if a bomb threat is called in or if a fight happens, it's dealt with appropriately. Not, "just another day, this is another day at Finney or it's another day at Denby". Or if somebody get shot, oh, it has to be on the news because well this is a Black school, we're gonna make it seem like it's all their fault. It's just like that's where it starts. It starts in the education system.

This passage expresses a common theme in HI-SET youth talk on racial stratification: an emphasis upon competitive relations with whites and the absolute necessity of a quality educational experience as a prerequisite to entering competitive fields. A lack of academic preparedness is not the sole indicator of a basic “unfairness in the education system”. The societal understanding that black students are worth less than white students (e.g. “this is a black school, we’re gonna make it seem like it’s all their fault”) is evident to this speaker in the maintenance of facilities (e.g., “They keep it clean”), the handling of crisis situations (e.g., “if a bomb threat is called in or if a fight happens, it’s dealt with appropriately), and the generally low regard for black institutions (e.g., just “another day at Finney”).

While stigma is clearly meaningful for HI-SET youth (and in no way displaced by some crude economic obsession), I suggest that interpretations of stigma must be considered alongside conceptions of the outcomes of stigma, as viewed by the actor. For the above speaker, and her HI-SET youth colleagues, the consequences of stigmatization are abundantly clear. I asked her what she meant by “it” (in her closing, “It’s just like that’s where it starts. It starts in the education system”). She responded, “There needs to be equality in school systems because it shouldn’t be a point where White kids can compete with the world and Black kids can barely get out of high school”.

The links between a sense of being looked down upon and treated differentially as a consequence of being perceived negatively – especially by whites in positions of authority – occur regularly in HI-SET youth accounts. The following passage is an account of early racial awareness. The speaker gave an example of how he became aware

that race mattered. His account, like many of the HI-SET youth accounts of early racial awareness, took place in a school setting, early in his educational career.

It was several occasions. It was the picking 'em out of the classroom. You know, not expecting a child -- like he would like say things to my mother like well I'm surprised that he knows how to read this well, I'm surprised that he knows how to write this well. And, you know, it wasn't like -- I wasn't dumb. I wasn't - never had any problems with learning anything. It was more that, "you're Black and you're learning more than the White kids are learning".

That schools were the most frequent locations of accounts of early racial awareness is a consistent feature of HI-SET youth racial stratification talk. Such accounts of early racial awareness reflect contemporary concerns with white attempts to deny blacks opportunities to compete with whites for positions of "real" power – ownership and employer positions in the labor market.⁷ The speaker is clearly affected by the insinuation – or rather, by his account, the explicit pronouncement of his assumed intellectual deficiency. But his rendering of the import of this pronouncement is ultimately interpreted through the prism of competitive relations with whites (e.g., "It was more that, 'you're Black and you're learning more than the White kids are learning'").⁸

This final passage provides further evidence of the distinct ways in which stigma is incorporated into HI-SET youths' constructions of racial oppression. This speaker expresses the optimism felt by most youth I interviewed for this project – both HI- and LO-SET youth - surrounding the recent presidential election victory of Barack Obama.

⁷ It is worth reiterating that the accuracy of accounts of early racial awareness is not so important as is the use of such accounts/rememberings/reinterpretations as cultural knowledge and resources deployed in making sense of/in the present moment.

⁸ While I recognize the potential and value of applying a psychodynamic discursive reading of this statement (e.g. the emphasis on whites' attempts to exclude blacks as a form of ego-protection), my approach privileges knowledge formation as a social process and so is less concerned with hypotheses of unconscious forces and internal psycho-cognitive processing. The goal of extracting common cultural resources in the talk of black youth is not suited to a psychodynamic reading of interview text.

However, HI-SET youths' deployment of "the Obama Effect" compliments and reinforces the ways they connect stigma and success. Obama represents the ease with which stigma and stigmatized relations can be erased.

Well if he does a good job like everybody expects him to, it will probably - you probably will have more respect for Black people. It will probably, you know, show you the light that, well, no, all Black people aren't uneducated, they are not all trying to get above the rest or try to, you know, pretty much screw you over. 'Cause that's what a lot of people think, you know. But we're all just trying to move up together. His success will probably change the way a lot of people feel about us.

In the context of other HI-SET youth accounts, this passage reflects much more than support for the kumbaya, "yes we can" spirit manufactured and embodied by the Obama campaign and victory. The speaker is clearly concerned with the power of Obama to undo much of the negative assessments of black moral character (e.g. blacks are not trying to "screw you over"). I suggest that the idea "trying to move up together" does signal an American camaraderie that lies beyond race. And though I did not probe this particular response, the weight of the evidence supports my contention that moving "up together" can be safely interpreted as working together as equals to improve our collective lot, the wealth and prosperity of the nation. Among HI-SET youth, renouncing stigma is as much about gaining recognition as contributing members of American society as restoring black moral character.

Colorblind Frames, Social Location, and the Unfair Barriers to Economic Parity Framing Belief

In the preceding section, I attempted to provide evidence of the framing belief *unfair barriers to economic parity* suggesting that HI-SET youth construct notions of

racial oppression primarily around their knowledge of the location of racial groups vis-à-vis the American class structure. These ideas engender perceptions of the positions of racial actors in the labor market, occupational prestige, and contributions to national prosperity. Stigma also figured into constructions of racial oppression, but entered in ways structured by the dominance of economic issues. In this section, I am concerned with explaining the emergence of this framing belief among this specific sample of black adolescence. That is, how and to what extent do macro-structural ideological forces influence this framing belief? What discursive responses do these black adolescents form given the predominance of colorblind racism? And how do variations in social location and attendant local knowledge play out in the formation and articulation of the *unfair barriers* framing belief?

Abstract Liberalism in HI-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

The tenets of abstract liberalism (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000) show up in HI-SET youths' constructions of racial oppression as a frequent tension between notions of the fundamental soundness of American political/economic freedom and calls for conventional notions of redistribution⁹ on the one hand, and the consistent application of concrete and contextualized notions of liberalism borne of a firm recognition of the racial bent in the distribution of societally valued goods. As a result, we can speak of a brand of opposition among HI-SET youth that reflects the ambitions of an earlier generation of blacks, concerned primarily with seeing the nation live up to its

⁹ Conventional modes of redistribution refer to the kinds of demands made upon the state during the civil rights era and are juxtaposed to radical egalitarian forms of redistribution. That is, enforcement of and adherence to the principles of equal opportunity would satiate HI-SET youth.

greatest moral potentials by extending its dream to all deserving citizens. This oppositional framework, or alternative ideological frame maintains a strict criticism of the practice of liberal democracy, while posing no fundamental challenge to American institutional imperatives or ideologies of achievement. These forces (e.g. a sense that economic and political freedom exists and that conventional processes of the distribution of social goods are sufficient) appear to contribute to the overall ideological dominance of colorblind frames.

The idea that political and economic freedom exists (albeit in a racialized form) is supported by the bulk of HI-SET youth commentary. The few examples that challenge this notion do not present radical departures from the basic belief, though I do contend that they suggest possibilities for more critical assessments of this facet of abstract liberalism. Such examples can be found in previously presented passages that featured quasi-historically grounded arguments and observations. The speaker explaining to the aliens unfamiliar with race why people's lives seemed related to their skin color foregrounded whites' historical domination of economic assets and distribution processes (e.g. whites "have controlled everything here for a long time and do not want that to change"). In the extreme, this comment highlights the historical instability of the notion of economic and political freedom in the US. However, as Bonilla-Silva (2003) suggests, this criticism seems blunted by the presence of colorblind racist frames. In this case, the speaker's implicit redistributive strategy (equality in the ability to "have", "buy and sell" freely, get paid fair wages, and have a chance to be "the big boss – up top") suggests that the possibility to realize political and economic freedom exists; some whites simply resist

extending those possibilities to blacks. Similarly, the speaker comparing the labor opportunities open to blacks and Mexicans states that blacks “still do the cheap labor”, suggesting that while there have been changes over time (and presumably more changes are possible), blacks continue to be over-represented in lower-wage occupations. The fundamental promises of freedom hold, even if they are hampered by racially slanted markets.

HI-SET youth tended to share more first-hand accounts, and to generate fewer tales based on abstracted characters and events. It may be the case that such personal accounts create more opportunity to directly challenge the taken for granted assumptions of colorblind racism. In the same way that the testimonies of whites revealed their rootedness in colorblind racist frames (Bonilla-Silva 2000), personal stories related by blacks might have the complimentary effect of putting the contradictory elements of dominant ideologies under a microscope. That is, the closer to the ground the account, the greater the presence of local knowledge resources, the more distant and non-concordant are dominant ideologies, formulated distally by people with opposing collective interests (Berger & Luckmann 1967). When one interviewee shares that his teacher expressed surprise at his ability to read and write, suggesting that the surprise was in fact a manifestation of the teacher’s low expectations and dissatisfaction with a black student outperforming white students, it is difficult to imagine that black youth see unfettered access to the resources that facilitate mainstream achievement, let alone freedom of individual expression. Still, little of this criticism is lent to an explicit challenge of the fundamental existence of political and economic freedom in the US.

The framing belief - *unfair barriers to economic parity* – does provide recourse to counter-ideological formations. These are most evident in challenges to two other aspects of abstract liberalism: decontextualized versus concrete applications of liberal principles and recognition of the racialized nature of the current distribution of social goods. Again, as Bonilla-Silva (2003) and Bonilla-Silva & Embrick (2001) suggest, the critical potential of these ideological formations is blunted by the influence of colorblind frames. In the first instance, blacks' tendency to think of liberal principles in terms of their concrete application (evidenced in practically all of their statements) is countered by their acceptance that individual freedoms largely exist and do not require enforcement or pursuit. This blunting effect is compounded by the fact that these youth do not envision other systems of redistribution or different criteria for deciding what is valued in society; the resolution to the current goods-imbalance is merely to re-allocate those goods and resources that already exist.

In the passage comparing Mexican and black labor, the speaker asserts, "We're still working for people. We're under someone at all times. We're not getting out there doing our own thing and making our own money and making jobs". He recognizes a racial bent in the distribution of wages, but his resolution that "we're not getting out there", reflects a belief that conditions exist to do so, and also meets the requirements of a concrete application of liberal principles – namely, the opportunity exists so it is incumbent upon each of us to meet the obligation, to seize the opportunity. Likewise, the passage on the lack of credit blacks receive for their contributions to national prosperity highlights the racialized distribution of public regard for achievements, and makes an

appeal to a concrete application of liberal principles that demands recognition for past achievements and transmission of this knowledge to contemporary black youth to bolster their current attempts to contribute to American society.

The passage regarding the valedictorian that needed to take remedial courses in college comes closest to posing a formidable challenge to the tenets of abstract liberalism. That is, both in its supposition of educational inequalities and its reliance on concrete liberal principles evident in how these inequalities are linked to long-term effects on black life chances, this commentary shines a bright spotlight on the contradictions inherent in the colorblind racist adherence to abstract liberalism. Interestingly, this perspective on education serves to distinguish HI- and LO-SET youth ideologically as well as structurally. All youth in the full sample espoused high value for education; HI-SET youth are most critical, articulately explaining educational inequalities while maintaining great faith in it as the great equalizer – the sole and best means toward political and economic incorporation. While I do not suggest that belonging to either of the two sub-samples determines ideological formation, as a reflection of a differential relationship to the social structure (e.g. via anticipated connections to mainstream institutions of higher education), student educational trajectory, along with related differences in acceptance and articulation of contemporary education rhetoric as it has been deployed and interpreted locally are all influences on the ways in which these youth articulate notions of racial oppression. In the following section, I consider how these forces converge in the HI-SET youths' particular constructions of racial oppression.

Explaining Abstract Liberalism in HI-SET Youths' Construction of Racial Oppression

In the above section, we see how HI-SET youth both accept and reject aspects of abstract liberalism – the key frame of colorblind racism. They accept, albeit with some qualification, that the US provides political and economic freedom, and opportunity to exercise and enjoy both. As to the distribution of social goods, they accept that educational and career achievements are highly valued in the US, and they also accept the means by which those goods are accumulated (e.g. hard work and individual striving). At the same time, HI-SET youth are aware of racial disparities in the allocation of resources, including regard, that help one achieve those educational and career goals. And they regularly make evaluations of opportunity and distribution processes based on concrete applications of liberal principles. That is, they discuss equity in the context of real people and events – not in the abstract sense characteristic of whites relying on abstract liberalism. The framing belief, *unfair barriers to economic parity*, is one means of capturing and beginning to explain this confluence of hegemonic (e.g. colorblind) and counter-hegemonic ideological elements. A richer understanding is made possible by further contextualizing the socio-cognitive terrain upon which these youth operate.

It is not difficult to imagine why these youth hold orientations toward abstract liberalism that differ significantly from those of whites posited by Bonilla-Silva (2000, 2001, 2003). At a most basic level, it is clear how unqualified acceptance of these tenets would conflict not only with black collective interests, but also more importantly, they

would contradict these youths' daily lived experiences.¹⁰ I argue that HI-SET black adolescents' engagement with abstract liberalism (and other frames of colorblind racism) occurs through the same local knowledges and experiences that ground the *unfair barriers* framing belief. As such, it is the specific socio-historic context that conditions these youths' discursive reactions to the dominant ideology as well as the formation of modified dominant ideologies and alternative (e.g. oppositional) frameworks. The puzzle is not that these youths' particularistic responses reflect various degrees of acceptance and rejection of aspects of abstract liberalism, but that it is done in a way that is responsive to their framing beliefs.

In the first instance, the allure of abstract liberalism for HI-SET youth lies in their educational trajectory. Structurally, they are poised, both in absolute and relative terms, to seize the economic and political freedoms they understand to be conferred upon people in their positions. Even awareness of the challenges faced by black urban high school graduates transitioning into institutions of higher education does not dissuade HI-SET youth of the significance of their position. Only one interviewee suggested that a college degree might not guarantee long-term success due to the cost of attending college and the difficulties of paying down loans post-graduation. But even she did not envision another path to maximizing individual freedoms.

HI-SET youth accounts reveal that much of their early racial awareness formed in school contexts, where the push for individual recognition had been developed around

¹⁰ As stated in the opening chapter, part of the rationale for this study is to explore the heterogeneity of "black collective interests" in a way that is beyond the scope of Bonilla-Silva's and others' empirical projects. Still, it is commonplace knowledge that we can speak intelligibly about real divides between black and white worldviews on racial issues.

competitive relations with white students, as well as white authority figures, who black students' often encountered as discouraging foes rather than allies. In all cases, *the* bad white teacher was an anomaly. That is, as an apparition, the significance of competitive relations is underscored, but in a situation where a real victory is possible. While *that* teacher may have been a rarity, the lesson that academic success is a good valuable enough for some (white) adults to try to keep away from deserving (black) children, is a powerful one. Moreover, experiencing that victory seems to establish a track record of academic success and academic identity formation that protects and enhances one's racial identity (Barr 2008). The anticipation of graduating high school and attending a reputable 4-year institution would only bolster that sense of academic achievement.

These youth had also been reared in an educational context that proffered a particular vision of educational utility – a vision these youth were aware of, embraced, and often parroted in interviews. All Urban Prep youth knew the district's mission: to prove that urban youth could succeed in college. And they saw the new buildings, safe surroundings, small class sizes, and ample opportunities to structure their own educational experiences as investments in their oft-neglected abilities to experience the freedoms available in US society. HI-SET youth had fully imbibed the mantra that higher education was a necessity in today's labor market (e.g. many students commented that a high school degree was not enough anymore), and that the only way to ensure individual and collective success was to build oneself and then return to rebuild your community. The school fostered a mission that placed a high priority on college acceptance and matriculation, but came to back that priority with another, focused on creating an

extricable link between academic and community identities. HI-SET youth, having developed such links early on, and having relative success in continuing down that path, were well situated to embrace those ideas.

When asked, most youth played down the significance of living in Detroit for their thinking about race. However, the HI-SET youth often made comments about the faux pas committed by members of the previous mayoral administration, city council, and the Detroit Public Schools governing board. They often interpreted these instances as examples of blacks blowing their opportunities to advance themselves individually, and to turn those personal gains into collective black progress. These activities were all the more embarrassing in light of the longstanding discussions regarding the failures of the Detroit Public Schools. Such malfeasance on the part highly visible elected officials while the eyes of the nation were fixed on Detroit as ground zero in the global war for economic qua academic supremacy only fueled these young peoples' desire to achieve in school and cash these achievements in for long-term economic rewards.

The *unfair barriers to economic parity* framing belief was equally well-fitted to HI-SET youths' rejection of abstract liberalism's abstractness and to their recognition of racial imbalances in the allocation of societally valued goods (material, social, and cultural). Belief in the existence of political and economic freedoms, and acceptance of normative definitions of success provided hope and validation. HI-SET youths' emphasis on the import of education increased their awareness of and unhappiness with educational inequalities. Similarly, their acceptance of and desire for dominant-conferred notions of

success increased their awareness of obstacles that seem designed specifically to keep success at arm's length.

Naturalization/Biologization in HI-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

HI-SET youth were immune to the influence of naturalization and biologizing frames in their constructions of racial oppression. That is, there is no evidence that the markers of racial oppression - distinctions in labor market position, occupational prestige, and lack of recognition for black societal contribution— are understood as natural/biologized (read non-racial) occurrences. Instead, in virtually all cases, black-white distinctions that form the basis of felt oppression, are attributed to historically grounded struggles. Collectives and individual actors engaged in conscious decision-making, and social systems with inherent biases, are implicated in the emergence of racial hierarchies.

In the account focused on blacks' over-representation in low-wage employment, an explanation relying upon the naturalization frame might have implied that blacks' leanings toward physical labor contribute to their disproportionate presence in low-wage sectors. A biologized frame might encourage a statement like, "blacks have learned that mental tasks provide low rewards, and so are likely to opt for physically demanding, but mentally less challenging occupations". The speaker's use of the *unfair barriers* framing belief is evident in his insistence that "we are not getting out there, doing our own thing and making our own money and making jobs". His focus on things that blacks are not doing implies a number of things that are being done to blacks, to create a condition where "we're under someone at all times". In opposition to a naturalizing or biologizing

frame, this account asserts that conscious, self-interested actors draw the lines along which racial hierarchies proceed.

In an even more explicit example of a speaker attributing contemporary modes of racial hierarchy to collective white interests, we are reminded that whites, who have controlled economic resources in this nation from the beginning, will “do whatever they can to keep things how it is”. The white teacher that one speaker perceived to be upset at the fact that a black student could be “learning more than the white kids are learning” is the prime mover in an attempt to deprive black students of an opportunity to prove their academic abilities, and to normalize the expectation that black students lack academic skill and motivation. One speaker pits the rich against everyone else, who “just pay taxes”, while another observes that there is “a basic unfairness in the education system” – attributable largely to white actors who are privileged by their geographic mobility.

In each case, the absence of naturalizing and biologizing frames suggests that these aspects of colorblind racial ideology are major foils against which HI-SET youth form understandings of what racial oppression looks like. This is expected in some sense, in that naturalizing and biologizing frames provide whites with a means of discussing racial phenomena in non-racial ways (e.g. ways that naturalize phenomena or attribute them to quasi-cultural forces). In other words, naturalizing and biologizing frames deny the very existence of racially based oppression. The absence of such frames among HI-SET youth is in fact the natural result of their perceiving any form of racial oppression. The perception of racial oppression along the lines emphasized by the *unfair barriers* framing belief, and in opposition to naturalizing and biologizing frames, can be further

linked to the specific conditions in which HI-SET youth form understandings of racial oppression.

Explaining the Absence of Naturalization and Biologization in HI-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

Given the framing belief *unfair barriers*, the absence of naturalizing and biologizing frames is not surprising. The *unfair barriers* framing belief emphasizes competitive economic conditions, whites who occupy high-wage, managerial, and ownership positions, and blacks who are locked into low-wage employment; it ultimately points to class and economic forms of distinction that are the basis for social hierarchies in the eyes of HI-SET youth. It is not hard to see why HI-SET youth would not rely heavily upon frames that suggest that these distinctions or the hierarchical arrangements they engender are natural or based in fixed characteristics of the actors involved.

We have already seen how HI-SET youth maintain an investment in mainstream achievement ideologies and the institutions that confer success. Many of the experiences and interactions that contribute to this investment also lead HI-SET youth not to invest in or draw upon naturalization and biologization frames. HI-SET youths' ties to the liberal legacy of black political thought reinforce the notion that the divisions that exist between blacks and whites, the divisions that equate to their experiences of racial oppression, are not natural or due to fixed cultural differences between blacks and whites, but are the manifestation of whites' purposeful attempts to maintain power that they have enjoyed since the nation's inception.

Many HI-SET youth interpreted experiences of being signaled out for mistreatment in their early schooling careers as motivated by racial prejudice on the part of white teachers and other authority figures. This has led to the cementing of an image of black academic achievement that is at odds with the worst of America's racist element, as well as in conflict with many more benign manifestations of anti-black sentiment. That is, not only does academic success refute the perception that black youth are unable or disinterested in succeeding academically, but also it reinforces the sense that a major line of black-white demarcation is whites' hold on the means to achieve academically (and therefore economically) and blacks incessant fight to gain access to those means. This struggle is perceived as one between collectives with distinct interests – not as a manifestation of two natural groups (one academically inclined, the other not), nor as the result of two groups with fixed and opposing cultural orientations.

Not only have HI-SET youths' racialized interpretations of schooling conflicts contributed to the rejection of naturalizing and biologizing frames; their relative academic achievement and educational trajectory also undermined these frames. Having accepted the district's mission, HI-SET youth champion the cause of proving "that urban youth can succeed in college". Many of them look to the examples of family members, friends who have graduated recently, and even their teachers as people who have distinguished themselves as cognizant of and committed to the pursuit of higher education. These images support student agency, creating a picture of a world where choices exist and matter. Success, as defined in American society, is not dictated by birth or circumstance, but by hard work (often times by working twice as hard as whites).

Likewise, the failings of Detroit's elected officials are interpreted as proof that hard work can lead anyone to seats of power; but adherence to mainstream decorum - and plain old commonsense - is a requirement to retain power. As one HI-SET youth commented about former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, "That's some dumb stuff. You already know people watching you, but your *black!* How you gonna get that far and do some stuff". Again, HI-SET youths' experiences and interpretations of school-based and citywide events all suggest that the walls separating blacks and whites into distinct and unequal strata are not built on a foundation of human nature or a limited/limiting conception of culture; rather, those walls are scalable and the ascent made possible through conscientious attention to racial obstacles and an unrelenting work ethic.

Minimization in HI-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

To make sense of the impact of the minimization frame on HI-SET youths' constructions of racial oppression, it is helpful to think in terms of very subtle degrees of influence. On the one hand, by virtue of their participation in the study, all of the sample youth have already acknowledged that they believe race is a significant part of American society. As the minimization frame was developed as a means of capturing how whites are able to explicitly deny the significance and impact of race and racism, it is highly unlikely that the type of evidence revealing the minimization frame in analyses of whites' talk would appear in blacks' talk. Still, it is the nature of even more explicit hegemonic ideological devices to work in rather subtle ways.

If we imagine strong and weak versions of minimization, it is possible to see the ways in which the frame is revealed in HI-SET youths' talk. In the strong version of

minimization, race is thought to be insignificant; that is, race is not understood as an important marker of difference, or as a determinant of individual life chances. Social goods are not seen as doled out along racial lines, and in affect, there is no racial hierarchy to speak of. Racism is either non-existent, or at least is not systemic nature. Rather, racism is redefined as a rare, individual pathology; i.e. there are a few bad whites out there, but their prejudices and discriminatory acts are to be understood as idiosyncratic and out of touch with respectable society. None of the HI-SET youths' statements suggest these kinds of sentiments. Still, there are hints of a weaker version of the minimization frame present.

Thinking back to the comment on the centrality of money in swaying people's actions and orientations (e.g. "whoever has the most money, that's who I'm rolling with"), the speaker does not suggest that race is irrelevant, but money is clearly treated as equally important, arguably more so. To suggest that money is significant is not to assert that race is insignificant, but a weaker version of minimization would lead one down the path of questioning the viability of race-oriented thought and action, especially when other forces (e.g. "There is economy, class") seem to rival race as tantamount. Similarly, the expectation that Obama's victory will "probably change the way a lot of people feel about us" signals a perception that blacks are on the receiving end of unprovoked negative characterizations, but the sting of these anti-black sentiments is easily remedied by the good works of one good (and admittedly highly visible and influential) black. That is, while race undoubtedly matters, it is no way central, and its negative impacts are far

from permanent. Support for Obama is taken as proof that even though race persists, Americans can and do move beyond it.

The account of the negative early racial awareness experience with a white teacher who expressed surprise at the speaker's academic skills and drive locates racism with the act of a single white actor, but does not explicitly link those actions to a variety of similar acts, occurring across time and in multiple spaces. Even though it seems a safe interpretive move to assume that the speaker is aware of negative stereotypes around race and academic achievement, the link is not made explicitly, and there is little evidence suggesting that the pervasive nature of negative black imagery is seen as systemic in its origin, dissemination, or institutional supports. Again, this is not to argue that HI-SET youth do not see racism as significant, but to the extent that they perceive negative treatment as being based in race, with rare exceptions¹¹, such treatment is understood to have individual – not social origins. That is the hallmark of the minimization frame; if racism is removed from the social sphere, whites as a group can logically abdicate responsibility for racial inequalities. For HI-SET youth, even limited reliance upon the minimization frame allows them to not see their situations as fixed and beyond their individual power to bring about change.

¹¹ For example, the passage describing “a basic unfairness” in the education system, while using the term “system”, and connoting a sense of the widespread nature of the problem, does not reveal an understanding of the “systemic”. Moreover, other passages from that speaker and other HI-SET youth, unsurprisingly, reveal a lack of sophistication in identifying the systemic aspects of race relations. They are not ignorant of the idea, but lacking the analytical skills and practice (perhaps) their interpretations of events as “racial” or “racist” consistently produce atomized, malevolent actors. Again, I am not suggesting that these youth are blind to the systemic nature of race and racism, but I am asserting that they are limited in articulating their interpretations to individualizing renderings of racism. Without an alternate vocabulary or meaning-system, their articulations will continue to reflect and in some ways reproduce the language if not the spirit of aspects of colorblind racism.

Explaining Minimization in HI-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

That the minimization frame has limited influence on how HI-SET youth construct understandings of racial oppression can be explained largely by the those experiential and locally-based knowledges that foster the *unfair barriers* framing belief. Whether relegated to “collective interests” or understood as part of a more complex process of subjective meaning making, much of the sample’s lived experience and interpretative devices contradict the core of the minimization frame. Accounts of early racial awareness (but more, the re-interpretation and articulation of such events) establish for the participants a history of race-based difference. That is, their current articulations rely at least partially on notions of being marked as different and deficient on the basis of race in the past. While many of their accounts recognize factors beyond or in addition to race as significant in shaping the social structure, none of their accounts suggest that society has moved away from making race-based assessments.

It is also clear that HI-SET youth perceive societal goods to be doled out along racial lines (e.g. opportunities to be the “big boss, up top” instead of always being the employee or worker), but they do not see those lines as being impenetrable – there is nothing essential about the link between high-wage jobs and managerial/ownership positions that would preclude black participation at those levels. As in the Kwame example, race heightens the sense of scrutiny for successful blacks, but also proves that race is not what keeps blacks from advancing. Race matters, but is not definitive in maintaining or reversing the problem. And as in the case of the educational inequality example, the racialized nature of the distribution of social goods has long-term impacts,

exacerbating the deleterious impact of race, but not putting the goal of educational achievement out of reach. There is a marked ambivalence regarding the significance of race for the distribution of societal goods.

In addition to supporting strong black academic identity, the school culture at Urban Prep emphasizes hard work – an ostensibly race-neutral goal, but combines this with the racially coded “urban youth”. Attention is called to race as problematic, but race is not pinpointed as part of the problem that needs resolution. In this way, the school culture highlights race as a problem, but in the limited sense of racial disparities in educational quality; the solution is to prove that urban youth are not really problems by allowing them an opportunity to excel academically, but not by critically and explicitly engaging the dynamics by which urban and black youth are deemed problems. The immediate contexts which HI-SET youth navigate routinely encourage reliance upon the minimization frame just enough to allow ideological space for the *unfair barriers* framing belief to counterbalance a lack of emphasis on race and racism as societal and systemic, while still positioning race and racism as factors that are surmountable.

Conclusion

In this section, I have identified *unfair barriers to economic parity* as a primary framing belief that HI-SET youth draw upon to articulate understandings of racial oppression. Additionally, I considered the extent to which the frames of colorblind racism influence the ways in which HI-SET youth construct racial oppression. I also illustrated how the achievement rhetoric dominant in Detroit political culture, the elevation of certain social objects (e.g. money and occupational prestige) in the HI-SET youths’

consciousness, and interpretations of past and present racialized experiences congeal to produce the *unfair barriers* framing belief, and to shape the ways in which colorblind racist ideological frames enter into HI-SET youths' notions of racial oppression.

As discussed in chapter 1 (conceptual model) and chapter 3 (methods), I adopt a grounded approach in order to allow HI-SET youth to define racial oppression. Rather than to predefine and impose a set of racially oppressive experiences (e.g. perceived discrimination, feelings of stigma, etc.), the goal is to allow the youth to illustrate what constitutes racial oppression, to give the young people space to articulate their own sense of how race lends itself to their individual and collective disadvantage. I identified *unfair barriers to economic parity* as a belief that holds together the many ideas, terms, concepts, and themes present in HI-SET youths' talk around those things that serve to meaningfully distinguish blacks and whites, to arrange racial groups hierarchically.

I argue and demonstrate that colorblind racist frames do enter into HI-SET youths' articulations of racial oppression in ways both subtle and dramatic. Again, the extent of their influence is mediated by the above the social forces. But the uneven ways in which colorblind racist frames are adopted (and their vying for dominance alongside counter and local ideological framing beliefs) makes for a complex and oft times seemingly contradictory set of emergent ideological positions.

Abstract liberalism is considered in four distinct components: the non-/existence of individual freedom; abstract/concrete applications of liberal principles; the non-/recognition of a racial bent in market relations; and the non-/acceptance of conventional modes of goods' distribution. HI-SET youth displayed a high degree of belief in the

existence of individual freedom and choice, and were highly invested in the dominant definition of success as well as the means by which it is dispersed. Ultimately, their understandings of racial oppression were firmly rooted and complicated by their particularistic econo-centric interpretation of US society.

While these tendencies were counterbalanced by the consistent application of concrete notions of liberal principles and the overwhelming recognition of the racialized state of market relations (the invisible hand is white as far as HI-SET youth are concerned), this opposition modifies but does little to dislodge the impact of abstract liberalism central in the maintenance of colorblind racism. Likewise, minimization, though on its face, antithetical to the experiences and interpretations of HI-SET youth, does exercise some influence on the construction of racial oppression. At work is a weak version of minimization that does not refute the significance of race or racism, but takes the former as en par with if not subordinate to class as an important social distinction. While racism is deemed to exist, it is understood primarily in individualistic terms. If minimization reveals a way in which whites can avoid responsibility for the impacts of systemic racism, it duly relieves HI-SET youth of the need to center race or racism as obstacles worthy of direct confrontation in themselves.

Racial Oppression in the Minds of LO-SET Youth

“We’re always gonna be second-class”: Assumed Inferiority as Defining Stratification

I will say -- I will say in society we -- I could just -- I will just say that we get judged a lot in society. And we're not get – like we are not given a lot of chances in life or whatever. The society view us bad, when we obviously are not. I will just tell them that.

LO-SET youth articulated a very different set of priorities around what it means to suffer from racial oppression. I suggest that the key framing belief underlying LO-SET youths' constructions of racial oppression is *assumed inferiority*. With this framing belief, I assert that among LO-SET youth, notions of racial oppression revolve around a central concern with anti-black affect, negative stereotypes, and stigmatized relations as engendering, promoting, and sustaining black-white distinctions. For them, the racial hierarchy is marked most clearly by the dominant discourse's imagery of blacks. The pervasive and extreme nature of this imagery creates a condition where advances in other domains are made all the more difficult. To the extent that the issues at the forefront of the HI-SET youths' consciousness arise in LO-SET youths' discourse, LO-SET youth treat those issues largely as consequences of being so negatively perceived.

Interestingly, in this next passage, the speaker begins to suggest that middle class blacks are in some way protected from the negative assumptions underlying evaluations of low-income blacks; in the course of his statement, and unprompted, he revises this initial point.

Well, there's kind of two ways of people looking at Blacks. I think the poor Blacks are kind of looked down on, because, I think when the people who -- I can't really say have something but are kind of like financially stable and financially well, they aren't really looked down at but they look at you like, "oh, I wonder how he got this, he must be a drug dealer" or something like that. That's what it is. Like they don't believe Black people can actually get a job and go get these things. They, "oh, he must play in the NBA. He must be a athlete or celebrity or something like that". I think that's where we are looked down on.

While unemployed blacks are vulnerable for being unemployed, employed blacks end up being looked down upon for being black. Of course, the implication is that the disdain initially reserved for unemployed blacks is indeed recognized to apply to all blacks

regardless of class position. Moreover, the social degradation associated with being black outweighs any social upgrading that might come with normative economic advance.

In another example, this speaker runs off a laundry list of negative stereotypes of blacks, many of which resemble concerns held by HI-SET youth (though lacking the element of inter-racial comparison), but she links them to moral evaluations. The response to my follow up makes clear the moral dimension of this speaker's concern.

How society -- how do -- ... poor. Probably don't have too much of nothing, don't mean too much of nothing. Not -- little education, illiterate. Lazy, don't like to work or won't work hard. Not that those things are true, but how other people probably look at us.

I followed up asking if these kinds of ideas about blacks were applied to middle and lower class blacks alike. She responded, "same difference. Even rich blacks, it's the same thing. It's like how what Malcolm X said, that even if you make it, you still just a nigger to them". Again, the value of "making it" in mainstream terms does little to offset the real seat of racial distinction – that American society maintains and promotes images of blacks as different in moral standing, desires, motivations, and human worth.

This next speaker was explaining the significance of Obama's victory. Worth noting is the different emphasis in this account as compared to the one offered by a member of the HI-SET sub-sample earlier. The HI-SET account focused on the possibilities for black recognition, situating negative imagery as a rather benign force; conversely, this account is far more deliberate in highlighting white society's role in producing, circulating, and reinforcing negative images of blacks. The black-white divide in images of societal worth is treated as the major boundary defining what it means to experience life from either racial position.

I did used to think, previous to, or before President Obama got into office, it seemed like, I don't know who, but people as a race, together, it made us look like blacks are gonna always be under whites. No matter what the situation is, we're always gonna be looked at as second class. No matter what we do, or who we know, or the achievements we accomplish, but, we're always gonna be second class just, just because we're African American. And that was one thing that people say that Barack being elected was so, so, so spectacular and memorable, ...but I think that was the most memorable part about it, even though, that stereotype is still gonna exist, but now it gives...I think the thing was that, that was a, a stereotype, and Caucasian people and African Americans both believed that African Americans were always going to be under Caucasians.

This speaker reveals some hope that the naturalness of black second class citizenship might recede, though even the advance of a black man to the post of most powerful person in the free world does not seem accomplishment enough to make this an unqualified victory over the specter of second class citizenship.

Much of the LO-SET youths' discourse provides evidence of the perceived permanence and durability of negative black stereotypes and imagery. This stands in contrast to the flexibility in racial hierarchies present in HI-SET youth accounts, as well as to the issues that most constitute oppression. I asked this next participant to describe the differences in how blacks and whites are perceived in American society. With startlingly little hesitation he replied,

Hungry savages. Just people that's willing to do whatever to get by type of people. The type of people that you gotta hide your purse from or, you know -- I was watching a commercial when a Black dude, he had a suit and tie on, very business-like, looked like he wouldn't hurt a fly. Came in the elevator with the White woman and she cuffed her bag real tight. He didn't have nothing on like a rag hanging out his pocket or -- he came presentable, you know. And it was like, oh, regardless, you know, you're Black, you know.

Interestingly, this comment reveals knowledge of the import of racialized cultural cues; the speaker seems even more put off by the behavior of the white female depicted in the

commercial as she goes so far as to violate the expectation that blacks who present themselves appropriately can be afforded some modicum of public respect. Even when dressed for success, “regardless, you know, you’re Black”.

One speaker shared a personal experience when she felt maligned by some of her white co-workers. Her personal experience reflects what is also understood by LO-SET youth as a generalized set of low moral expectations. She was responding to a set of questions on the meaning and experience of equality. This underscores the power of the *assumed inferiority* framing belief for LO-SET youth.

Yeah, I feel very equal. I mean I'm -- I'm -- I'm going after my goals as if anybody else, getting -- I got enrolled to Wayne Community College. I'm going there, then pharmacy school. I say that at my internship. Them white people look foolish, like, “right” and act surprised like “you actually want to do that”. Um. Yeah. Yeah, so I feel very equal.

She might have emphasized the material and even psychological gains of going to college, getting a professional degree, and landing a solid career. Surely, these ideas were in her mind as well (if not at the moment, than certainly in the course of her decision-making). However, in the context of talking about equality, she aligned her plans to achieve alongside a refutation of white assumptions that she should lack such aspirations.

Similar to the Obama-related passage above, whites’ roles, individually and collectively, in perpetuating and adhering to negative beliefs about blacks lead LO-SET youth, working from the *assumed inferiority* framing belief, to develop the “anything is possible” mantra in response to the seemingly impenetrable forces underlying negative portrayals of blacks. Consider the following passages.

I think the big impact came from when President Obama came in office. Like just to see how people judge him just cause of the color of his skin. Like

they thought he wasn't capable of it, even being a senator, going to Harvard, when he really can do – anything is possible with anybody.

While all the youth interviewed shared optimism regarding Obama's presidential victory, LO-SET youth juxtapose Obama as a symbol of the possible squarely against their perceptions of whites' refusals to accept black humanity. The same logic is at work below.

Yes, I think it's gonna make big difference. I mean because like back in the day certain Blacks couldn't get a job because they was Black. But like now like we're running the country. It shows them because some Whites really think we were too stupid enough to do stuff like that, but it shows that Blacks can do anything, up to running a country. Now he is over all or whatever and it basically shows we can do anything.

And

Yes, it shows Blacks that they can do anything no matter what the White man say or the next person say, that you can do it. They never want us to believe that. Even if they know it's true. But now, it shows you, you can do anything. Anything is possible. Anything.

Again, I would underscore the distinction between proof that “we can do anything” and the HI-SET youths' assertion that “we'll probably get more respect”. The urgency and purpose behind the former sentiment, as well as the target of the pronouncement (white/societal disbelief/disavowal of black humanity) is markedly different from the tone of the latter. This is evidence of the distinct framing beliefs that are holding together ideas and themes on this single topic.

In a related passage, this speaker describes the goal of a fictional contemporary black mass movement. After concluding that a mass movement on the order of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's was needed today (as opposed to individual blacks doing

their best to advance as individuals), this speaker stated that the message of this movement would be,

Basically saying no matter who you are or what you do, where you come from, you can do anything long as you put your mind to it, even if people think it's impossible. So long we been told different. We almost believe it. But we need to tell people nothing is impossible.

I would direct attention to the statement, “So long we been told different”, as another indication of the centrality of the perception that the key distinction between blacks and whites – the surest marker of racial oppression in the eyes of LO-SET youth, is the taken-for-granted nature of black second class citizenship, or what I term *assumed inferiority*. The point is driven home in this passage, where refuting the assumption of assumed inferiority takes center stage as the *raison d’être* of an imagined 21st century race-based social movement.

Assumed Inferiority: The Cost of Second Class Citizenship

LO-SET youths’ reliance upon the *assumed inferiority* framing belief does not suggest that material conditions did not concern them. They are important as social objects that bear racialized interpretations and as elements of the day-to-day construction of racial stratification among these youth. Still, material conditions – notions of what class advance and social mobility “buy” in terms of transforming and/or escaping racial hierarchies – take on a different look across samples. In this first passage, the speaker refers to a topic familiar from our discussion of HI-SET youths’ constructions of racial oppression: jobs. However, the subtle differences in the understanding of jobs in relation to oppression make for potentially vast divergences in orientations and potential actions

across groups.¹² This speaker was discussing the most serious challenge facing blacks in the US.

I think more jobs for low class. I think that they don't really give a chance in life in succeeding just 'cause they are in poverty. Like, for example, it's -- when you have a bridge card, right, it's certain houses you can get, certain jobs you can get. It's certain things you can do. If you done a certain crime, again some jobs you can't have, places you can't live, or maybe not go to school. It's not a lot of choice. It's like they limit them just because they are poor, not giving them a chance in life.

This account suggests that the real cost of class disadvantage is the limitation of social freedoms imposed upon the poor. The inability to choose where you will live, what career you will pursue, or what schools you will attend – the emphasis on choice and freedom engendered by these comments differ in nature from that in the *unfair barriers* guided talk of HI-SET youth. The link LO-SET youth make between resources and freedom speak to the denial and need to affirm black humanity in a way that is qualitatively distinct from notions of economic parity. I suggest that through the *assumed inferiority* framing belief, LO-SET youth link material advance to moral standing in a way that encourages a distinct understanding of racial oppression.

The next three examples all make urban-suburban comparisons, again focusing on differences in material conditions between blacks (urban residents) and whites (suburban residents).¹³ These passages reveal further evidence of the particular ways in which LO-SET youth linked material disadvantage to racial oppression. This first response was

¹² It is beyond the scope of this study to predict actions that might flow from the theorized differences in ideological stances; I only wish to emphasize that the different orientations to jobs that I argue are present here are distinct enough to entail real behavioral divergences in practice.

¹³ Interestingly, LO-SET youth make few class distinctions between blacks. So while they acknowledge that suburbs are not 100% white, they rarely make attempts to distinguish between urban and suburban blacks.

given to a follow up asking the participant to explain what kinds of inequalities exist between blacks and whites.

Why should -- you know, about 95 percent of Detroit is populated with African-Americans. And so maybe by say Birmingham, Michigan, maybe 95 percent is populated with another, White Americans or another ethnic group. Like they -- it just seems like why should we have to use their address to get good insurance. Like that's not like a good sign. Because it should be the same whether the car is -- theft rates are high or not. Why should someone mom have to make up a address out there so her son can go to a decent school? We all suppose to be equal, so I don't think that's equal. What's so equal about making it so one group of people can be better?

This passage reveals an interpretation of class-related difference that goes beyond the recognition that blacks and whites seem to inhabit different socio-economic worlds. The issue of parity aside, material disparities are linked to differences in geography and living conditions that seem to affirm for LO-SET youth the taken-for- granted nature of black degradation. The costs of class-based disparities are express differences in the value placed upon the very existences of racially differentiated groups. LO-SET youth do not frame these differences in living conditions as primarily economic in nature; that is, while not ignorant of the ways economic and geographic mobility correlate, their focus is not this correlation. These differences are not merely correlates of economic striving, but of race-defined disparities in the quality and sanctity of life. The following passages extend this observation.

And, you know, a lot of our housing conditions, you know, those aren't as good as the ones out in the suburbs. You know, a lot of Black people don't really live in the suburbs. A lot of 'em stay in the inner city, so that shows like ways to different races. And really it's kind of everything is out in the suburbs, you know, like shopping, like different malls, lot of stores like, you know, a lot of the better stores are out there. Yeah, I guess that's just how the world is set, like out there, you can do more, you have more, it's all there for people, where down here, nah,

make due with the least. Less of what you can get, eat, and like for entertainment. Down here isn't made for that.

This passage depicts quality of life distinctions almost as natural occurrences; the onus is not put on blacks and whites having different motivations, tastes, or work ethics. It is more likely that these distinctions are the physical analogs of society's general lack of regard for black life. And in a final example, this speaker elaborates on what appears to be the most significant differences between blacks and whites.

Yeah. It's a lot of, um, Black people that stay in like low-income homes such as myself, like the projects or whatever, or you want to call them townhouses or whatever. Like I said, out the whole little, whole time I been living there, my grandma lived there ever since my mama was ten, and it was only one White family that lived in there. And then like you see White people in big homes, even though it is some low-class people, White people that stay in low-income homes, but majority you see Black in the low income and White in the high income such as the suburbs, stuff like that. Like, what's wrong that we can't live in those kind of places. And you see a lot of Black people like on food stamps or whatever, getting help by the government. White people too, once in a while, but not like Blacks.

In the three passages above, physical environment carries a moral component, in that spaces are associated with some people being better/being treated as if they were better than others. Each of the passages describe and challenge these links, but do so in a way that extends the critique beyond a call for more access to opportunities that make accumulation of these goods possible. I do not suggest that this because LO-SET youth are unaware of mobility and stratification processes, but that they interpret these differences through the *assumed inferiority* prism. In the following section, I consider some of the forces that lead them to form constructions of racial oppression as they do.

Colorblind Frames, Social Location, and the Assumed Inferiority Framing Belief

In the section above, I attempted to establish the framing belief *assumed inferiority* as the primary assumption and interpretive device underlying LO-SET youths' understandings of racial oppression. That is, I contend that the ways in which LO-SET youth articulate notions of race-related oppression express a cultural logic underpinned by a sense that to be black in the US is to automatically and normatively be perceived in dehumanizing terms. Such normative perceptions make it difficult for blacks to get a fair chance in life, as they are cast as undeserving and otherwise unworthy of such opportunities. Class-based differences such as differences in the physical environments and geographically-defined cultural amenities were also important markers of racial oppression, but acted to confirm blacks' degraded status more than to spur calls for greater access to wealth building institutions. In what follows, I am concerned with explaining the emergence of the *assumed inferiority* framing belief among LO-SET youth. I consider how and to what extent macro-structural ideological forces shape *assumed inferiority*, the discursive responses these black adolescents form in the face of a dominant ideology that suggests in the extreme that race, racism, and racial hierarchies do not exist, and how variations in social location and attendant local knowledge play out in the formation and articulation of this framing belief.

Abstract Liberalism in LO-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

Whereas HI-SET youths' talk evidences a tension between two sets of key abstract liberalism tenets (e.g. belief in extant individual freedoms and endorsement of dominant definitions of success/distribution mechanisms versus a race-neutral social

market and decontextualized notions of liberalism), LO-SET youth seem immune to the influence of abstract liberalism in their constructions of racial oppression. The centrality of the *assumed inferiority* framing belief, with its emphasis on the rigidity, pervasiveness, and durability of anti-black affect, negative stereotypes, and stigmatized relations, all preclude any notion of the existence of individual economic and political freedoms. A lack of freedoms is indelibly inscribed in racialized bodies. With this rejection of a belief in taken-for-granted American freedoms, investments in dominant notions of success and normative modes of distributing social goods also fail to take hold.

An example of the frailty of beliefs in economic and political freedoms among LO-SET youth is seen in the passage where the interviewee begins by suggesting that class standing might shape how black Americans are perceived in the US. Had that stance been maintained, it might have signaled a belief in the ability for money to “whiten”, preserving a way for black Americans to pursue a semblance of freedom. However, as the participant speaks and thinks through a response, he decides that even black Americans who make it have their talents questioned and their deservedness denied. Though this respondent did not specify this, it is likely that, similar to the HI-SET youth, he relies upon knowledge of a concrete experience when he or another black individual who was successful by normative measures, was still victim to an attack on his or social standing (or was “Skipped”). Even the reference to Obama as a symbol challenging long held beliefs in black inferiority are made with a degree of caution that voids any sense of optimism around real possibilities for economic and political freedoms being fully

extended to black Americans. It is an expression of faith, not of a reality they concretely envision constructing.

The refutation of abstract liberal notions supporting conventional notions of social goods' distribution is apparent in the *assumed inferiority*-guided interpretation of place-based racial disparities. A HI-SET youth focus on the same disparities would center upon the economic mechanisms and steps required to access resource-rich spaces – limitations in the opportunity structure. When LO-SET youth discuss the urban-suburban split, they are far less concerned with those mechanisms; they focus upon limitations to consume and the lower quality and fewer choices of products and services available to black Americans as confirmations of society's low regard for black life.

One LO-SET youth participant's description of the goal of a fictional new Civil Rights Movement – essentially to get black Americans not to succumb to mainstream America's attempts to convince them of their inferiority and hopelessness – illustrates how *assumed inferiority* acts as a buffer and reaction to abstract liberalism. Interpreting the hierarchical divide between blacks and whites as centered primarily upon notions of public regard and social esteem, LO-SET youth form understandings of oppression that negate the core claims of abstract liberalism. For them, the veil is constituted precisely by a lack of those fundamental freedoms that abstract liberalism insists (and HI-SET Youth tend to believe) are available in US society. The kind of freedom offered to those who will play by the rules (e.g. accept the mechanisms through which the socially valued is constructed and distributed) offers little to compensate for the LO-SET experience of oppression.

Explaining Abstract Liberalism in LO-SET Youths' Construction of Racial Oppression

LO-SET youths' perception of the rigidity of anti-black affect, their sense that abiding by normative prescriptions for upward mobility, and their interpretation of place-based disparities as symbolic of fundamentally skewed social relations reflecting the pervasive anti-black affect that characterizes US society can be conceptualized as a convergence of locally mediated society-wide discourses on racial stratification. I contend that while their relatively less certain educational trajectory, mediated through their educational experiences and the discourse around the import of education in US society located in their school, while not determinative of their views, plays a significant role in the emergence of the *assumed inferiority* framework. Additionally, this framework is further bolstered by their immediate experiences and local knowledges, providing a buffer against the integration of abstract liberalism into their worldviews.

Images of blacks who have made it by conventional means and standards being slighted stand out for these youth and constitute a more realistic vision of what mainstream credentials "get" for blacks. The image of Malcolm X describing a black doctor of philosophy as ultimately "a nigger", and blacks who "have something" being perceived as having made progress by less than respectable means (as entertainers, not as professionals with "real" careers) represent something more reflective of society than does the suggestion that Obama has overturned four hundred years of irrational anti-black sentiment. Television commercials that depict white women clutching their purses when a professional black male replete with suit, tie, and briefcase (and not with a "rag hanging

out of his pocket”) enters the elevator corresponds closely to their experiences of other blacks making comments like, “I hate being around black people” because “they don’t know how to act when it gets a little hot”.

The bulk of the narratives LO-SET youth offer that speak to their understandings of racial oppression didn’t feature first-hand accounts, but focused upon abstract images of historically and socially distant figures. The few accounts that did feature first-hand experiences typically related instances when they were denied recognition for mainstream accomplishments and desires (as in the young lady planning to attend nursing school). It is not the case that these youth do not know of examples like Obama, but having personal experiences where the Obama exception does not pan out might trump a dozen Obama-esque exceptions. This perspective may be further reinforced as they see themselves as ill positioned to take on those few “exceptional” roles.

They also expressed views regarding the unprofessional behavior of local leaders suggesting that rising to positions of leadership was no guarantee of respect from whites, and no guarantee that black elected officials were any better than the typical politician. This cynicism, coupled with a sense of the emptiness of such achievements likely contributes to the *assumed inferiority* framework, while simultaneously acting against the influence of abstract liberalism.

Naturalization/Biologization in LO-SET Youths’ Constructions of Racial Oppression

In contrast to HI-SET youth, there are some very subtle ways in which naturalization and biologization frames are operative in LO-SET youths constructions of racial oppression. Naturalization enters in that the ways these youth characterize

oppression rarely moves beyond the sense of a sustained, impenetrable anti-black affect. This anti-black sentiment is so insidious, not even the office the presidency lies beyond its reach. That the naturalization frame would be evident in the talk of any black youth is somewhat counterintuitive, as this frame is hypothesized as emerging to allow whites to speak about racial matters in ways that deny their racial character, describing them as the result of human nature, just things that any person or group would do, think, etc. Of course, when used by whites, it is usually to justify some exclusionary or discriminatory act, excusing it as something that “insert-minority-group-label-here” also does, believes, etc.

Similarly, it seems that LO-SET youth may rely on a form of naturalization to interpret anti-black sentiment among whites (and blacks too). In terms of power, blacks’ use of a weak form of naturalization does not equate to the kind of social control exercised by whites that can excuse discrimination and prejudice through exercising this frame. Still, in lieu of a more thoroughgoing set of articulations, those offered by LO-SET youth seem to implicate whites’ dispositions to be the root of their anti-black feelings. Even in cases where LO-SET youths point directly to white individuals or collectives as fostering ideas of black inferiority, this is not characterized as having some basis in social relations beyond affect (e.g. whites really don’t like blacks for no real good reason). To be clear, these youth are not denying that race drives this antipathy. But they may be relying upon a form of naturalization that allows them to highlight the irrational character of white prejudice, as opposed to situating white sentiments in social relations.

Biologization functions in much the same way as naturalization, but rather than explaining racial matters in terms of universalizing notions of human nature, biologization infuses a pseudo cultural theory into that explanation. It recognizes aspects of human nature as learned, but then suggests that once behaviors and orientations are learned, they become fixed characteristics. We are able to explain racial matters in terms of the cultural traits groups just have, or have learned, and have therefore become part of that group. In this situation, it seems that black youths' conceptions of white racial sentiments reflect the subtle influence of biologization.

Again, the power dynamic is very different when and if subordinate group members make use of colorblind frames. As part of a process of group definition, the white construction of black behaviors and orientations as “not because they're black, but because it is there culture” within a system of structured racial inequalities has a life-shaping impact not matched by blacks' beliefs that white racial antipathy is part of their cultural DNA. Both are clearly critical aspects of the racialization process with implications for social relations and interpersonal behavior. But rather than biologization allowing for white expression of cultural racism, this frame is available to black youth to interpret white behaviors and orientations as non-sensical. This might buffer LO-SET youth from accepting that black status is entirely the result of blacks' choices, beliefs, and actions, but it also undermines the potential to form analyses of racial oppression that recognize structure.

Explaining Naturalization/Biologization in LO-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

The reliance on these weaker versions of naturalization and biologization reflects the convergence of broader discourses with locally grounded knowledge. Given the emphasis on anti-black sentiment in their constructions of racial oppression, LO-SET youth face the task of reconciling an awareness of racial disparities at the abstract and concrete levels, received narratives of the triumphs of earlier generations of blacks, and their own sense of the fruitlessness of pursuits of normative success (to overcome persistent negative imagery of blacks), in a way that locates oppression with the whims of whites. Even though LO-SET youth (similar to HI-SET youth) are openly critical of poor personal choices, they see themselves working hard, making mostly good decisions that square primarily with their sense of right and wrong, but also with a normative sense of personal responsibility; but white racial antipathy at the societal level is seen as non-responsive and impervious to black youths' attempts to do right. To a great extent, oppression simply reflects who whites are.

Minimization in LO-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

In constructing understandings of oppression, LO-SET youth do not minimize race so much as they amplify a narrow reading of how racism is constituted. Their notions of oppression turn less on an analysis of collective interests than on a diagnosis of collective pathology. Again, it would be counterintuitive for any black youth to incorporate the logics of minimization into their racial sense-making repertoires. This is even more the case for LO-SET youth for whom the *assumed inferiority* frame poses race (and a highly individualized version of racism) as permanent obstacles.

Explaining Minimization in LO-SET Youths' Constructions of Racial Oppression

The minimal influence of the minimization frame among LO-SET youth reflects their interpretation - gleaned from their knowledge of notable black Americans who have made it as well as from their experiences receiving little recognition for their achievements or middle class aspirations – of the social structure as impervious to change by normative means. Individual mobility is a worthy pursuit because it allows one greater control of their lives through enhancing the power of consumption. It also reminds black Americans that they are better than the image of them held out by mainstream society. Following the normative route shows that it can be done and secures some modicum of financial, social, and cultural security. None of these “pros” associated with individual mobility is thought to make a dent in the overall standing of black Americans in the racial hierarchy.

Conclusion

In this section, I have identified *assumed inferiority* as a primary framing belief that LO-SET youth draw upon to articulate understandings of racial oppression. Additionally, I considered the extent to which the frames of colorblind racism influence the ways in which LO-SET youth construct racial oppression. I also illustrated how the achievement rhetoric dominant in Detroit political culture, the elevation of certain social objects (white antipathy and the pervasiveness of negative black imagery) in the LO-SET youths' consciousness, and interpretations of past and present racialized experiences converge to produce the *assumed inferiority* framing belief, and to shape the ways in

which colorblind racist ideological frames enter into LO-SET youths' notions of racial oppression.

As discussed in chapter 1 (conceptual model) and chapter 3 (methods), I adopt a grounded approach in order to allow HI-SET youth to define racial oppression. Rather than to predefine and impose a set of racially oppressive experiences (e.g. perceived discrimination, feelings of stigma, etc.), the goal is to allow the youth to illustrate what constitutes racial oppression, to give the young people space to articulate their own sense of how race lends itself to their individual and collective disadvantage. I identified *assumed inferiority* as a belief that holds together the many ideas, terms, concepts, and themes present in LO-SET youths' talk around those things that serve to meaningfully distinguish blacks and whites, to arrange racial groups hierarchically.

I argue and demonstrate that colorblind racist frames do enter into LO-SET youths' articulations of racial oppression in ways both subtle and dramatic. Again, the extent of their influence is mediated by the above the social forces. But the uneven ways in which colorblind racist frames are adopted (and their vying for dominance alongside counter and local ideological framing beliefs) makes for a complex and oft times seemingly contradictory set of emergent ideological positions.

Abstract liberalism is considered in four distinct components: the non-/existence of individual freedom; abstract/concrete applications of liberal principles; the non-/recognition of a racial bent in market relations; and the non-/acceptance of conventional modes of goods' distribution. LO-SET youth displayed a low degree of belief in the existence of individual freedom and choice, and had very little invested in the dominant

definition of success as well as the means by which it is dispersed. They did not suggest that normative pursuits should not be undertaken, but did not see such pursuits as capable of altering whites' views of blacks. Those pursuits do not present a viable means of altering the racial hierarchy. Ultimately, their understandings of racial oppression were firmly rooted in and complicated by their particularistic socio-moral interpretation of US society.

The consistent application of concrete notions of liberal principles and the overwhelming recognition of the imbalance in racial imagery combined to further limit the influence of abstract liberalism on LO-SET youths' constructions of oppression. Likewise, the naturalization, biologization, and minimization frames all make rather limited inroads with LO-SET youth. When LO-SET youth consider examples of successful blacks, be they personal acquaintances or famous public figures, what stands out is not the exemplification of overcoming racial obstacles, but the tenacity of racism in the face of blacks' best efforts. Adopting a limited version of the logics of naturalization and biologization, such antipathy – the inability to anticipate and accept black success – becomes an enduring feature of mainstream American social imagery. Minimization fails to take hold for similar reasons. For LO-SET youth, the significance of race and racism cannot be overstated. While they are not expressing a structural understanding of race, it is as enduring, durable, and insidious as racism understood in more structural terms.

CHAPTER 5

Whattupdoe: Explaining Racial Disparities

In this chapter, I identify the frames that circumscribe my sample's explanations of racial disparities. All of the interviewees were aware of at least one domain of life where blacks tended to fare worse than whites. They understood racial disparities to refer to quantifiable differences between blacks and whites on some objective quality of life indicator. In addition to eliciting what social objects figured most prominently in their explanations of racial disparities, I also assess the extent to which colorblind frames appear to influence these explanations. While in the arena of defining oppression, colorblind frames attempt to deny that race-based oppression exists, they explain what oppression does exist as rooted in processes, forms of evaluation, and attitudes of a non-racial manner. This chapter explores the frames underlying my sample's explanations of racial disparities to see which if any colorblind logics permeate their thinking on the topic.

I find that the HI-SET youths' responses to racial oppression rely upon a central framing belief I designate as "it's racism, but". Essentially, HI-SET youth are very vocal in pointing to racism and discrimination as key barriers to collective black advance, but they are as adamant about the role of individual decision-making in explaining black status. For example, as well as they could situate white supremacy as an historical

product, they as quickly suggested that “that was then, and this is now”, and history can explain but only so much of the current moment. They are a perfect example of why the system- versus individual-blame dichotomy holds limited utility, as their explanations of racial disparity reflect portions of both orientations. They also see some historical continuities, in that race is understood as an arbitrary means of excluding one group from competition with another. Just as race (or skin color) was an excuse for slavery, it is now an excuse to assume blacks are less capable of or less interested in competing with whites (for grades and jobs). Similarly, whereas white racism is understood to be at the root of historical segregation, contemporary separation is taken as a sign of blacks’ inability to do what is required to occupy new spaces. Racism is boiled down to individual negative affect that whites wielded unchecked “back in the day”, but now they hide or attempt to sugarcoat (i.e. act on negative sentiments in very subtle and non-racially explicit ways).

The LO-SET youth seem to rely upon “the (folk) devil inside” as a main framing belief. This frame supports expressions that center upon black character, culture, and identity as crucial explanatory factors of black status. Similarly, racism is couched in talk of individual psychopathology. Segregation by whites and separation by blacks are both seen as causes and exacerbating features of racism. LO-SET youth are less immediately concerned with explaining labor market features than they are with exposing the unfair practice of judging a book by its (black) cover. They have little sense that there is a way to avoid being seen as a second-class citizen; this would depend upon the relinquishment of power by whites. Bewildered by white racism, a great deal of attention is turned inward, to assessments of black distrust, materialism, and individualism. Ultimately, LO-

SET youth own a great deal of the responsibility for producing images that give whites “reason” to hold them in contempt, but hold out that it is wrong to judge the majority by the acts of the many.

HI-SET Youth Explain Racial Disparities

And Behind Door One: Defining Racism and Connecting it to Racial Disparities

Well it started off as racism and it kind of changed into us just like provoking it on ourselves, bringing it on ourselves. 'Cause the education system would not be as bad as it is if parents stepped up and handled their business. If, you know, you made sure your student was in school instead of you having to find out after he gets kicked out. It's not just about racism. It's about you helping yourself also. So if you're hindering yourself because you're letting your son stay out 4:00 in the morning on a school day, there is nothing for him to do 4:00 in the morning on a school day except getting in trouble, you're contributing to the crime. You're contributing to the lack of education.

HI-SET youth struggled with trying to make sense of how racism and racial disparity intersected. They were certain that racism existed, as they were keenly aware of racial disparities (even if they did not use that jargon). However, that the two might bear some unique relationship was not at the fore of their minds. And when this relationship did stand out, they had trouble articulating ideas that did not give them pause, as they tried to talk and think through their responses. This speaker ends up closer to a traditional individual blame response, after displaying a rather limited sense of the import of historical racism. The waning interest he has in an historical account of racial disparities mirrors that of many HI-SET youth. But he, like they, never relinquish the significance of past racism. It is simply tempered by their attention to personal responsibility. The

framing belief *it's racism but* attempts to label this perspective, but also to denote its significance in holding together ideas that explain racial disparity.

HI-SET youth were very clear that racism and discrimination are real obstacles to black advance. However, this certainty was not matched by a clear and unambiguous understanding of what racism entails. This was true not just across the subsample, but often for individual responses. Views of racism ranged from historically grounded conceptions that center group conflict, to psychopathological diagnoses of individual whites. Consider the following to definitions of racism, given by the same speaker:

Well, they would need to understand that white people here, lighter people here control, have controlled everything here for a long time and don't want that to change. So they do whatever they can to keep things how it is, with them having more than blacks.

And

Racism is a lack of understanding of another race. You choose to be fearful of it without even trying to know it.

The first passage was given in response to the respondent's request for clarification. He was not sure what I meant by "black status", so I directed him to pretend he was explaining to aliens why people who had different skin colors lived differently in the US. (As seen in the previous chapter on domains of racial oppression), the speaker focuses upon "control" of vital resources as a primary indicator of the roles held by different racial groups. More importantly for the current analysis is the phrase "for a long time and don't want that to change". The rudiments of a structural analysis of race are apparent, at least in that the conditions of historical contact are located at seminal in making sense of current affairs. The problem of racism is put in its proper context of group-based social

relations centering differential power. The second passage was a response to my direct inquiry, “How would you explain what racism is to someone who didn’t know what it was?” This second explanation reflects a 180-degree turn in terms of the locus of racism. It is no longer about a battle for “control” that has been waged “for a long time”. Instead, it is stripped of all social and temporal contextual factors; it is immediate and individual. It is a (poor) choice, rooted in ignorance and fear.

These two views are not incompatible, but there is little proof that these youth are explicitly connecting social and psychological versions of racism. It may be that notions of black status and racism are really that distinct in the minds of HI-SET youth – that the two notions occupy spaces in their imaginary that are that distant. In any case, they lean toward the psychological version of racism in most cases, which complicates the ways in which they link racism to racial disparities.

The following passage is a response to my request to explain how serious racism is for keeping racial disparities in place. (The speaker had already described racism as “believing negative things about a group instead of learning about them yourself” and discussed educational inequality as the most significant racial disparity today). She chooses to focus on the nature of racism, notably only making a very tenuous connection between racism and the maintenance of racial disparities:

It's serious. They try to cover it up and sugarcoat it and make it seem like, no, it's not racism, but it's always racism. People don't just change overnight. And although it's been 40 something years since King died, it's still a cycle there. And it's -- some people, they don't like racism and they change it. And then other people instill it in their children like it was instilled in them, so it just continues. Bush was racist, very racist. A lot of different -- republicans are racist but it's overshadowed because well they have money, they are doing good things. But racism is racism at the end of the day.

The covert nature of racism she describes is essentially a matter of whites who harbor prejudicial attitudes towards blacks finding ways not to let those feelings show. Bush's real feelings came across in his lax response to Katrina, but he was able to paper over that by eventually using his governmental powers and personal wealth to do right by the Katrina victims. Racism inheres in individual feelings, so individual whites can counter racial disparities by teaching their kids not to be racist. Ultimately, racism helps keep racial disparities in place by maintaining negative stereotypes of blacks and passing them on to the next generation.

I asked another participant what was the main thing holding black Americans back as a group today. This response also briefly acknowledges the significance of our racial legacy, linking it to a very particularistic version of racial discrimination:

“discrimination; definitely. It still be going on--- not like back in the day, but still, like just not as worse”. When I asked her to distinguish between discrimination then and now she shared this personal, if somewhat abstract, vignette:

For example, I have experienced discrimination going to different places because my mom does make me, you know, she makes sure I have exposure. So I will go into some situations and I might be the only Black person there and so it will be pointed out a lot. And so, you know, it's -- I'm comfortable with it because I'm like well I'm here. This is what it is, but I'm here to stay. You not sending me nowhere.

The “back in the day discrimination” has given way to a form of discrimination that features white surprise and perhaps disdain at black presence. (This also reflects HI-SET youth's focus on oppression as defined largely by white resentment of black economic competition). On the one hand, this is a feature of “different places” where people might

point out her presence as odd. This implies that such occurrences are somewhat frequent and linked to spaces where whites are likely to find it strange that blacks are there also, presumably in roles of equal status. On the other hand, and this is less clear, such an assessment may have the potential to elicit a structural reading of racism, but it is more likely given HI-SET youths' overwhelmingly individually-based conceptions of racism, that such discriminatory experiences will be attributed to individual "racist" whites.

Towing the Line, Walking the Tightrope: Individual Responsibility in a Colorblind Context

The "but" portion of "it's racism but" suggests two related implications that come out of the individualist understanding of racism held by HI-SET youth. One implication is that they will interpret racial disparities as being caused by individual failings as well as racism. The other addresses what has often been reflected in studies of black youth performative identity: adaptations in cultural orientations based on interpretations of the role of race in the social structure. The "*it's racism, but*" frame engenders individualist readings of racism and the development of strategies to cope with individual whites, the latter reinforcing notions of racism as an individual issue – especially when the strategies prove successful; and they usually do according to HI-SET youth.

Below, the participant recounts a situation where she first recalls becoming aware of race as being significant for how people treat one another.

Well I had a teacher in the first grade. Her name was Sister Mary. She was suppose to be a nun, but she treated different students differently. So her White students she treated correctly, she didn't give 'em a hard time. And the Black students, they were like her target to always point out. So you had to

always be on your game around her so that you wouldn't be a target for her all the time. And so it was like I learned to keep myself together when I talked to her.

Of interest in this passage is the notion of “being on your game” and how it relates to explanations of racial disparities. That the account features an individual white in a position of authority, perhaps abusing that power by exacting different expectations upon her students does not in itself suggest that the interviewee has foregone a structuralist understanding of racism and its role in sustaining racial disparities. Personal experiences demand that kind of concrete connection of an abstraction like racism or discrimination to actual people, along with actual responses. It is the subsequent failure to link this occurrence to similar other situations, and particularly to develop a response that though transposable to similar situations, does not recognize a structural component of such discriminatory experiences. The interpretation of racism as individualistic and the appropriate response as one that effectively deals with this form of racism is reinforced.

In a follow up, I asked the participant to clarify the meaning of “targeted”.

Well, it wasn't really me, but like, if we're sitting in the classroom, she'll just do like a random check of homework to make sure and then it was like me and my two friends we would get called to show our homework. And since I would have mines done, she really couldn't say anything to me. But then when she would start talking to her, “you people don't have y'all stuff done, y'all never do this and y'all always want excuses”.

Her response reflects her displeasure with the blanket accusations of unpreparedness, but the respondent dodges the bullet by being prepared for targeting.

In another example of this protective response to individualized racism, the discrimination is recognized as “messed up”, but in some sense necessary, if not understandable. Further, this interpretation of the situation places responsibility upon

black youth to recognize and accept this form of discrimination as acceptable, again, reinforcing the individualized interpretation of racism and obscuring the relations between race, discrimination, and racial disparities.

So we had went to the gas station to turn to go back and see if that was my cousin. So we was going slow, real slow. And the cop turned on the lights. I had been sitting back so he couldn't see me. It looked like he [the driver] was in there by himself. And that's what they do when a guy is alone in a nice car around there, you know. But as soon as I put my chair up, he seen me and he was like, 'oh, OK. Well y'all be careful', or whatever. Because a lot cars be getting stolen around there. So they do that just to the boys. It's messed up, but, you know, that's they job.

This kind of a balancing act is made possible and necessary in part because of the first implication of the “but” in “it’s racism, but” – that HI-SET youth take seriously the role of individual responsibility in maintaining, but primarily in transcending the bounds of current racial disparities.

I asked one participant what was the greatest challenge facing black Americans. (To an earlier question concerning the most important differences between blacks and whites, he had focused on whites’ superior positions in the labor market, describing whites’ practices of “keeping the good work to themselves”).

Like I said, it starts from the high -- it's just us not having our minds right, priorities. Like I'm saying, people need to set, like they need to have a future in their mind or whatever. Because people, they be stuck after high school and don't know what to do which cause them not to have a career, or they just settling for a simple job where you only can get what you afford and eventually going to food stamps and basically striving for poverty.

In this account, racism has largely fallen out of the equation; his answer is not incompatible with the earlier response regarding black-white differences. However, harkening back to an earlier emphasis on the importance of education, he is now focusing

squarely upon a “mindset” that some blacks lack, creating a way for whites to deny blacks opportunities. This mindset includes a predisposition to “strive for poverty”, pointing to a fundamental character flaw, and a primary means by which racial disparities remain in place.

Another participant, responding to the same question, had this to say:

Right now everybody's facing losing their jobs, but it's more likely that we will lose ours because a lot of people who have them right now they don't have education. They didn't go to college. They dropped out of high school and they just went to a factory. So it's – unemployment but education, is like the really big thing for us right now.

When I asked how this differed from the situation facing white workers with the same educational backgrounds, he responded, “They’re going to have first choice, they won’t – we’ll get looked over first, before them”. The implication is that the proper educational credentials could help black Americans preserve their jobs, by providing a buffer against the capriciousness of white bosses. Again, this passage could potentially signal a structural reading of the labor market, whereby connections are drawn between educational inequalities and uneven labor market outcomes. However, in the context of other passages from this speaker, the onus is being placed on black Americans for not pursuing education far enough leaving them vulnerable to attacks from racist whites.

One participant suggested that poverty was the main challenge facing blacks. And as has become the mainstream standard, poverty was not framed as a structural condition, but primarily as a situation if not caused then certainly deepened by poor fiscal decision-making.

Well as far as poverty goes, it's -- right now best thing you can do is cut back. You can't have, you can't be wearing \$300 shoes and, you know, house note

needs to be paid. You need to know when to spend money. Because Blacks do have a tendency -- we like nice things, we like shiny things and we go buy it, but we don't think about well I got to pay the water bill today or the water gon' be cut off tomorrow. It's more so a mindset. You need to think about the more important things before you start thinking about materialistic things.

Again, a pervasive “mindset” is the seat of persistent racial disparities like poverty. This mindset has now expanded to include a taste for conspicuous consumption and materialism. It should be kept in mind that the response patterns for HI-SET youth included both individual-blame type responses like the one above, as well as indictments of racism and discrimination like those featured earlier, often from single speakers. These barbs were often directed at other youth, making no distinctions in terms of class. Rather, the distinction was based upon who exhibited these self-defeating behaviors and who did not.

Another speaker compared black and white mindsets or priorities, using a familiar humorous scenario that only half-seriously chides white youth, while extolling their flare for thrift.

And then like, with that, the schools like, why people, when I was in school, that school [a racially mixed school in the city], blacks was like more, so materialistic, like if you scuff your shoes you gotta buy a new pair. The white people in that school, they would go months and months with the same pair of shoes, and not even worry about it. I used to say, “that’s why they don’t worry about money, ‘cause they don’t buy new shoes.” With us, you scuff up your shoes, you gotta buy a new pair. Theirs can be open, and they don’t care [laughing]. I used to be like, “oh my god, I cannot do that”. But they do not care. Even with clothes; we gotta be at the mall every weekend getting clothes. They be like, whatever, we gonna where the same thing to school this year that we wore last year. You, with us, you don’t want no one to see you with what you had on last year.

While the comment was made in jest, it was offered as a legitimate analysis of differences between black and white youth that contribute to the precarious social positioning of the former.

In a much more serious indictment of black youth culture, and the tendency for blacks to implode, this next passage is a response to my query, “who or what is an enemy to blacks”:

Blacks are their own worst enemies. They either hold each other down and they hold themselves down. They blame everything on the man. And I know my cousin said that “it's the man's fault that I didn't get into school”. I was like, “no, it was your fault. You didn't pull the grades out that you need to pull out”. And so everybody tried to pull the race card. “It was because I was Black, it was because” - but that's not always the situation. It's rare now that it will be because you're Black. It will be because you did something wrong or you didn't handle your business.

Though acknowledging a limited role for race, black status is presented here primarily as due to black Americans not handling their business. This participant is expressing frustration with what she sees as avoidable missteps committed by her counterparts who make poor decisions. Moreover, she has no sympathy for black youth who would “play the race card” after not made the most of their opportunities.

Other black youth are not the only targets of this frustration. In many ways, the activities of black Americans who have not only made it, but have achieved notable public status, are held up to greater scrutiny. Their blunders not only cost them personal losses, but add to the social imagery that paints all black Americans as unworthy competitors in America's race for success. After establishing that the interviewee believed that blacks, regardless of class standing, are portrayed negatively in the media

and perceived negatively in general, I asked if most blacks were aware of these portrayals and perceptions:

If they are, they don't care because, well, they're not making any changes. You might have a few that just come out and do what they need to do, but then you get those few that still acting stupid where they become a millionaire, they do dumb stuff. O. J., very clear example of doing dumb stuff.

The only thing met with more disappointment than blacks' proclivity to shoot themselves in the foot was their doubly strong tendency to take other blacks down with them. Trying to account for what he perceived as a debilitating lack of trust among blacks, one participant said:

Let's see - long line of separation. Like people, they go back and try to get scientific with it. They'll say the Willie Lynch theory or, you know, his letter how people are separated light skin, dark skin, old from the young and it's like a continuing thing. You can still see the affects of it today.

The Willie Lynch Letter and the crabs-in-the-barrel syndrome were common themes among the HI-SET youth. The trope of blacks holding other blacks back, and not wanting to see one another succeed was particularly prevalent in general discussions of the black community in the abstract and in concrete discussions of safety in the communities where these students lived. Following up, I asked if he had any Willie Lynch experiences:

I have had people attempt to hold me back. Words. It's mostly through words, it's not through actions. It's like, "well why are you doing that? Do you really think you can succeed doing what you're doing? You know, it's not a lot people in that career field". It's just the words that they say. They try to discourage someone and if you don't have a strong belief in yourself, then you're not gonna do it. You're gonna let them convince you not to do it and you'll be in the same condition as them which most times is unemployed.

Real or imagined, the specter of some blacks holding up the progress of other blacks, of blacks who make it squandering their good fortune, and with it the chances for other

looked down upon blacks to climb the ladder, and of a bulk of blacks being afflicted by a self-destructive mindset all stand in stark contrast to articulations of the role of racism and discrimination in maintaining racial disparities.

Education and Racial Disparities

According to HI-SET youth, the self-destructive tendency among black youth is perhaps most prevalent, and most costly, in relation to school. As seen in the previous chapter, education plays a huge role in terms of how HI-SET youth construct racial oppression. While the analysis in this chapter does not presume that the objects of knowledge used to constitute oppression must be the ones used to explain racial disparities, education is highly relevant in both processes. While all the youth in the sample hold favorable attitudes toward school (albeit for different reason), only the HI-SET youth link education to an explicit strategy of overcoming racial obstacles. Below I offer two passages that serve to sum up the HI-SET youth perspective on the role of education in relation to racial disparities. In the first passage, one participant explains what he understands to be the main racial disparity in the nation. In the second passage, another participant captures why this is the case:

Yeah, well I guess like our schools are like a lot worse in our inner city, a lot worse than the schools out in the suburbs. 'Cause a lot of those kids -- I really had an example. It's like when it came like to ACT type things, like that's kind of an example. Like at our school we had to like pay for ACT prep and at other schools they really get it free and it start in the ninth grade. And, you know, we start at the 12th grade and they get those free books, all kind of things. And it's hard for us to, you know, get like different materials and stuff that are needed. And they are using nicer buildings. And, fortunately, you know, Urban Prep all the buildings are really nice and everything. Like at like Detroit Public Schools all the buildings are torn down, old, worn down, you know. Using reused books, just things like that.

Notably, he identifies two reference groups – his counterparts in the Detroit Public Schools and students in the resource-rich suburbs. The clear implication is that with those resources, he and his comrades would have a better shot at transcending the racial disparities that are a normal part of his current landscape. The “really nice” buildings at Urban Prep are one sign of a tangible investment in breaking down those barriers. And no one better exemplifies boundary breaking than Barack Obama:

So you take Obama. No one knew he was going to – he just went to school, did his best, went to college, the best colleges. And now, he’s the one, on top of the whole world. No one can take anything from him. And, like, your education, that’s yours. No one can take that. No one can say you don’t deserve, or you don’t, you’re not right there too.

Aside from the most zealous advocates of education as the great equalizer, most level-headed thinkers on either side of the political spectrum would see this diatribe as inspiring, but naïve – the great individual theme overshadowing the importance of any contextual factors whatsoever. While it may be the case that no one can take Obama’s education away, he surely did not get that education on his own; and more importantly, it was not that education alone that propelled him into the office of the presidency of the United States. In the next sections, I examine the discursive factors that might contribute to the appeal and articulation of so naïve a view.

Colorblind Frames, Social Location, and the “it’s racism, but” Framing Belief

HI-SET youth construct explanations of racial disparities around the notion that racism exists in a covert form, and that this new form of racism can be successfully

challenged by black Americans who commit themselves to mainstream practices associated with individual mobility. Their narratives feature the occasional white who is unable to camouflage their dislike of blacks; the targets of white hostilities are most often blacks who show promise of attaining mainstream success (e.g. a quality education and solid career). Also featured in their explanations of the maintenance of the racial status quo are black Americans, mostly young, but not necessarily poor, who partake in a culture of conspicuous consumption, materialism, and discouragement of fellow blacks to pursue mainstream goals. The tension between their identification of racial discrimination as a cause of persistent racial disparities and their assertions of the need for blacks to exercise personal responsibility in order for blacks to make progress as a group can be explained by the framing belief *it's racism, but*. That is, this framing belief helps link these disparate positions in a way that fulfills the interpretive needs of this sub-sample, locating them in the ideological space where their variously derived cultural knowledges converge in a logical and consistent way. I contend that the interpretations that signal this framing belief result from the unique combinations of cultural knowledges these youth come to articulate given their educational trajectory, schooling context, the broader local and national discourses on public education, and their embeddedness in broader hegemonic and counter-ideological racial discourses. Moreover, by analyzing the emergence of these youths' racial frames, we are able to assess the extent to which colorblind frames influence how these young people understand and explain the persistence of racial disparities.

Abstract Liberalism in HI-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

Similar to the findings in the previous chapter on the construction of racial oppression, HI-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities are highly influenced by the core notions of abstract liberalism – namely that American society does offer substantial opportunities for the pursuit of success (i.e. fundamental political and economic freedoms do exist and are protected for the most part), and the conventional modes of acquiring and distributing social goods do follow sound competitive principles. That is, in assessing the current racial imbalances in life chances and outcomes, things may not be equal, but there are paths readily available to make things so. However, also mirroring the breakdown of abstract liberalism in their logics, HI-SET youth are aware that these principles of fair competition are not always applied to black Americans, revealing a skew in the availability to attain the resources and freedoms available to all Americans. So while abstract liberalism is crucial for its provision of admiral social goals, the actual experiences of these youth, and their knowledge of the racial obstacles endured by other black Americans who have played by the rules works against a more thorough embrace of this dominant racial ideological frame.

In the passage that begins this chapter, the speaker asserts that present day racial disparities “started off as racism” but over time changed to “us just like provoking it on ourselves, bringing it on ourselves”. Given the rest of the text of this interview (not reported), racial discrimination figures into current disparities more than this passage suggests, but this text still stands as an exemplar of the kind of abstract liberal logic articulated by HI-SET youth. Educational inequality is bad, but it wouldn't be as bad if

parents took greater interest in their children's' schooling. That is, our fundamental freedoms are guaranteed, but we still have to meet our end of the bargain to maintain them. Our end might be a bit heavier given the racial slant of the distribution of financial, social, cultural, and psychological resources in the US, but it is not beyond lifting.

Another example of abstract liberalism can be found in the passage describing the targeting of black students by Sister Mary. Recall how the participant discussed the strategy of being on her "game around her" to avoid being made a target. I suggest that is within and reflecting the logic of abstract liberalism in that by taking the being "on my game" approach, the respondent has implicitly accepted the definition of success maintained by the school, finds that she has the opportunity to attain that success, and failure to do so is ultimately an individual issue, even if she is affected by her teacher's desire to degrade her black students.

Acquiescence to the "messed up" practices of police who find it necessary to stop lone black male drivers articulates abstract liberalism. It is in a spirit of shared sacrifice that one might forfeit a little freedom in order to maintain the freedoms of all. Even as it is recognized that this is a practice carried out exclusively against black males – a fact that runs counter to liberal principles – HI-SET youth articulate a willingness to endure such slights as part of their everyday realities.

Perhaps the greatest presence of abstract liberalism is present in the many passages where HI-SET youth make the most explicit claims that black Americans and black youth in particular fail to exercise a strong will. Rather, they are prone to prioritizing the wrong things, failing to plan for the future, succumbing to materialism,

playing the race card, and sabotaging themselves and other blacks. It is this “mindset” that helps keep black Americans locked into the bottom of the racial hierarchy as it prevents black Americans from taking advantage of the limited opportunities that do exist. In a competitive market, it is expected that individuals will do all they can to be successful. HI-SET youth see many of their less devoted counterparts (including older black Americans who become successful and fall from grace through their poor choices and unethical actions) as being unwilling to compete.

Explaining Abstract Liberalism in HI-SET Youths’ Explanations of Racial Disparity

The articulation of elements of the abstract liberalism frame leads to an optimistic if not naïve perspective on the role of individual striving. Despite their own recognition of the tilt in the playing field, HI-SET youth cling to aspects of abstract liberalism that mirror what is most useful in the frame for whites to justify black inequality. They see opportunity there for the taking, and they see failure to take it as a lack of character as much as a reflection of a withering system of racism. The *it’s racism, but* framing belief offers a shorthand to describe this phenomena, but more importantly, carries the analytic force to delineate the convergence of knowledges that coalesce in this grounding assumption.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, HI-SET youth are particularly attuned to the processes by which they believe individual mobility is achieved. That is, these processes and what they bring you are prominent in their consciousness. While all the youth in the sample are on the verge of independent adulthood, the HI-SET youth are better positioned to take that first step. While educational trajectory is by no means

posited as a causal factor in itself, it does reflect differences in objective relations to mainstream American institutions. Participation, relative success, and high expectations in the schooling arena reinforce investment in that arena's stated goals and means. And in sustaining that investment, the cultural logics embedded within become more and more a component of the actor's social knowledge. This is just one facet of the experiences from which HI-SET youths' interpretations arise that must be taken into account in exploring how and why they articulate particular explanations of racial disparities.

What is unique about the HI-SET youth is that they both embrace and reject the central ideas of abstract liberalism simultaneously and without dissonance. This predisposition toward abstract liberalism's propagations of extant freedoms and the social actor's attendant obligations is borne out and reinforced in the school setting, and relies upon a multilevel discourse on the roles of education in the globalizing economy and in Detroit. At the same time, their melding of mainstream cultural imperatives with an acute cognizance of racial obstacles creates a vision of racial disparities that are daunting, but by no means insurmountable. Similar to Carter Andrews' high achieving black high school students in a predominantly white setting, a recognition and articulation of one's racial awareness is part and parcel of a high achieving black academic subject position (2009), but plays out differently depending upon context.

HI-SET youth are aware of and internalize messages that the country is falling behind other nations academically, particularly in the areas of math and science. All of these youth have grown up with high technology, but even over their short life spans they have seen technological advances seep into every domain of life and have experienced a

higher quality of life as a result. So when they are confronted with news that America is falling behind in these crucial areas (and that the country is also in fiscal dire straits) they do not turn a deaf ear. The call to serve the country by improving your own lot is being taken very seriously by these youth. HI-SET youth have accepted that the primary means by which to heed this call is to pursue one's education to the fullest, even if that means muddling through a subpar educational experience.

In the midst of this national and global discourse, Detroit finds itself positioned as the city with the absolute worse academic record in the country. That the students in my sample and their parents have in large part accepted the prognosis regarding the utter collapse of public schooling in Detroit is apparent in their fleeing DPS en masse for the wave of upstart public school academies (or charter schools). They agree that DPS is falling apart, that its implosion has slowly robbed black youth of their futures, and that charter schools offer a real way to become competitive – undoing extant racial disparities. In short, both the broad discourse on education and the local discourse on Detroit public education foster a narrative that has been capitalized upon by the charter schools (and their proponents). That narrative opens with an admission of institutional failure, is followed by what appears as a sincere apology and plan of reconciliation, and closes with a demand that individuals not engage in the sorts of behaviors and orientations that helped contribute to the initial institutional collapse. By and large, HI-SET youth have been responsive to this narrative.

I suggest above that HI-SET youth, despite embracing abstract liberalism's core tenets, maintain a belief that race and racism play a part in sustaining racial inequalities,

similar to that seen among other high achieving black youth. I contend that the way this belief is maintained and able to co-exist alongside contradictory components of abstract liberalism has to do with HI-SET youths' interpretations of Detroit's majority black environs and prospective upward mobility. In a white setting, an awareness of racism serves a protective role, insulating black youth against personal attacks and insinuations of inability, but also preserving a link between themselves and other black Americans. However, in Detroit, this awareness serves an additional motivational purpose. HI-SET youth are attentive to the fact that they have seen the best and worst of black leadership; and what made for the worst was not the presence of racial obstacles, but personal foibles. While abstract liberalism denies that race is a basis for disparities, the tempered version embraced by HI-SET youth acknowledges racism but abhors recourse to racial explanations for difficulties that appear to be of a personal nature. There is in a sense a higher bar applied to the appropriate use of racism as an explanation for racial disparities.

In the eyes of HI-SET youth, many black Americans are not clearing that bar. Again, the national and local discourses on education encourage HI-SET youth to identify particular groups for comparison: resource-rich suburban students and resource-poor, but also "mindset"-poor urban students. In identifying the differences between themselves and their suburban counterparts, they highlight available school-based resources. But when the downward comparison is made they distinguish themselves from the masses of black urban students by focusing on the latter's mindset and poor decision-making. As a result, racial inequalities stay on the radar as contributing to racial disparities, but there are much more immediate instances and daily reminders of the

consequences of bad choices – choices that are easy to disavow in order to create some measure of distance from individuals who look like you, but do not share your work ethic or upwardly mobile orientation.

That the height of the “appropriate to claim racism” bar is so high is further complicated by HI-SET youths’ contradictory notions of racism. On the one hand, they have learned well the mainstream narrative of black victimization (Johnson 2008) – whites’ need for capital ended in the subjugation of blacks. As horrific as that experience was, it is in the past. The lessons they glean from school texts, media depictions, the lives of friends and family, and now Obama all affirm a notion that the past is dead, and with it, racism is dying as well. Or is it? Notions of colorblind racism have also entered the mainstream (e.g. Kanye West’s oft-quoted “racism still alive; they just be concealing it”), and are closely connected to classroom-based discussions of the need to “code switch”. Black youth are being taught that there are indeed different rules for different folks, but that there are ways to compensate for this inequity (e.g. by presenting oneself as playing by their rules). And while their articulations of what racism was and is respects the qualitative differences in the severity of the experiences, they also fail to draw significant continuities. In a context where equally viable sources suggest that racism is dying, but very much alive, the conceptual confusion regarding racism and discrimination is hardly surprising. Abstract liberalism capitalizes upon such confusions by supporting an articulation of racial disparities that may include race, but turns primarily on a racialized reading of individual responsibility.

Naturalization/Biologization in HI-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

HI-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities do not reflect the naturalization frame, but do feature rather mild forms of the logics of biologization. I call them mild, as they do not have the ideological punch we see in the hands of whites. HI-SET youth do not explain racial disparities as natural occurrences, devoid of any real bases in race. And while they do not depict culture (white or black) as something immutable, they do articulate that culture as a quasi-fixed trait characteristic contributes to current forms and levels of racial disparity.

The HI-SET youth focus on individual mobility processes pits them against whites in competitive relations for scarce resources. This is a fundamentally race-based challenge, as they understand that scarcity is driven up by whites' reluctance to see education, careers, salaries, and the quality of life accompanying these things equitably distributed across the population. Moreover, they attach the label "racist" almost exclusively to whites who have exercised whatever authority available to deny blacks opportunities to compete. HI-SET youth have no compulsion toward naturalizing racial disparities.

Alternately, the logics of cultural racism do influence how HI-SET youth discuss racial disparities. On the one hand, they exhibit a clear acceptance of many the negative stereotypes of their group. However, they are selective in how those images are to be applied. That is, they make a distinction between blacks who don't have the right mindset and are not handling their business, and those who are. Such distinctions turn on the same logics that assert that blacks are not inferior, but there are elements of their culture

including orientations, worldviews, and even temperaments that put them at a disadvantage. That HI-SET youth do not make this a blanket assessment of all blacks does not deny the fundamental logics underlying biologicistic explanations for the persistence of racial disparities.

Explaining Biologization in HI-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

The impetus for HI-SET youths' articulations of biologizing logics in their explanations of racial disparity mirror the reasons that components of abstract liberalism are so prevalent. These logics reflect the dominant discourse on the significance of education on the global scene, the local discourse on education in Detroit as a means of stopping the economic bloodletting going on there for decades, the educational rhetoric deployed in the school, and the corroboration of many elements of these multilevel discourses in their own experiences. These ideological forces converge to provide HI-SET youth with a means and need to distinguish themselves from the educational chafe in Detroit.

By pointing out the culturally-inflected shortcomings of black youth culture, HI-SET reveal that they understand the link between individual responsibility and success, that they are aware of the kinds of cultural orientations and behaviors that work against progress, and with that awareness, they are able to make appropriate choices. Additionally, they are able to justify the racism and discrimination they do identify as a reasonable and justifiable evil, as well as assert when discriminatory behavior is out of line.

HI-SET youth act in accord with these understandings of “appropriate” behavior, anchored in tenets of individual responsibility, and in so doing cement their place among Detroit’s best, brightest, and most committed to individual advance for the purpose of uplifting the city. This necessitates altering their behavior to not match that of DPS and other students, as well as displaying a moral fortitude that surpasses that of the city’s not too distant past leaders. Again, while I am not asserting that HI-SET youth are cultural racists, or that their wielding of the biologization frame carries the same weight as it does in the hands of whites who are protecting their privilege, I do hold that their negative characterizations of black culture have a similar starting point and serve a similar end – to distinguish oneself and to justify social climbing.

Minimization in HI-SET Youths’ Explanations of Racial Disparities

HI-SET youth show a surprisingly strong tendency to resort to minimizing logics in their explanations of the persistence of racial disparities (despite their reliance on far weaker forms of the minimization frame in their understandings of racial oppression). Their assertion that discrimination exists, but is not as bad as it once was mirrors the core assumption of the minimization frame. In the hands of whites (as well as defenders of the racial status quo of any hue) it removes one set of explanations for the persistence of racial disparities. Of course, for reasons cited earlier, dominant frames do not serve the same functions for black Americans. For blacks, rather than guide one to the conclusion that racism is insignificant, minimization frames complicate how racism is constituted posing further problems in assessing its role in sustaining racial disparities.

Racism appears as historically significant – as a catalyst for black degradation that would eventually take on a life of its own. Many of the Willie Lynch references were used to express this understanding of the insidious nature of racism. It is responsible for a “slavery mentality” that black culture still evinces in its tendency to promote sabotaging black Americans that try to make something of themselves. The fact that black Americans have bought into a system and set of relationships where they would willingly seek to destroy another black in order to keep everyone “in their place” is one way that HI-SET youth construct the idea that racism exists, albeit in a different and covert form.

At the same time, racism is thought to adhere in whites’ negative attitudes toward and about blacks. This hatred is not thought to be as widespread as it once was, and without the backing of the law, those who do harbor such sentiments are not able to act upon them. HI-SET youth therefore envision racism as omnipresent until proven otherwise. As HI-SET youth see themselves in competition with whites, and feel like many whites resent this competition, preferring to see blacks as servile, disinterested, and ill equipped to compete, they anticipate these antagonisms creeping over into situations where whites are present – places where blacks and whites will inhabit equal status roles, or where whites even find themselves temporarily in a subordinate position. Racism is again, not as bad as it used to be, and of necessity, covert and hard to detect.

Finally, racism is treated as a highly individualized phenomena, it’s origins ranging from a lack of understanding, to fear, to territoriality. But rather than see these attitudes as resulting from a system of meanings and relations unfolding over time, HI-SET youth see racism as manifested almost exclusively by individual whites. As a result,

unless concrete instances of racism in action are carried out and perceived as such by these youth, they have no way of conceptualizing its presence and potential impacts on racial disparities.

Explaining Minimization in HI-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

As in the case of the articulation of the biologization frame, the discourses and practices around education are crucial in the ways minimization logics enter HI-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities. Where biologization provided a way for HI-SET youth to posit differences between themselves and other black youth, minimization provides an additional justification for those biologized characterizations, while legitimating the HI-SET youths' educational experiences and orientations to mainstream American institutions. If black youth are understood to have difficulties maintaining an adequate level of personal responsibility and if these difficulties are in fact large contributors to extant racial disparities, then so long as the gates to opportunity are not always blocked by racist whites, the pursuits of HI-SET youth are a logical response to the ideological messages they have received and used to mold and make sense of their own conditions. Minimizing racial discrimination as a cause of racial disparities allows HI-SET youth to focus upon those things that are under their control – working hard and distinguishing themselves from those who do not.

Another discursive factor shaping the use of the minimization frame among HI-SET youth lies at the intersection of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic black victimization narratives. Black elites and elders often hold out the prospect that opportunities are looking better than they ever have for black Americans. The history of

racial struggle is looked to as proof that the individual and collective wills of black Americans can create positive social change. The hope is that we will build on that legacy (though it is not always explicit what such progression should look like). Alternatively, the hegemonic narrative tells a similar tale, but suggests that racial struggles have been totally overcome. It is time to move together as a nation and forget the old divisions. For the most part, HI-SET youth accept that things are better now than they have been because they do not witness the types of brutality they know to have been visited upon their ancestors. But that also creates pressure from within the black community to somehow show appreciation for their forbearers' sacrifices. In a society oriented to a particular vision of success, HI-SET youth imagine that show of appreciation to come through individual striving that can be parlayed into resources for community uplift.

Finally, the minimization of racism frame, both by lowering perceived racial barriers to individual mobility, and by centering racism as an individual-level trait allows HI-SET youth to make sense of their experiences in relation to racial disparities. Many of the HI-SET youth have white friends who they acknowledge as "cool" because they [the friends] act in ways that reveal their racial sensitivities; they will correct other whites who may do or say something offensive in the presence of a black American. Or they will "understand" if another black youth says or does something racially offensive. The minimization frame legitimates beliefs and validates experiences where a white person has learned to be more understanding. And through minimization, one can comfortably assume that the number of whites who are "cool" or "can learn" far outpaces the

occasional racist bent on denying black Americans an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their toil.

Conclusion

In the above section, I provided evidence of the “*it’s racism, but*” frame. This frame conveys a simple shorthand that captures a complex convergence of discursive threads articulating the primary social objects and associated meanings that provide the cultural resources for HI-SET youth to explain racial disparities. “It’s racism, but” refers to the tension HI-SET youth betray in their narratives as they are torn between a strong belief that racism continues to block opportunities for black Americans and an equally strong faith that through exercising individual responsibility, they are likely to reverse the racial disparities that exist today. I suggest that this frame allows HI-SET youth to make coherent sense of and locate themselves within a number of crucial discursive battles. This frame serves to modify the dominant racial ideological frames abstract liberalism, biologization of culture, and minimization of racism.

Of the multiple discourses pertinent to HI-SET youths’ explanations of racial disparities, their convergence in and around national and local Detroit discourses on education appears as the most significant. The tenets of extant freedoms and opportunities are embraced by HI-SET youth, due at least in part to their exposure to rhetoric positing educational failure as the cause of the current state of Detroit and America’s dwindling fortunes throughout the world, to messages from within the black community that we are in a period of great opportunity but black youth has squandered it, and to their relatively strong positioning to build on current successes in their post-

secondary lives. Biologization allows HI-SET youth to distinguish themselves from black youth who make poor choices and do not prioritize taking advantage of the available opportunities. And minimization allows HI-SET youth to reconcile their belief that racism exists with their faith in individual mobility, by asserting an individualist approach to racism. As individuals, they can do what is needed to prepare for and not be held back by individual whites.

LO-SET Youth Explain Racial Disparities

Exorcising the folk devil inside: The Primacy of Individual Responsibility in Explaining Racial Disparities

I think success is the enemy of Blacks. Success. That's my main thing with Black people. Like people not succeeding in life. It seems as if Blacks make it so hard to succeed. It's like, like they go against it, not all Blacks, no, not all Blacks. But the majority, they go against it. It's like - it's like they would rather choose being low-class than high-class because they think it's the easy way out, but really they are making it hard for they self. It's already hard, but that makes them make it harder. So I'll say success.

This commentary is representative of the ways in which LO-SET youth connect black agency, decision-making, choice, and motivation in their explanations of racial disparities. The primary emphasis is on black culture in general, sometimes with specific references to black youth culture, but always with an eye toward strong internal criticism. LO-SET youth often admit to the offenses they outline as being detrimental to black Americans individually and collectively; and they see these offenses as the main sources of sustained racial disparities in the US.

The next passage presents a similar diagnosis, along with the most common prescription to aid an ailing black culture.

As a black culture, I think we really need to step it up far as getting life -- getting our lives together, overcoming, taking over. As you can see, we already did with the president. We just not getting our life together; we need to start making better choices mainly.

I had initially asked the participant to tell me how he would describe the status of black Americans to a group of aliens unfamiliar with race. His response was, “low, low, low”. When I asked him what he meant by low, he offered the above. Notably, he did not begin with the common laundry list of quality of life and life chances indicators we tend to expect. Rather, “low, low, low” status was immediately associated with a cultural deficit, with an inability to make better choices, despite the fine example of President Obama.

LO-SET youth offered commentary on the flaws in black culture, very similar to HI-SET youth; they focused on materialism, individualism, and a lack of trust among black American youth. In a follow up to the above, I asked the young man to describe what he meant by “black culture”:

Like Blacks always – we always think we got to present ourself, got to be cool or whatever. And like our identity is very -- man, how should I put this. It can mess us up. Like we always got to look at ourself as looking good. We always try to set a image as the good look or whatever. I do it too. But it’s – we get so caught up in that, overdoing it, to – like we not doing anything else sometimes.

Of note is the degree to which LO-SET youth emphasize multiple aspects of black Americans’ cultural and psychological make up. Beginning with an overriding self-consciousness to a dysfunctional narcissism, black American’s attention to self-image and the choices they make to appear “cool” serve to distract them from what really counts. The speaker is not immune. The pursuit of “the cool” is truly a collective effort with consequences felt by all black Americans.

That LO-SET youth see black youth culture as driven by pursuit of the cool (at the expense of other pursuits) is evident in the following passages. LO-SET youth make connections between a number of fatal black cultural flaws. A lack of trust among black Americans seems to lie in the middle of this web. That is, having prioritized the pursuit of material goods in order to portray a cool public image, black Americans develop a deep distrust among themselves. This distrust creates a wedge in the community, degrading already low levels of capital that could otherwise be used to uplift black Americans.

When asked about levels of trust among black Americans, one participant responded,

I say it's kind of in the middle. Because believe it or not a Black person will, not judging, but like a Black person will trade on you for a quick dollar. Like you can trade on your best friend for a certain amount of money. It seem like Blacks think money is all, when it's really not. It's really not.

Tellingly, her most immediate reference point for evaluating trust among black Americans was the speed with which a friend would betray another for quick cash. Many LO-SET youth shared stories of the debilitating effects of the pursuit of materialism and its attendant erosion of trust:

I actually was just telling somebody like money is not everything. If you not happy, then what's the point of it. And like, um, prime example it was a young guy that got killed in the projects. His best friend killed him over I think it was a gun. But they supposed to got a certain amount of money for a gun and he killed his best friend over that gun. Like that's unnecessary. That's just sad.

Equally sad was the matter-of-fact tone used to convey that narrative, but it matches the commonness of those kinds of events, and the ease with which such happenings begin to be taken as typical of black youth culture. From there, it is a small step to viewing culture as the cause of racial disparities.

Underscoring the significance of a lack of trust among blacks, this participant offered:

And if people was more loyal to anything, friendship, jobs, to doing they homework, if people was loyal we would be like probably the best right now. Like I feel if it was more loyalty, African-Americans won't get the fire or the feedback that we get now. If it was more loyalty. So if you see somebody down, dude gone be like, "oh, shoot, it ain't me". You know what I'm saying. That's not -- I mean that's not loyalty. You got to be loyal to yourself to say, you know what I'm saying, "I'm gonna help this guy because this guy can probably be something", you know what I mean. And I just feel like loyalty is the key to success. That's really what success is. It's loyalty.

Responding to a similar question about levels of trust among black Americans, this participant expanded trust to include loyalty, and employed loyalty in an expansive way as a means of summarizing the many character and culture flaws inhibiting black progress. Loyalty reflects making good, moral choices and then committing oneself to follow through. LO-SET youth see black (youth) culture mired in poor decision-making goaded by the prioritizing of materialistic and individualistic ends.

In the following passage, the participant explains how he thinks the negative images in rap music help "keep blacks in a lower positions than whites",

I think it kind of hurts us, the youngest people, younger generation African-American, because now it's everybody trying to get rims. And you got it, somebody else don't, they gon' try to rob and kill you, or like the glasses or the diamonds, the big watches. That stuff kind of hurts us a lot cause everybody want it. So when it's on television, everybody want it and everybody try to get the best, or if they can't, they'll be hurting somebody else's son. Like Gucci Man say, you know, people are no -- he a rapper. But in one of his songs he say "I rather see -- like I rather see your mother cry than my mama cry". So basically I'll shoot you, I will kill you before you kill me.

Here, the speaker is very clear in assessing the links between materialism, consumer culture, and black-on-violence. The victims are clearly black youth, but they are also the

perpetrators, whether in the personage of Gucci Man – a currently popular rap artist –, a consumer of the music, or a young black person trying to emulate the music’s imagery. Again, most tellingly, I had initially asked the participant what most held black Americans in their current positions, and as was typical of LO-SET youth, the immediate response centered upon individual choices in the context of a misguided black youth culture.

Compared to their HI-SET counterparts, LO-SET youth were far more concerned with the question of rap music’s influence on the black youth culture, far more likely to reference this debate, and far more likely to link those references to explanations of racial disparities. The next speaker was adamant about the pervasive nature of such imagery, and how it directly and indirectly influences black American’s life chances.

It's all through media of how we're being put down. Like even though the rappers, different, not necessarily all rappers, but different people, different rappers, they have it throughout their music. They give them a reason to put us down through what they're rapping. And a lot of people are trying to live that lifestyle. And that's how like if the people live in the suburbs, that's how they really view the 'hood or view the streets like that. Even though it's really not always like that but that's how they are viewing our neighborhoods cause they see it on TV.

This speaker is clear that many of the images portrayed in rap music, accurate or not, are not admirable. Black youth are affected both by “trying to live that lifestyle”, and by being perceived negatively by whites and others outside of black communities. There is little question, fair or not, that whites are not out of place for negatively judging black youth. Similarly, LO-SET youth accept the same reasoning to explain racial disparities.

This last speaker puts it bluntly. In response to my query regarding the sources of such images, she said without hesitation,

They are coming from us. I mean even though it is a lot of us like that, but like they shouldn't judge us as a whole because it's also other races that do the same thing. But like they just stick to all of us when it's not like that. There is an admission to these negative acts committed by black youth. And these illicit behaviors are linked to “lots of us”. The judgments are not met with indignation because they are overgeneralizations, or because they are inaccurate, but because they are not attributed to other racial groups. They are only applied to black Americans. Black Americans may have many (folk) devils to exorcise, but at least, in the eyes of LO-SET youth, they are not alone.

The depth of LO-SET youths' reliance upon the (folk) devil inside frame to explain racial disparities arouses interest in how they navigate another tension – seeing themselves in the same way that they believe whites to unfairly see and prejudge them. I asked one interviewee if he experienced such a tension, if he felt like black youth were aware of these images and what they felt should be done, especially as they admit to behaving in ways presented in stereotypical media portrayals.

I think we are aware of it, but we don't know how to fight back against it. So we don't accept it, but we don't try to fight it, because we don't realize it as that there are ways to fight back. We don't try to analyze the situation and say, “OK, why am I being looked down upon, can I change this”. We just know we're being looked down upon. And it's been that way for so long, it's like logically, when something has been happening some way for so long, it's the hardest thing to break, like habits. The longer you do a habit the harder it is to break it. So it's been going on for so long that it, now we don't see – it's a way that can get out, but we just can't see.

When I asked him how he thought he might get out, he offered the familiar refrain, getting himself together, keeping his head straight (focusing), etc. Even having acknowledged that there is something habitual, patterned, both in being “looked down

upon” and in reactions to being looked down upon, all of the onus is located with the individual youth to make better choices.

In this next passage, this participant offers a similar assessment of the prospects of breaking through current racial disparities. She too is primarily concerned with a special something inside of black Americans, even as she attempts to link this to something without. While she has some clue regarding how this cycle might be undone, she is unable to explain the predispositions of those most dispossessed in this process of self and collective definition.

I don't know if it's confidence, or the way things are set up, the structure so the government, or the structure of the society, but it puts us in a situation where we lose confidence. I just feel like overall if people was to really think about where they came from and really think about the beatings and the torture that our ancestors been through, people would, you know, really just change. But a lot of people don't think about that. They live for the moment because they don't, you know, quote, unquote, know if you gonna die tomorrow, you know. I don't know why.

Again, this commentary begins to include an assessment of structure and its possible influence on shaping black culture and psychology. Her solution, too, speaks to a cultural and psychological renaissance, whereby pride replaces the current lack of confidence, and actions based in communal strength displace individualistic and fatalistic responses. The speaker disassociates herself from the more fatalistic black youth, but still implies that her understanding of black youth reflects the views and realities of most.

Finally, this speaker begins with a pragmatic approach to explain racial disparities. But again, the pragmatism turns into and on a healthy dose of self-criticism:

Because I think it mainly start from college or whatever. Because it's a lot of Black people that don't know what to do after high school, which starts everything. And once you have nowhere to go, you just stuck and that's what get

you in that low class. It's a lot of Blacks like that and lot of Whites that's -- I don't know what's so different about them, like how they make it to college or whatever, but that's -- there is a difference going on [long pause]; it seems more important to them, so -- they think about it. Start figuring it out early.

There are many ways that one might explain differences in college preparedness. Given that over 90% of his school's graduates went into some form of post-secondary education, one would suspect that he had at least a few ideas about what could go wrong with the process. Still, this speaker falls back upon a notion of black deficiency, not in absolute terms but compared to white students for whom post-secondary life is "more important".

And Behind Door Two: Trouble Defining Racism and its Relation to Racial Disparities

Like the HI-SET youth, LO-SET youth also found it difficult to link the existence of racism to the persistence of racial disparities. For them, racism is a fundamentally irrational response to fear of the unfamiliar. Accordingly, their attempts to link racism and racial disparities painted racism as working in that same way – unpredictably and with great capriciousness. One participant described racism as,

just stupid, period. It's just that. It's stupid. Plain stupid. There's no real explanation, 'cause it's stupid and just wrong. How can --- to judge people by their skin, to think someone is less than you, not as smart, or lazy, or just really bad things because of their skin. There can be reasons to not think, to not like people, but that's it?

Several LO-SET youth expressed this kind of incredulity at the existence and practices of racism. However, it was rare that their indignation carried over into a deeper critique. In fact, they rarely made the kind of rudimentary links to various social structures that pepper HI-SET youths' discussions of racial disparities. What is certain is that skin color

is not an adequate reason to dislike someone (though certain actions that may be engaged by people of a certain hue may be).

Because their understandings of racism are so deeply rooted in affective, individualist notions, when LO-SET youth do attempt to link it to racial disparities, they inevitably posit correlations that suggest structures (in this case structured inequalities like neighborhood safety and housing stock) are the causes of racism:

The differences can cause the racism because we're so different and we view each other as different and that causes the racism because it causes separations or whatever, like separation. And it might make us not like each other or one another because of where we come from, for what we is, or whatever. And it causes the White people to look down on the Black.

This participant was suggesting that because black and white Americans inhabit such different physical spaces, real significant cultural differences had emerged and are exacerbated by perceptions racial groups have of one another given their different geographic locations. This cycle persists, and because black Americans inhabit spaces that are less well kept, whites end up looking down on, i.e. being racist towards blacks.

LO-SET youth take this psychopathological sense of racism to its fullest extent, suggesting that because at its heart, racism is simply an irrational dislike, black Americans can be racist as well. To a question asking if the US was basically fair or unfair, the interviewee answered,

It's unfair because of the racism in this country. It's about judging people and not really knowing who they are. And, um, like, for instance, they will think even from the Whites -- I mean the Blacks judging the Whites or whatever. Coming from -- say, for instance, if a White come into a party of all Blacks, they will look at them like "what they do doing in here" or whatever, look at them crazy. It's not right, but we do it. Everybody is judgmental. Race or religion or whatever. We just, we're going to act on what we think we know even when we don't want to know.

Here, racism cuts both ways, as irrational fear is not a race-based commodity. As a result, LO-SET youth make almost no connections between structural relations and racial disparities, though there are infrequent examples of the connections HI-SET youth posit, namely individual whites who are in a position of authority that will allow them to deny black Americans entry. In the HI-SET youth case, though, they also linked such behaviors to competitive relations with whites – an angle missing in LO-SET youths’ discussions of the persistence of racial disparities.

In this final passage, a LO-SET youth male expresses his feelings on the seriousness of racism:

I see everybody is still segregated, like separated into different groups, in different races. And people are still being judged by who they are or whatever. Like it was certain people who not voting for Obama just because of what he looks like. Like it's still very serious. It's not just as serious, but it's serious.

The seriousness of racism is here distilled to a segregation that appears as cliquish, and the proclivity for human beings to judge one another. While LO-SET youth do not suggest that segregation or prejudice should be taken lightly, it is telling that the rantings of a few anti-Obama zealots provide LO-SET youth with their most immediate and far-reaching evidence of racism.

Colorblind Frames, Social Location, and the (Folk) Devil Inside Framing Belief

As evidenced above, there is some confluence between the objects of awareness in LO-SET youths’ construction of racial oppression and their explanations of racial disparities. Both cases rely upon highly individualistic readings of racial matters. As we seen in formal theorizing on race, this kind of methodological individualism carries with

it the very real danger of removing one's understanding from the social context in which it occurs. In many ways, LO-SET youth seem oblivious to many of the structural roots of race and racism that impact them most. Such is the case with racial disparities, where their individualist notions of racial matters are so deeply entrenched, an analysis of power relations is almost impossible.

I suggest that this shortsightedness can best be understood by linking LO-SET youths' utterances to the discursive skirmishes occurring around them. Again, while their relatively less stable prospects for incorporation matter, they are not determinative. In fact, their educational trajectory may say as much about prior experiences as they do about their future orientations. In any case, their future prospects locate them structurally in ways that seem to play out in terms of what social objects they are most attentive to, and what kinds of meanings are consistently linked to those objects.

LO-SET youth's explanations of racial disparities turn almost entirely on notions of individual responsibility and black cultural deficiencies. Their talk seems to echo the concerns of black elites and elders concerned with folk devils – deviant youth – who may cost black Americans their hard earned freedoms by confirming the worst about blacks' latent cultural backwardness. LO-SET youths' definition of racism as a personal affliction reinforces their tendency toward self-criticism. Similar to HI-SET youth, having such an extreme stance on racism and black culture likely allows them to more easily navigate their schooling environment by providing a way to make sense of their own limited interracial experiences with teachers and administrators.

Finally, LO-SET youth interpret the city and its leadership as prime examples of squandered opportunities. They are not so concerned with having blown the opportunity to govern the city in a new way, as they are with the repeated scandals that provide further proof to the public that black Americans seem incapable of making prudent choices, no matter their station in life.

Abstract Liberalism in LO-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparity

Abstract liberalism has a very strong influence over the ways in which LO-SET youth explain racial disparities. This colorblind frame shows up in two interrelated ways. Freedom and opportunity are always presumed, though very little pragmatic discussion is given to either of these ideas. And there is a strong endorsement of the centrality of personal responsibility and individual choice, though again, this endorsement does not come with an involved discussion of what responsibility and good choices look like proactively. Also, little attention is given to the racial bent of the availability of opportunity and the exercise of freedom. Similarly, little critique is made of the processes by which social goods are deemed valuable and distributed. I do not suggest that by ignoring these latter aspects of abstract liberalism that LO-SET youth would presume a level playing field; rather, their inattention to these aspects of abstract liberalism is ideologically expedient. It allows for streamlined interpretations of the social structure by only engaging aspects of the dominant ideological frame that are most pertinent to LO-SET youths' daily routines and to the discursive accomplishments they are working toward.

I want to suggest that in explaining the role of colorblind frames in LO-SET youths explanations of racial disparities, it is helpful to think of abstract liberalism as a backdrop against which other dominant and alternative frames operate. That is, in order for LO-SET youths' claims regarding culture and personal responsibility to ring true and provide direction for them on a daily basis, there must be some acceptance that the freedom to choose exists and that opportunities are available for those who choose well. This allows LO-SET youth to assert a limited but effective model of personally responsible decision-making – a model of not making bad choices. When LO-SET youth explain racial disparities, they affirm the existence of freedom, and assert that by avoiding certain negative behaviors, they are meeting the requisite personal responsibility obligations.

The passage opening the section on LO-SET youth captures this movement. Black Americans are accused of working against success, which presupposes it is there in the first place. The speaker's impassioned posture regarding success as the "enemy of blacks" signals the tangibility of success. It must really be out there, and black Americans must be working real hard to steer clear of it. Similarly, the next speaker's admonition that black youth "really need to step up as far as getting our lives together...like we already did with the president" signals the real possibility of making these things happen, despite the lack of substance in these curt and oversimplified directives. Again and again, LO-SET youth communicate implicitly that success is there for the taking. They draw heavily upon the colorblind frames of biologization of culture, minimization of racism, and naturalization of racial matters to explain why this does not happen.

Naturalization/Biologization in LO-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

In discussing how racial disparities are maintained, LO-SET youths' talk is riddled with articulations of the biologization of culture frame, which works in tandem with the naturalization of racial matters frame (though the latter is less prevalent). The line is thin between the two, but the function tends to be the same. Again, in that opening passage, "Blacks make it so hard to succeed" smacks of a latent naturalization, while explaining this occurrence as a choice based on a worldview, e.g., that mediocrity is "an easy way out" steps, more clearly into the biologization zone. The impact is the same – to emphasize black American's lack of initiative in grasping success, if not adopting cultural orientations that push success away.

The passage on black Americans' pursuit of "the cool" goes even further in locating black missteps in the cultural and psychological make up. In a move that falls squarely in the biologization frame, the speaker talks about black Americans' need to portray a certain image to themselves and to others. Moreover, in doing so, black Americans create distractions from the more important things in life, like "getting their lives together". From there it is a small step toward cataloging and criticizing a number of stereotypical cultural traits, orientations, and behaviors. All of these reactions reflect articulations of the biologization frame, often in the same terms that might be uttered by whites.

The final passage provides a fine example of the use of the naturalization frame among LO-SET youth. In this instance, it is used to assert a definition of racism that universalizes the tendency to judge people who are different. As the speaker suggests,

this is something that both black and white Americans can be guilty of, exacerbating our perceived differences, reinforcing our actual differences, and undermining our ability to recognize one another as equals in the truest sense. In addition to helping prop up a very specific multiculturalist project, this naturalization logic serves to further undermine the implication of racism in the perpetuation of racial disparities.

Minimization in LO-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

The minimization frame is evidenced in a number of ways in LO-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities. In passages like the one introducing this section, and other passages that asked directly about mechanisms of persistent disparities, racism and discrimination were simply omitted, as the interviewee focused on issues of personal responsibility. When another speaker describes racism as "stupid, just plain stupid", it is implied that racism is not only an individual characteristic, but it is characteristic of the most stupid and irrational individuals, requiring no further exploration, and eliminating it as a serious element of LO-SET youths' discussions of racial disparities. And just as racism is whittled down to a trait of incredibly stupid people, it is likewise reduced to a matter of not liking someone due to fear of the unfamiliar. The solution lies in overcoming the fear, which means confronting the fear, which in turn simply requires us to look beyond those unfamiliar differences that inspire fear. It is this very logic, lodged in the minimization frame, which allows LO-SET youth to cite as causes of racism the very social conditions (segregation, urban blight, urban crime, etc) that are produced by structural racism.

Explaining Abstract Liberalism, Naturalization/Biologization, and Minimization in LO-SET Youths' Explanations of Racial Disparities

Because of the convergence of colorblind frames in LO-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities, I consider how the multilevel ideological context in which they are enmeshed can be understood as providing the discursive landscape on which these articulations are worked out. I suggest that the intersection of educational trajectory, school-based educational rhetoric, knowledge derived from local experience, local and national discourses on segregation, and exposure to dominant frames create discursive conditions that shape the kinds of utterances LO-SET youth express in their explanations of racial disparities. Ultimately, LO-SET youths' articulations emerge as a result of ideological needs and goals specific to their social and ideological locations.

Again, educational trajectory, by fashioning a course for LO-SET youths' immediate futures play a significant role in how they explain racial disparities. Oddly, it is not the instrumental value of their educational trajectory that matters here, but its expressive worth. In light of the dearth of concrete discussion around why and how to navigate systems of individual mobility and stratification, I suggest that academic success they had attained was primarily valuable for them as a tangible sign that they had refuted the most scathing public criticisms they had received as black Detroit-based youth – they were not high school drop outs, they were going on to post-secondary education, they didn't think getting an education was for white kids only, and they recognized the link between getting an education and being positioned to rebuild the city. In considering the impact of educational trajectory and rhetoric for LO-SET youth, they had not attained the kind of success that would elicit the kind of investment we see from HI-SET youth, but

they also had outdone many of their Detroit Public School counterparts as well as the swaths of Detroit youth predicted to drop out at some point in the school year. In the context of the Detroit's ongoing discourse on the failures of education, these youth had good reason to interpret their positions favorably. They symbolized a partial truth of abstract liberalism, even if they lacked a concrete sense of what it meant to have freedom of choice and opportunities to choose.

However, realizing those freedoms turned on showing awareness and promoting the virtues of personal responsibility. By relying on the biologization and naturalization frames, LO-SET youth were able to articulate, reinforce, and critique an image of black youth culture. In doing so, they simultaneously identified with, and dissociated from a homogeneous mass of irresponsible black youth. In this way one can earn partial credit for knowing what not to do, even in cases where it is not so clear what to do. That is, a proactive stance on how to capitalize on the freedoms that purportedly exist takes a backseat to the more immediately tangible strategy of positioning oneself against a local and national public discourse that has largely discounted an entire generation of Detroit youth.

Finally, minimization is employed to keep the paths to racial progress and individual mobility open to the exercise of individual effort (in avoiding negative choices if not pursuing specific opportunities) and to allow for a form of racism that is so plastic, it does not warrant serious attention. Instead, attention can be turned to those things more closely under one's personal control.

Conclusion

In the above sections I have established the (folk) devil inside alternative frame as a means of capturing the ideological work undergirding and articulated in LO-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities. All four colorblind frames shaped this framing belief, but appear in ways not only different than how they appear among HI-SET youth, but also in ways distinct from their discussions of racial oppression. Their heavy reliance on naturalizing and biologizing logics, and on weak forms of abstract liberalism and minimization lead LO-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities to look very similar to what we might expect from whites. There is an abiding focus on the significance of individual responsibility and personal choice, on the minimal importance of racial discrimination in perpetuating racial disparities, and on the cultural deficiencies that provide a framework for the poor choices of black youth. Ultimately, their views suggest an ideological need and desire to be part of the counter-discourse involving Detroit and its youth, despite a light investment in the full promise of abstract liberalism. LO-SET youth resolve this ambivalence by highlighting their awareness of what they need to move away from (for their own sakes), even if it remains unclear what they are moving toward.

CHAPTER 6

Can't Call It: Racial Stratification 3.0

In this final empirical chapter, I present side-by-side comparisons of HI- and LO-SET youths' visions for the future of America's racial hierarchy. These visions were assessed independently. That is, while notions of oppression, explanations of disparities, and ideas about what group relations can and will look like in the future are all interrelated, I do not assume that one follows in a predictable way on the other. Rather, I proceed from the assumption that each area is constituted by a relatively unique configuration of social objects and associated meanings. Definitions of racism and the limits of black agency emerge as two topical areas that are key for how HI- and LO-SET youth talk about the direction of race relations in the US.

HI-SET Youth Envision Race

HI-SET youth rely on the "just a little bit of love" framing belief in their discussions of the future of racial equality. Setting a relatively low bar, HI-SET youth indicate that a future where whites do not display outward signs of fear or hostility toward blacks would be a strong sign that whites were coming around, and that some form of equality had been gained. They believe in the potential of white parents to continue to teach their children that there is only one race – the human race; and that even though the potential for racism would always exist (as it only requires one person to

dislike another person for an arbitrary reason), there is reason to believe that through continued interracial exposure, whites would witness their common humanity with blacks. HI-SET youth also believe in the Obama example – that through hard work, dedication, and most of all education – the path toward healing interracial contact could be summarily paved.

LO-SET Youth Envision Race

Conversely, LO-SET youth embraced what I call the “ain’t no love” framing belief, whereby the racial future is one in which little change is foreseen. In fact, LO-SET youth use contemporary standards to argue that relatively little has changed – racial antipathy runs as high now as it ever did. Moreover, it is understood to be passed intergenerationally, almost genetically. And like genetic code, it is as inevitable that racism will persist. What remains is for blacks to not allow racism to define their destinies – to have them succumb to a life beneath them, nor to blindly accept the path of least resistance in order to conform to white standards of success. This is not a form of oppositional consciousness that seeks to negate a perceived set of norms and values, but an attempt to create a consciousness that recognizes itself as its own standard-bearer.

Racism is, Racism ain’t

As we have seen throughout, HI- and LO-SET youth have maintained fairly distinct if overlapping notions of what racism entails. While both groups focus on racism as an individual level phenomenon, they attribute it to differing origins, and as we will see, they imagine very different ways of mobilizing against and possibly ending racism.

This first HI-SET youth seemed surprisingly pessimistic about the future of racism. I asked him if he thought racism would ever end. He responded,

Nah. Racism can't totally go away because there can always be someone gonna not like someone else.

I posed the same question to a LO-SET male, who had slightly more to say:

Not possible. Because you have, say if we were both White. You are my father, your grand dad taught you that the Black man is just a nigger or he's nothing in this world period. He's programmed you to think that. Now since you learned from him, I'm your son, you gonna program me to think that. Once you program me to think that, I'm gonna program my kids and it's gonna keep going. So it's just like pregnancy. It's never -- it's not gone die. It's gone keep rebirthing in different ways, different generations.

In a surface sense, these responses are the same. In fact, these two young men would probably have checked the same box on a survey instrument. But the two answers convey very different orientations. The HI-SET youth's response relies upon the naturalization frame as seen in the previous chapter. His definition of racism is boiled down to not liking someone. As such, racism takes on a universalistic and probabilistic tone. Anybody can arbitrarily not like someone based on a physical characteristic, and chances are, humans being what they are, that will happen. The latter speaker is much more certain in terms of the process by which predispositions to like or not like are passed on, and he is much clearer on the fact that racism *will* be passed down – and not because of some arbitrarily sparked human default. While both responses also reflect the logic of minimization in that they reduce racism to individual affect, the latter is considerably more pessimistic and sure in its assertion.

Another LO-SET youth had responded in a similar fashion, that racism was not likely to go away in her lifetime or ever. In response to a follow up, she explained,

I was looking at YouTube, was when McCain was trying to win, it was this one White boy in this small little country White town and he had a Obama sign. Everybody wanted to beat him to death. And this lady grabbed the mic and said if Obama was to win to be the president, Blacks will take over and the world will be "F"ed up. And I was like real shocked. I'm like – and I was mad that I wasn't old enough to vote, you know. I'm old enough now to, you know, vote but I was real upset. Like this is what people think. Like it's 2009 and you would think all that type of stuff is been left behind where people is acting like that. Slavery really ain't went nowhere. You got slavery in your own-- in different type of ways. You can say slavery if you working in a job. If you locked up. I mean it can go on and on. It's just different ways of slavery, but it's covered up. Different ways of white folks running black folks.

She equated the intensity of whites' anti-black affect qua anti-Obama with the kind of hatred that must have filled the hearts of slave owners and overseers. She also offered the beginnings of a structural account of racism that was rather uncommon among LO-SET youth (in likening slavery to imprisonment). And though her sentiments still turned on a primarily affective understanding of racism, it is clear that she sees affect as a very powerful and enduring source of racism. Compare this to a HI-SET female who was responding to a question regarding the possibility of black and white Americans working together for racial equality:

They can help because everyone is not racist. Every White person you meet is not going to, you know, be like well I don't want -- to clinch their bag to their side or anything like that. So it's -- it will take both races' efforts.

In this version of affect-based racism, whites' blood does not run nearly so hot. The type of virulence indicated in the previous passage is not a part of the HI-SET youths' renderings of white people or racism. Relying on the minimization frame (e.g. racism is again equated to affect or affected behaviors like purse-clutching), with abstract liberalism lingering in the background (e.g. that not all whites are racist suggests that

political and economic freedoms exist), this passage renders a much kinder, gentler, and salvageable white than depicted in the LO-SET youth account.

This next LO-SET female expresses doubts over the eventual cessation of racism as she has real concerns about black and white Americans' abilities to accommodate one another's differences:

There could be equality, but it will take a while for equality to like, true equality to happen because it's got to be a lot of acceptance that will go on. Like different races will have to accept another races differences, including all their flaws and all the rumors that they heard about them. I just don't know if that is really possible.

This comment diverges considerably from the more humanist tone struck by many HI-SET youth. This LO-SET participant seems to hold more essentializing views of race and also puts a lot of stock into the negative imagery and affect whites may carry around regarding blacks. And though she doesn't say so directly, given the general tenor of LO-SET youths' discussions of whites and racism, and their heavy reliance upon biologization in explaining racial disparities, it is safe to assume that she is primarily concerned with whites accepting black differences and getting over the "flaws and all the rumors" black Americans (are depicted to) have. In what can be characterized as an example of naturalizing and biologizing talk, she paints both black and white Americans with broad essentializing strokes, implying the deep entrenchment of prejudice attitudes in the latter.

In addition to holding more essentialist views of racial differences between groups, LO-SET youths' attributions for whites' anti-black affect characterize whites as naturally aversive.

For some reason I think it's just in they heart, like they just look at us differently. But I think it's just something in they heart that just say bad stuff like about us to think and feel bad stuff about Black people just because of their heritage and like where they come from and how they viewed us as. I mean they didn't view us no more than the dirt that laid on the ground or whatever, and I think it's just something in they heart.

This final passage is representative of LO-SET youths' extremely individualist readings of race and racism, and their overarching concern with white anti-black affect as the core of an enduring racial hierarchy.

For HI-SET youth, white affect is also central, but they see whites as far more corrigible. The root of white anti-black affect is ignorance and fear of the unfamiliar, both of which can be addressed through education. Sharing a story about a church trip where she found some of the white girls to be friendly, and others not so much, a HI-SET female stated,

It was like their parents taught 'em it doesn't matter what skin you are. It doesn't matter the color of your skin, your race or religion. You're still a person at the end of the day.

And this HI-SET males' idea on how to fix racism equally displays faith in whites' abilities to change:

If it was possible, I would try to pair a Black person up with a White person and, you know, just see each other's lives. I want to put them with a person who lives like in a poverty area with a White person, put 'em together and show them what life is about, show 'em they're just alike, you know. They have feelings, you know, yeah. And show 'em how, yeah, I want -- something like that.

This last example speaks to the core of HI-SET youth's understandings of race and racism. Like LO-SET youth, the energy of racism is stored in an abiding anti-black affect held by individual whites. While LO-SET youth see this energy as part of the psychological make up of the vast majority of whites, HI-SET youth tend to see this

energy as sparked by fear – fear of threats to privilege and of surface appearances of difference. Accordingly, in a naturalizing and race minimizing move, HI-SET youth can envision whites growing out of those fears by confronting them, learning that the differences whites perceive are not so deep or frightful as they suspect. In a final example of this aspect of the “just a little bit of love” framing belief, this HI-SET male offers a popular solution to America’s race problems:

Talk. That's what we need to do. We need to communicate. That's what it is. It's communicating. It's a communication barrier between Blacks and Whites. We need to just talk, understand each other. Get locked in a room with each other for one day and everybody just talk. Every person individually, every person just locked up somewhere, talk.

Dealing with Racism

Accordingly, HI-SET youth’s strategies for affecting racial change feature ways to minimize apparent differences and reinforce similarities. Drawing on the logics of abstract liberalism, HI-SET youth propose a kind of “three-for” approach, where the pursuit of mainstream ends using approved normative means by black Americans en masse accomplishes collective uplift, individual mobility, and a narrowing of black-white differences in living conditions and worldviews. One HI-SET youth offered,

To deal with racism, deal with the view of racism; take care of business. Go to school. Get your education. Prove 'em wrong. Because if you're on financial aid or if you getting aid from the state all of your life and you just didn't choose to get a job, you're proving them right. You're proving the stereotype right that Blacks are lazy and they don't want to work and they don't want to do anything.

Notable is the equating of racism with a view that black Americans are not taking care of their business. In a biologizing move, she suggests that black Americans are choosing not

to get to jobs, instead settling to receive aid from the state. If racism inheres in whites holding on to these kinds of negative stereotypes of black Americans, then whites are right to be racist.

Fortunately, there are ways to effectively “deal with the view of racism”. One HI-SET male describes how the election of Barack Obama is illustrative of this path:

So I think it [Obama’s election] really means a lot. It shows that race really isn't a big thing too much anymore. When it comes to hard work and dedication, you can achieve anything that you want because becoming a president is a big achievement. So, yeah, really shows that hard work does pay off. And, you know, like, anybody can do it. Just be respectable and carry yourself the correct way and it can happen.

Implicit in this commentary is that Obama establishes in a concrete and most visible of ways that black Americans are capable of “hard work and dedication”, being “respectable” and carrying themselves in “the correct way” – that is, a socially approved mainstream, familiar and non-threatening way.

This model of racial reconciliation sits well with the individualistic ethos underlying abstract liberalism. While HI-SET youth are consistent in their sense of racial uplift, their immediate strategies to deal with race depend upon the pursuit of individual mobility first. A HI-SET male responded with the following to my question regarding collective versus individual approaches to resolving racial conflicts in the US:

It's nothing really you can do 'cause one person can't really fix a worldwide thing. I can probably do it in my community and if I somehow got out there I could do it for my, around my state. You have to just -- you just have to start getting other people with you but, you know, a lot of people just don't want to really want to come together for causes like that.

Interestingly, his response is deeply ensconced in a strong charismatic leadership model of change. Collective action is equated with a mass of people following the leadership of

an individual or cadre of individuals who have the ability to persuade others to join an otherwise unappealing cause. Assuming “it” and “causes like that” were synonymous, I asked for further elaboration:

I would start more small businesses. Like now, all the little stores, like party stores, gas stations; most of those are Arabs. And we don't end up benefitting from those really. Like once in a while they might hire one of us, just to, it looks good, but that's money we could be making right where we live at. If we could start to build our money, and then like, maybe get more funding into helping out our schools more; getting them extra, the things they need. We could do things like that, like how the other groups stick together and then they get respected. We could make our money, keep getting our education, like anyone else.

He espouses an immigrant model of assimilation (with or without acculturation, which also interestingly does not seem to be a concern at all), where, like Arabic peoples, ethnic enclaves emerge to provide services either to their own ethnic communities or to other communities in a middleman minority role. Such ethnic communities build the economic capital to them be taken seriously in their socio-political endeavors. In addition to subscribing to the abstract liberal logics in which the immigrant narrative is embedded, this participant evinces the type of race-immigrant equivalence that has been promoted in mainstream accounts of America's founding and growth. Race theorists (Omi and Winant 1994) and educational practitioners alike (Grant 2011) have suggested the ill effects of teaching black American youth to obscure the differences in racial and ethnic dynamics in the US. Evidence of such obfuscation is prominent in HI-SET youths' strategies to deal with racism.

In an inversion reminiscent of the political right's attacks on affirmative action under the stewardship of Ward Connerly and others, one HI-SET female described the need for a collective approach to America's race problems with the following:

No, you can't have one person change the world. You make it seem like Martin Luther King changed the whole thing. He had people behind him. He couldn't walk down the streets of Alabama by himself; he would have got killed. So we as people, as Black people, need to come together and make changes, not argue, not try beat one another out and just do it just to help out the cause, not so you can get ahead but to actually do something to help the people.

And as to the goal of black Americans coming together to make changes:

Like buying from Black companies, that would make sense to, you know, you helping your own out, but instead of robbing the store that they own.

Similar to the biologization/abstract liberalism-based logic of HI-SET youths' explanations of racial disparities, this strategy of collective advance takes a do no harm approach first. That is, it promotes a "don't do the bad stuff to one another that we are typically perceived of as doing" approach and applies it to black Americans en masse. It reduces King's success to a matter of numbers. Positive racial change is a matter of incorporating large and growing numbers of black Americans into the mainstream economy, and perhaps developing some form of black capitalism.

HI-SET youth are not alone in advocating individual mobility as a means of ameliorating racial problems in the US. But notably absent is the linking of such individual successes to a logic of wooing white support and destabilizing the grounds of whites' anti-black affect. This LO-SET male utilizes the "ain't no love" framing belief – a frame not predicated on notions of white corrigibility – to present an interesting twist on the abstract liberal logic underlying the pursuit of individual mobility. This male has

entrepreneurial inclinations, steeped in notions of autonomy and self-direction. He is slightly more ambitious than the typical LO-SET youth (i.e. he not only spoke about these future aspirations in rather concrete ways, but had also started to conduct market research and develop a business plan), but his articulation of the link between individual mobility, collective advance, and changing racial relations captures the sentiments conveyed in the LO-SET interviews as a whole.

Personally, I'm willing to go that extra step to be successful. I realize how much I want to be successful and I realize the steps that I have to take. And I realize the correlation between the two. I'm gonna have to do above and beyond to get where I want to go. I know a lot of people have certain goals and aspirations, and then they look at the way things are, and they try to alter their goals to fit in the way things are, and then usually what you end up alternating to is not really what you want, so I think seeing what I want to be, knowing where I want to go, and then saying instead of changing me, let me change the avenue I'm on, so I can achieve this in my lifetime. That's what life is really all about. Knowing what you want, why it's important, and doing it. So I can still get what I want, but I just have to change my method to fit this society we live in.

I maintain that this narrative of individual attainment differs in significant ways from the standard HI-SET narrative. Moreover, these differences reflect modifications of common cultural resources (e.g. abstract liberal frames) in ways that reflect and have substantial implications for differing perspectives on the future of American race relations.

His assertion of “an extra step” refers to the fact that, compared to going to school to “just get a job”, his intent was to use his education to pursue a career that would allow him to be comfortable but also to do something he really enjoys. For him, this dual pursuit offered a kind of opposition to what he (and the bulk of LO-SET youth) perceived of as whites’ desires to see black Americans kept in their place. He acknowledges that his goal pushes the boundaries of what is perceived of as OK for black Americans, and so he

anticipates even greater resistance to his attempts to succeed because, as he sees it, where he wants to go does not fall neatly within whites' comfort zone. He sees his major challenge as not accepting society's version of black American success, but envisioning and crafting his own.

Again, the LO-SET male above was atypical of any of the youth in the either group in terms of his ambitions, but his sentiments reflected the more consciously collectively oriented communalistic thought behind individualistic aspirations. Again this difference is significant for how LO-SET youth construct the racial future and with it, plans for their future endeavors. This LO-SET female was responding to a question about how she might deal with racism. She immediately articulates concerns with her career trajectory, but her response does not carry the same "individual success as buffer against racist assumptions" as is present in the HI-SET narratives above. Instead, I suggest that her words articulate a fundamentally distinct use of abstract liberalism within the framing belief "ain't no love".

I'm not comfortable enough with just a job. So I want to have a career and so I like, try to associate -- not like I dislike my own family but, you know, the ones that have succeeded in life. I try to communicate with them about like different things and get like they advice on a lot of things. Because I know coming up they went through the same thing and worse and I'm walking the same shoes that they was in. I am trying to get to where they at, if not better so. If I can do that like they did and pass it on, we'll all get it together.

Again, I have not tried to argue that LO-SET youth are unconcerned with mobility options, but only that the social objects that are at the front of their consciousness as it were, have typically focused on other than purely economic interests. The same thing is apparent here. Even with the unexpected turn to the "career versus job" discussion in the

context of a question about racism, the underlying sense of the import of autonomy as central to constructions of current and future race relations is distinctive.

In a similar vein, this LO-SET male highlights the communal nature of success and emphasizes that enacting models of success ultimately creates paths for future generations of black youth. This goal supersedes any impetus to gain incorporation into the American mainstream or to put whites at ease by accepting normative definitions of success. I should emphasize, this is not to suggest that HI-SET youth have no communalistic leanings; they do and I illustrate as much elsewhere. But as points of relevance in how youth across the sample articulate understandings of particular aspects of racial stratification, these subtle differences carry potentially significant ramifications for future-oriented thought and action. The emphasis in the following LO-SET males' comment suggests a distinctive role for individual mobility in the evolution of the racial hierarchy. In explaining the most effective route for the American racial structure to become more equal, he focuses on black Americans, asserting they must,

improve themselves. Because if I was around you and you were around my age, and I was doing bad things and you were doing good things, and I saw that you, me and you from the hood, but I see that you don't act like everybody else, you trying to elevate yourself to be better than, you know, other people, I would try to be like you. Because if you are in a mentality of saying "you know what; I'm about to get this job that everybody want because I done took time to, you know, basically get to that point", I'm gonna try to get to that point, too. Because I don't want to be left behind.

Here is an intriguing use of competitive motivation that reverses the common knowledge regarding peer influence among black youth.¹⁴ Abstract liberal logics are bent to forge a

¹⁴ (See Steinberg and Morris 2001 and Dornbusch 1989 for discussions of positive peer influence).

kind of “social reform liberalism” (Bonilla-Silva 2010, pp. 280) – a move I assert is made possible by the reliance upon the designated “aint’ no love” framing belief.

Another LO-SET male approached dealing with racism from the angle of the pervasiveness of negative black imagery (similar to the HI-SET female’s “dealing with the view of racism” above). Notable is his emphasis on an internal sense of accomplishment.

What it is -- because if you don't -- because if you don't or whatever, they are gonna keep on doing it because they are assuming that you don't care. They are assuming that you think it's true because you are not saying anything about it. You're not letting your voice be heard. So they are assuming that everything that they are saying must be true 'cause you are not trying to fight against it. And you are not proving them wrong either or at least trying to prove them wrong. That those things they assume are not true. We need to show that we are better than that.

Like HI-SET youth concerned with negative images of blacks and anti-white affect, this LO-SET male articulates responsiveness to this aspect of racial conflict and hierarchy. I suggest that his words express an orientation to the racial hierarchy that is more than merely non-assimilative in nature (as compared to one potential reading of HI-SET youths’ orientations). Their orientation suggests strands of a tempered black economic nationalism along with a modern black cultural nationalism. That is, fighting against negative portrayals entails not engaging in certain self-destructive behaviors, and also taking advantage of the freedoms and opportunities which do exist and which afford black youth some hope of improving their individual and collective lots. However, these acts, which would coincidentally produce economic benefits, do not center upon or

require a particular black identity.¹⁵ Instead, the “ain’t no love” frame provides an adequate cultural grounding rooted in abstract liberal logics. I offer this way of describing the ideological articulations of LO-SET youth to highlight the inadequacy of some common labels to make sense of black youth orientations today.

I provide one more example of the subtly distinctive ways in which HI- and LO-SET youth locate this issue of anti-black affect and imagery in dealing with racism. This LO-SET female was describing what black progress would look like in the future; how we would know the racial hierarchy was changing. Notable is the lack of direct emphasis on labor market position, wealth, and the like. Her comments reflect concern with those things, but as a point of reference, she does not highlight those things in the same way; when she glosses over them, her attention does not turn there for the same reasons as we see with HI-SET youth.

I think that you – when you are actually doing something to get ahead – when you show that will, and that you’re trying to do something, and when you accomplishing something, that you’re progressing in your life and your education and you’re doing bigger things as you go along. I think that’s your way of actually proving – actually, I don’t think you have to prove yourself to anyone, to say, “I’m better”.

I suggest that an important distinction should be made between proving yourself to someone else versus proving yourself to yourself; and I believe LO-SET youth are clearly engaged in the latter. In other words, while HI-SET youth convey the need to prove that they are more like whites than whites are willing to give them credit for, LO-SET youth convey that they are better than whites think they are; the latter recognizes a dominant

¹⁵ This does not result in a raceless persona (Fordham 1988), but one where success is conceptualized as race-neutral (Carter, D. 2009), and can be pursued for racially motivated reasons.

scale of evaluation, and locates themselves beyond that metric, while the former recognizes and aims to land within that metric's bounds. Again, this is a subtle distinction that is made bolder when we turn to an explanation of how and why HI- and LO-SET youth develop the "just a little bit of love" and "ain't no love" framing beliefs, respectively, and locate these alternative ideological formations alongside articulations of America's dominant colorblind frames.

What's love got to do with it: Explaining Ideological Divergence Among HI- and LO-SET Youth

HI- and LO-SET framing beliefs regarding the future of America's racial alignment center racism (and by proxy the nature of whites), and the scope and limits of black Americans' agency or ability to effect racial hierarchy through their own initiatives. Both groups use mediated versions of colorblind frames, sometimes the same frames, but to different extents, in different ways, and toward different ends. While a full-scale exploration of the structural-interactional antecedents of their interpretive practices is beyond the scope of this study, I do retain a number of structural and ideological factors that help explain why and how dominant frames were articulated as they were.

Specifically, I focus on student educational trajectory (SET) as a means of inferring orientations to mainstream institutions. Accordingly, HI-SET youth are thought to be more incorporated and therefore more susceptible to the direct influence of hegemonic ideological positions, whereas LO-SET youth are potentially less susceptible to dominant ideological frames as their social location, expressed by post-secondary

plans, signals lower expectations and therefore potentially lower investments in hegemonic beliefs.

SET is not posed as an individual level predictor of ideological stances, but is intended to suggest the prominence of this transitional lens as a prism through which these youth make sense of and fashion discursive responses to broad discourses (e.g. globalization) and local public discourses (e.g. the failure of public education). That is, educational trajectory and the structural relations and immediate experiences they engender (which admittedly are explored in a limited way given the focus on interview-based data to map out their thoughts rather than on ethnographic data that would allow for an even clearer grounding of these ideas in interaction) influence interpretations of these multiple discourses. These interpretations reflect and reinforce interpretations of their immediate contexts and experiences.

Among these discursive foci are the stigmatized images of the city, its recent history as a majority black-run city, its tense relations with its suburban rings, and the failure of Detroit public schools. Again, as these youth interpret these immediate issues in light of broader discourses, the influence of dominant ideologies (and emergent alternative frames) becomes clearer, allowing for an analysis focused on the nuances in how differentially located social groups (even those who share major markers of social categorization such as race, age/generation, class, geography, and educational experience) exhibit considerable ideological heterogeneity.

The “just a little bit of love” framing belief leads HI-SET youth to articulate versions of racism where it is omnipresent yet unstable, highly durable yet given to

change and even eradication; accordingly, black Americans appear as highly capable of effecting change in racial dynamics. Moreover, there is a clear emphasis on turning this potential into action; black Americans should be committed to doing what they can to exploit the fluid nature of racism.

This HI-SET framing belief is greatly influenced by the frames of colorblind racism. Abstract liberalism functions as a consistent backdrop, its emphasis on the existence of individual freedoms and attendant insistence of individual responsibility, and its assurance of equal opportunity being available to all who want it, allowing HI-SET youth to maintain fairly optimistic views of racism (and white people) and a rigid belief in black Americans' capabilities to adopt the behavior and outlooks that would minimize white racial antipathies. The logics of biologization and naturalization are also heavily present. Taken together, they serve to define specific roles and scripts for black and white Americans alike. The latter are understood to maintain irrational fears of the former. The former are presented as predisposed to act in ways that arouse those fears. Minimization is used to relegate racism to an individual attitude, and reinforce the notion that black agency can interrupt whites' formations of such attitudes.

Conversely, through the "ain't no love" framing belief, LO-SET youth articulate a version of racism that is stable, enduring, and highly pliable. Racism, which inheres in anti-black affect and the holding of negative and stereotypical views of black Americans, varies over time mainly in how whites are able to act on their negative views; the virulence of the ideas remains. Black Americans have a great deal of agency, but to direct it toward ameliorating racism (creating a fundamental change in whites' predispositions)

is a futile undertaking. Ignoring racism is not an option, however; it is best addressed by pursuing mainstream pursuits only to the extent that it creates greater latitude to exercise one's limited freedoms in the service of individual autonomy. At the collective level, such autonomy would rid black Americans of needing to be concerned with the attitudes and predispositions of whites.

Colorblind frames make their way into LO-SET youths' logics, in ways both dramatically and subtly different than in the case of HI-SET youth. Abstract liberalism has a limited influence, as LO-SET youth do maintain a belief that opportunity is available – a belief that fosters adherence to mainstream processes of individual mobility that is committed to the attainment of an individual freedom that centers black autonomy. LO-SET youths' articulations of biologization and naturalization present whites as predisposed toward prejudicial sentiments against black Americans, while painting black Americans as predisposed toward a “slave mentality”, whereby they act in self-defeating ways. And reinforcing the naturalizing and biologizing tendency above, minimization is reflected in the positing of an autonomic black dislike response in whites, reducing racism to a fundamentally individual level phenomena, and reinforcing the charge toward autonomy; that is, taking the view that racism is an individual level expression, the appropriate response and outcome is the elevation of individual autonomy which de-emphasizes the need for structural change.

These framing beliefs reflect differences in the impact of converging cultural knowledges, at least partially situated in and mediated by student educational trajectory. That is, the ways in which members of either group modify dominant colorblind frames

are structured by the role of social location (e.g. student educational trajectory) in shaping and reinforcing particularistic interpretations of immediate experiences, local public discourses, and larger society-wide discourses.

HI- and LO-SET youth describe different immediate experiences involving race and racism. My analysis is less concerned with the accuracy of the accounts of these experiences than with the cultural resources these accounts reveal as relevant to how these youth make meaning of race-related issues. In the retelling of these experiences, the participants provide evidence of how colorblind frames shape their current articulations, as well as the interpretive scheme that may have been in place during the event. (Again, the latter proposition is interesting but not necessary to substantiate in this analysis).

Compared to LO-SET youth, HI-SET youth shared more accounts that featured first-hand interracial experiences. The early racial awareness accounts typically included a white authority figure presenting an obstacle to some social resource or reward. Subsequent accounts similarly located whites in a gate-keeping role bent on preserving competitive advantages. These experiences were not always all bad, as they frequently ended in overcoming the obstacle, recognizing the obstacle and making an affirmation as to how they dealt/will deal with similar rubs in the future, and in some cases seeing whites change and/or show the capacity for change.

The experiences that have led HI-SET youth to their relatively more secure post-secondary paths engender experiences with whites that reinforce their renderings of prior experiences (and of whites). They value the opportunities that attendance at Urban Prep has given them to move in white spaces; many of them see such exposure as a necessity.

They welcome chances to “see what’s different with whites” - to learn how to work with them as they see such interracial cooperation as integral to their immediate and long-term educational and career goals. And many of them have cultivated interracial friendships where racial sensitivity is an “out” topic – that is, they see themselves as working through the very ameliorative processes that abstract liberal logics posit as part and parcel of a free democratic society. These logics, as seen above, are supported by minimizing strategies that reduce racism to a relatively flexible individual attitude, and naturalizing and biologizing framings of racial fear as common to the human experience.

Conversely, LO-SET youth had fewer accounts featuring first-hand experiences with whites. The few they had, most often recounted as part of their emerging racial awareness, were overwhelmingly negative. The whites in their accounts possessed an inordinate capriciousness, were aversive, and held stingingly negative conceptions of black Americans (as perceived by the LO-SET youth). Notably, the connections between privilege and white and treatment of black Americans is not nearly as explicit in LO-SET youth accounts; they do not attribute white antipathy to protecting group privileges. In fact, in most cases they forego expressing any guess at what motivates whites, often implying that whites’ racial orientations are simply part of being of white. The articulations of these experiences reveal the influence of naturalizing and minimizing frames, which guide ongoing interpretations, even if they were not in force at the time of the event recounted.

The rigidity of whites’ antipathies is evidenced in accounts that repeatedly suggest that no matter black Americans’ accomplishments, shaking the pervasive stigma

associated with black culture remains an impossibility. Despite their relative academic success and their self-evident interest in academic achievement, they find themselves in spaces where their commitments and abilities are questioned if not denied. They emphasize the same in the experience of Barack Obama; that whites can harbor the sentiments they do, and express them in ways that are formative parts of the LO-SET youth experience, severely undermines expectations of racial progress.

Paradoxically, LO-SET youth harbor many of the same sentiments regarding black Americans' shortcomings. The state of the city is largely the fault of black elected officials and administrators not "taking care of business"; the deteriorating local economic scene results from a lack of black American business initiatives; lowered academic output is due to faulty prioritizing and decision-making on the part of individual students. Steeped in a first and second hand set of experiences that they interpret as "not getting our lives together", they develop a modified version of abstract liberalism that bolsters their vision of individual and collective autonomy.

There were also significant differences in how HI- and LO-SET youth evaluated historical, contemporary and personal discriminatory experiences. The slights HI-SET youth experience are interpreted as "nothing compared to back then". Because of the images they have of the injustices experienced by earlier generations of black Americans, they see their contemporary sufferings as racism on its last legs. As suggested above, LO-SET youth see similar slights as indicative of the staying power of racism; it is almost inconceivable that people could hold and act on the same racist attitudes in 2009 as they did in 1809. Racism dying is even less conceivable.

While LO-SET youth interpret broader discourses through the lens of indomitable white racism where black American dignity is anathema to American life, HI-SET youth locate themselves more squarely in world of globalizing competitive relations. They see themselves as perceived as threats; not only do they want to encroach on whites' privileges, but far worse, they are perceived as undeserving competitors. They mold their experiences to demonstrate that they are only interested in getting a fair slice of the pie. LO-SET youth function under the assumption that mainstream tools are better put toward baking a better pie.

Conclusion

Visions of the future of racial stratification, as should be expected, are formed largely in relation to ideas regarding the nature of whites and conceptions of racism. We see that the youth in both subsamples rely upon colorblind frames to articulate their notions of America's racial future. However, dominant ideological frames are necessarily filtered through extant and developing local interpretive devices, which reflect, express, and shape social locations. The divergent modes of seeing and imaging how to deal with obstacles to racial equality displayed through HI- and LO-SET youths' talk provide evidence of this multilevel recursive process. Moreover, they reveal the possibilities for considerable ideological heterogeneity within largely similar structural relations. The future of race relations cannot be mapped without considering the complex topography of the views of black urban youth.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion and Conclusion

The Contours of Black Youth Colorblindness

The use of the frame concept to analyze how this sample of black youth discussed racial stratification allowed me to highlight patterns in the selection and definition of the social objects (including processes) that were most prominent in constructions of three dimensions of racial stratification views. Frames are understood to highlight some features of the social landscape, and consequently to downplay others. Additionally, frames condition the meanings associated with these objects by providing an assumptive link between objects; this link signals the ideological work being accomplished through the communicative act.

Racial stratification was conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of understandings of racial oppression, explanations of racial disparities, and visions of the racial hierarchy. Accordingly, the analysis focused on revealing the social objects, associated meanings, and assumptive links operative across each of the three areas. By approaching interview talk in this way, I was also able to assess the extent to which colorblind racial frames were articulated across each of the three areas.

The framing beliefs that I identify reflect the convergence of colorblind frames as well as socio-historically embedded counter-ideological frames (such as those outlined by

Dawson 2001), as they are mediated and refracted by immediate experiences and local knowledges. Frames can be analyzed to reveal prominent object-meaning pairings, assumptive links across objects, and the extent to which colorblind frames influence the ways in which these youth construct and articulate racial stratification.

In the course of the analysis, differences in the types of social objects emphasized across accounts revealed the impact of student educational trajectory (SET). That is, there were differences in the objects discussed in their interview talk, depending upon which of two post-secondary educational paths the students were on. (HI-SET youth had plans to attend a 4-year university, while LO-SET youth expected to attend 2-year schools or pursue professional licensing). Moreover, patterns emerged in terms of how the different objects featured within either group were linked together. The identified framing belief served as a shorthand to define those assumptive links from the point of view of the actors. (There were no gender-differences in the types of objects students featured in their accounts).

HI-SET youth relied upon the “unfair barriers to economic parity”, “it’s racism, but”, and “just a little bit of love” framing beliefs to articulate understandings of oppression, explanations of racial disparities, and visions of racial (in)equality respectively. All four of the posited frames of colorblind racism were heavily influential in the ways in which HI-SET youth discussed racial stratification. The configuration of objects and their linking together in a distinct meaning system revealed that notions of competitive relations with whites, particularly in the labor market, were the topical bases for HI-SET youths’ articulations of racial stratification.

LO-SET youth articulated the framings beliefs “assumed inferiority”, “the (folk) devil inside” and “ain’t no love” in their constructions of racial oppression, explanations of racial disparities, and visions of the racial hierarchy, respectively. Most prominent in LO-SET youths’ discussions of stratification was the overwhelmingly pervasive nature of negative portrayals of black Americans. Again, all four colorblind frames were influential in the ideological formations of LO-SET youth. How they converged through the particular linking assumptions revealed across each dimension of stratification views produced a unique set of groundings assumptions. While LO- and HI-SET youth shared a number of topical concerns, stigma played a central role in how those other concerns were configured.

Colorblind Frames in HI-SET Youths’ Talk on Racial Stratification

One pillar in HI-SET youths’ constructions of racial stratification is the ambiguity of racism. That is, their tendency to develop conflicting understandings of racism reverberated through their meaning making process. The confusion over racism resulted in a major disjunction between the existence of racism and its role in a racially unjust society. Their unique set of conceptions of racism, and the links between these conceptions and the selection and interpretation of other social objects that constitute constructions of racial stratification rely upon varying configurations of colorblind frames.

In talk that defined the bases and contours of racial oppression, racism is characteristically ambiguous, especially compared to class-based discrimination, which for this group of low-income black youth is straightforward and easily assessed. A

combination of abstract liberalism and minimization is firmly implicated by both the emphasis on class-based distinctions and the de-emphasis of racial dynamics. Abstract liberalism is evident in their belief that the US offers and protects political and economic freedoms, which individuals are obliged to exercise in the pursuit of opportunity. And even though HI-SET youth recognize that black Americans' freedoms are not always equally protected, and that therefore they cannot always expect to avail themselves of opportunity in the same way as whites, the minimization frame acts to quell this criticism. The belief that racism does not shape black life as it did years ago reinforces the abstract liberal vision of an America defined by its promise of opportunity.

The combined influence of abstract liberalism and minimization gives stigma secondary importance – it is significant only to the extent that it produces competitive disadvantages. HI-SET youth focus on earned redistribution, so when they discuss stigma or relay experiences where stigma stands out, some form of competitive motivation is attributed to the white offender. Similarly, HI-SET youth equate individual mobility through normative means with an affirmation of their belief in American freedom and opportunity. By refuting negative stereotypes and stigmatizing images of black Americans through their actions, they demonstrate their commitment to the nation's egalitarian principles.

In a seeming paradox, HI-SET youths' interview talk on explaining racial disparities returns to those very stigmatized images, and asserts that many of them are true. Combining abstract liberalism with biologization, HI-SET youth suggest that even while racism exists, it only offers a partial explanation of the persistence of racial

disparities. A large chunk of it can be explained via black youths' cultural deficiencies. And abstract liberalism and minimization combine again to produce a debilitating cocktail of hegemonic belief based in contradictory views of racism and the attendant complications in linking it to racial disparities.

In explaining racial disparities, racism is pitted against individual responsibility. Conceptions of the former range from a powerful socio-historical product to an ever-present concealed antipathy to a mere negative attitude limited in reach and effect. The tendency to hold one or more of these conceptions simultaneously is bolstered by the abstract liberal tenets that freedom and opportunity exist in the US (e.g. they are not denied by the fact of racism) and that black Americans have the agency to develop strategies (e.g. following mainstream cultural norms around success) to buffer them against racist attacks – or against whites with bad attitudes. Black Americans who fail to develop such strategies are complicit in the reproduction of racial disparities. One twist of the abstract liberal influence is that black youth, by dint of their acceptance of the legitimacy of American norms around success and acceptance of the responsibility to act in accordance with those norms, also acquiesce to racial degradation; they are disposed to see discriminatory acts against blacks as justified given black's tendencies to act in stereotypical ways. (That is, Skip Gates' altercation (Jan 2009) with police at his home is understandable, given that black Americans do not tend to live in those kinds of neighborhoods). The catch 22 is, while HI-SET youth take pride in their recognition of racism as increasingly covert, they tend to minimize the impact of race in situations where it is exceedingly visible.

HI-SET youths' visions of the racial future are likewise mired in the logics of abstract liberalism and minimization but also feature the naturalization frame. These combine with, support, and are reinforced by a highly individualist rendering of racism. Racism is seen primarily as an irrational yet justifiable fear that can, had, and will continue to fade as it is confronted head on. Structural racism (e.g. state support for overt racial discrimination) is seen as being on the decline, reinforcing messages that the worse has come to pass, and what vestiges of racism remain are truly on their last legs. Their vision of the future features corrigible whites whose fears can be allayed, especially if black Americans can make strides that illustrate their ongoing commitment to liberal ideals. This will provide greater impetus for white parents to teach white children the truth – that race doesn't matter. In turn, greater opportunities for interracial exposure will emerge, giving whites more opportunities to see for themselves that black Americans are worthy competitors and contributors to the national well-being.

Colorblind Frames in LO-SET Youths' Talk on Racial Stratification

LO-SET youths' discussions of racial stratification were also driven by confusion over how to define racism, and then how to connect its multiple and contradictory versions to racial disparity and the future of America's racial hierarchy. As seen with the HI-SET youth, colorblind frames are heavily influential in shaping the tools with which LO-SET youth craft ways to speak intelligibly across these topics. However, the nuances in how they combine and re-combine various elements of the dominant discourse reveal important differences in the social objects emphasized, and the meaning systems developed around those objects.

Abstract liberalism, the key frame of colorblind racism, is notably less directly influential in LO-SET youths' talk around racial stratification. However, its limited influence, and its use as a foil for alternative framing beliefs makes it a crucial part of LO-SET youths' constructions of the racial order. The assumed inferiority framing belief revealed in discussions that featured social objects and processes most relevant to understandings of racial oppression posed a firm challenge to the central tenets of abstract liberalism. While LO-SET youth do not typically say that political and economic freedoms and opportunity do not exist, the notion that they do operates more as a matter of (weak) faith in the unseen than as a tangible goal. Little that they do say reveals any more than the most surface recognition that some people are able to achieve at high levels in the US, but that course is far from formulaic. The only thing that is predictable is the overriding sense that whatever success takes, it is not something black Americans are thought to be privy to.

As the form of abstract liberalism exercised by LO-SET youth lacks its normal reference point – the exercise of freedom to achieve a normative and relative sense of success – the trappings of success are viewed in an absolute sense. That is, the material wealth available to those who play by the rules is significant, not because it is symbolic of incorporation into the political, economic, social, and cultural fabric of the US, but because of the access it provides to resources otherwise denied. This twist on abstract liberalism fosters the “anything is possible” attitude applied to exceptional cases like Barack Obama. Paradoxically, the take on his victory as the penultimate symbol of black

agency stands in stark contrast with his symbolism as the full incorporation of black Americans into the fold.

This weak form of abstract liberalism, when tied to articulations of oppression, reinforces a view of racism as essentially a matter of a deep-seated, impenetrable, pervasive anti-black sentiment and negative stereotypes. These prejudicial feelings are so endemic a part of American society, there is often little need to connect them to particular individuals (though LO-SET youth are able to do so). This view is further supported through the application of naturalizing and biologizing logics that depict whites as predisposed or taught to maintain such sentiments; in either case, prejudicial attitudes come to be viewed as relatively fixed and stable traits of whites.

This notion of racism is augmented in explanations of racial disparities where the logics of minimization work against citing racism as a major force. Minimization works primarily through LO-SET youths' inattentiveness to racism (i.e. the taken-for-granted state of anti-black sentiment) and overwhelming concern with the deficiencies of black culture. Able to draw only the most tenuous links between white racial antipathy and black disadvantage, LO-SET youth turn almost exclusively to an internal critique. In the same way that naturalizing and biologizing logics when applied to understandings of oppression reinforced perceptions of the permanence of white racial antipathy, those logics in the context of explaining racial disparities are used to render a deficit model of black culture.

For LO-SET youth, the future looks a lot like the present. It promises an intractable racism practiced by incorrigible whites, black Americans who will not or

cannot refrain from self-destructive behaviors, and the continued press for autonomy in a society perceived as being run by people who have little intention of ever treating black Americans as fully equal. Their view of racism as defined almost exclusively in terms of whites' attitudes reveals the continued influence of a modified form of minimization. Again, as applied by LO-SET youth, the claim is not that race does not matter or racism does not exist; however, by reducing racism to attitudes, its perceptible impacts are narrowed to individual acts of discrimination and expressions of anti-black sentiments.

This a-structural view of racism easily lends itself to naturalizing and biologizing logics. As in explanations of racial disparities, these logics help explain the incorrigibility of whites. They also heighten LO-SET youths' sense that the socio-cultural differences between whites and black Americans are so wide, that bridging them is almost a waste of effort. Whites' incorrigibility and black Americans' proclivities toward self-sabotage take on essentialist tones, precluding any substantial change in the racial hierarchy in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, LO-SET youth envision transcending race not by refuting negative stereotypes and claiming their rightful spot among the American citizenry, but by putting themselves beyond the snares of white antipathy. Guided by a mild and altered liberalism, LO-SET youth seek to turn limited freedoms and opportunity into a means of autonomous self-realization.

Riding out the Storm: Detroit and Race

Detroit has been at a crossroads for all of these youngsters' lives – in fact, it has been sitting at this crossroads for most of their parents' lives.

If ever a city stood as a symbol of the dynamic U.S. economy, it was Detroit. It was not pretty. It was, in fact, a combination of the grey and the garish: its downtown area was a warren of dingy, twisting streets; the used-car lots along Livernois Avenue raised an aurora of neon. But Detroit cared less about how it looked than about what it did—and it did plenty. In two world wars, it served as an arsenal of democracy. In the auto boom after World War II, Detroit put the U.S. on wheels as it had never been before. Prosperity seemed bound to go on forever—but it didn't, and Detroit is now in trouble.

The above appeared in Time Magazine, Friday, October 27, 1961. It opened an article entitled “Michigan: Detroit in Decline” which documented a decrease from 130,000 to 50,000 employed by Chrysler over the previous seven years, a population drop of just under 200,000 since 1950, and a loss of \$16 million in taxes over the previous four years through a thinning of the middle class and a growth of the population “on the dole”. It could have easily been written in 2001. Many of the structural challenges facing Detroit remain and have deepened. What has drastically altered is the way in which race can be implicated in the woes black Detroit youth face today.

In 1961, whites composed the vast majority of Detroiters. Detroit was a largely white city presided over by a white mayor and other executives, legislated by white council people, and patrolled by white police officers. Now, the face of urban failure is black. In a time when the country has elected its first black president, in a city that has had 3 generations of black mayors and a predominantly black city council, it is no straightforward task to describe the role race plays in shaping or reforming the city's current conditions. The youth in Detroit are well aware of the depth of the stigma attached to this city, and they recognize this stigma as being attached to black people as much as it is to political corruption and a slack economy. Despite such stigmatization,

the youth in this study maintain a positive outlook and are motivated to act, even if racial justice is secondary and ill conceived.

To speak to black youth in Detroit about the roles of race and racism in maintaining the social hierarchy is to speak to those who in terms of race, age, generation, and geography represent the most vilified, most vulnerable, and most reviled elements of the social structure. Far from taking a victimized stance, these youth refuse to hold onto race as a “crutch”. Race is ever-present in their discussions of the city, in their plans for individual mobility, and in the ways they identify themselves. Still, even their arguments implicating racism and discrimination as obstacles to individual and collective black growth are made haphazardly. Due in part to single-sided and narrow understandings of racism, these youth – both those who are more invested in mainstream institutions, and those who are disenchanted with the mainstream modus operandi and objectives – are inclined to focus on individualist goals, i.e. personal mobility, self-improvement, and individual work ethic as a means to right racial wrongs in the city and nation.

Both the HI- and LO-SET youth are on trajectories to achieve more in terms of academic experience and credentials than the bulk of their Detroit Public Schools counterparts. The question, how will they respond to their relative successes given the ideological dispositions they have started to form, is beyond the scope of this study, but there are a few keys present now that might help us imagine an answer.

These youth are keenly aware of Detroit’s image both nationally and internationally. They understand, in an abstract sense, that the city represents a complete

and utter failure of social, political, and economic institutions. And while they understand how they are implicated by others - and indeed they implicate themselves in the same ways – as playing a role in the city’s continual downward spiral, they also sense that the mess they have inherited is larger than some of their personal choices and tastes. That is, they are able to read the city’s conditions as reparable, not permanent, and awaiting better black Americans. And in their own ways, they are those black Americans.

While it seems a paradox, the dominance of colorblind racism explains the reluctance of these youth to center racism as explanations and targets for ameliorating racial disparities. In addition to providing contradictory cultural messages regarding racism, it is the visible way in which race is so intimately linked to Detroit’s decline today that diminishes the strength of a race-based or race-conscious approach to resolving some of Detroit’s issues. As one interviewee commented, it might have started with racism, but now we bring it on ourselves. No matter how much of the current crisis was caused by white malfeasance (most of which exists as abstractions if at all for these youth), black Americans have had their chance at the reigns, and have to this point failed to take advantage.

One consequence of this application of abstract liberalism is the reinforcement of individualist tactics and ideologies, especially as these youth do well, achieve some measure of mobility, and reproduce these commonsense practices and beliefs because they “work”. Despite the school’s commitment to delivering the skills that will help these youth go away to college but then return to resurrect the city, many of these youth see higher education as a means to get as far away from Detroit as possible. In this way,

they can prove to themselves and others that Detroit is not a trap, but is capable of producing successful students and citizens. Many who would come back do so out of complicity with notions of the current and prior city fathers as backwards and lacking in mental skill and moral character.

Both sets of youth recognize the need to deal with the presence of whites as well. While the HI-SET youth have accepted the need to deal with racial microaggressions as a rite of passage into the mainstream, LO-SET youth are more reluctant to engage whites. Again, their differential perspectives reflect their experiences and interpretations of Detroit's particular racial milieu. HI-SET youths' ability to position themselves as high aspiring and committed to racial uplift is facilitated by a number of significant white figures (e.g. the PSAD's founder and superintendent at the time of the study, and a number of teachers and support staff) that challenge the otherwise negative views of whites and provide evidence that a new white is possible. LO-SET youths' views of whites are similarly challenged, but again, their commitment to a definition of racism as an irrational affect leads LO-SET youth to be more ambivalent about whites.

Finally, my analysis reveals some interesting combinations of contrasting positions among these black youth that are likely to play out in future intra-group political moves and the development of policy and programmatic preferences regarding black Americans. One interesting development is the articulation of both liberal and conservative positions within this population that typically has more conservative leanings. For example, both sub-samples rely heavily upon narratives of black self-help and moral uprightness. At the same time, they are both supportive of programs like

affirmative action (albeit for slightly different reasons; HI-SET youth see it as a necessity to create an even playing field while LO-SET youth tend to focus more on the moral correctness of the measure). Such traditionally conflicting opinions reflect the heavy internal critique made possible by the majority black power structure, along with awareness of educational inequalities between themselves, students in DPS, and white students in the suburbs. Such specific contextual features make for a convergence of dominant and counter ideological positions that provide grounds for new coalitions.

As students such as the participants in this study continue to make good on the educational promise of charter schools, it is likely that in the short run, up and coming generations who are able to avail themselves of these resources will also read the social structure as slowly opening. Whether they will see that structure as primarily full of opportunities for incorporation or as limited in its ability to offer authentic autonomy may turn on the opening up of the labor market and other means of income and wealth creation.

To put it bluntly, the students coming through the charter mill are a novel commodity right now and there is little reason to think that the students who come behind them in the immediate years would deviate too greatly from the present patterns of racial sense-making. However, Detroit is undergoing its own peculiar gentrification process, recreating the segregated pockets of wealth and despair that has characterized the city for decades. These newly wealthy areas tend to feature an influx of young, educated white creatives. The emerging Detroit will have to reconcile the national tendency to play down race with a local reality that is saturated in a rich and complex racial history. It is

clear that the city's youth are ready, willing, and able to engage in a discussion around local and national racial dynamics. Further suppression of their racial awareness can only serve to dampen attempts to move the city forward by marginalizing the knowledge of a population that is struggling to make sense of the many forms of oppression that serve as the backdrop for their coming of age.

Opposition in the Post-Obama Era

By the next presidential election, the youth I interviewed for this project will be entering their fourth year of post-secondary life. At least half of them expect to be going into their final year of undergraduate studies. Some expect to be in the military, others working in their chosen fields, and yet others not so sure. Their perceptions of the racial hierarchy, their sense of the significance of race and racism, then like now, will be largely predicated upon the social locations they inhabit at that point. Still, knowledge of what they carry with them provides some insight into how they will shape and be shaped by those new locations.

Both groups of youth rely upon colorblind frames to make sense of racial stratification, but they rely on each to a different extent, in varying combinations, and in ways that vary across dimensions of stratification talk. Each group modifies and challenges colorblind racist ideology, but in distinct ways, penetrating and remaining susceptible to different facets of the dominant ideology.

While abstract liberalism inspires HI-SET youth to imagine and work toward a tangible notion of racial equality, LO-SET youth invest little in this vision, adhering to a

weakened liberalism that is not concerned with altering the racial status quo so much as individual and collective preservation. Both groups rely upon naturalizing and biologizing frames to characterize white and black Americans. HI-SET youths combine these with abstract liberalism and minimization in ways that construct whites as salvageable and racism as entrenched but changeable. LO-SET youth, conversely, produce versions of whites and racism as fixed in rigid opposition to black dignity. And minimization, which is a particularly bold logic as it brings whites to name the very thing they wish to refute, becomes equally as powerful in the hands of HI-SET youth, who rely on this logic to maintain a belief in the dream, and for LO-SET youth who turn to an internal critique due in large part to an inability to penetrate racism.

The use of these colorblind frames, even as they are modified in fundamental ways, tends toward reinforcing the status quo. HI-SET youth might be accused of not seeing race and racism clearly enough, while LO-SET youth might be said to see it too much. The issue of course is the inconsistent and contradictory nature of both groups' visions of race and racism in shaping the social structure. And the analytic challenge is to make sense of how actors reconcile these inconsistencies and contradictions.

I attempt to meet this challenge in this project by returning to a focus on group position with its emphasis on the processes by which racial groups define and redefine themselves and one another. In a time when "identity politics" have been defamed as primitive and the individual is more and more celebrated as the center of social activity, it is a necessity that analysts re-focus on ideas about group position in order to accentuate their centrality to social thought and action. In this way, we can build upon work that has

demonstrated the multiplicity of strategies black youth adopt in and out of school to maneuver spaces where distinct racialized performances are differentially valued.

This project expands such work by focusing squarely on the process by which social objects and processes are imbued with racial meaning, consequently providing the ideational content underlying racialized performances. The discursive approach employed maintains the initial cultural logics in play in the interviewees' utterances, revealing gaps and/or single-sidedness in their knowledge. It also situates these logics as collective, public, socio-historical products – beyond the intentional machinations of individuals. As such, we are able to glimpse how the flexibility of racial hegemony is achieved.

I contend that this analysis delivers a tool with which to engage black youth in critical discussions of the roles of race and racism in America. But most importantly, it does not do this by suggesting that there is a single pedagogical or ideological panacea that will bring black youth around to their roles in maintaining racial subordination. As Cohen (2010) suggests, a prime difficulty in this proclaimed “post-racial” era is developing a structural analysis of race and racism that sticks. The dominant ideology, its expression through broad and narrowcasting outlets, our immediate experiences, and what strikes us as our commonsense all work against a reading of race and racism as ever-present, its fluidity part and parcel of our own cultural genius.

At a basic level, black American opposition persists. These youth are aware that race and racism continue to be relevant and they fashion a sense of self and future plans in light of this awareness. The tension created by the contradictions of race always leaves

open the possibilities for further critical penetrations of power relations in the US, whether structured along lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or their intersections. As more subordinate communities continue to voice their concerns and challenge their subordinate statuses, black Americans will be called upon to re-evaluate the meaning and significance of their racial group membership and that group's status as they navigate new and old coalitions and strategies. While the current trend would suggest that race will continue to recede in its effectiveness to provide a central foundation for organizing and mobilizing political interests, just how far to the background this generation will allow race to recede remains to be seen.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample Background Information on Selected Variables

Variable	Male	Variable	Female
B5. Subjective Class 1. very stable; always had enough for the basics and usually more 2. pretty stable; usually had enough for the basics and sometimes more 3. pretty unstable; frequent difficulties making ends meet 4. very unstable; often uncertain about making ends meet	 5 4 2 1	B5. Subjective Class 1. very stable; always had enough for the basics and usually more 2. pretty stable; usually had enough for the basics and sometimes more 3. pretty unstable; frequent difficulties making ends meet 4. very unstable; often uncertain about making ends meet	 6 3 2 1
Number of HH Member	Avg: 4.53 Min: 2 Max 10	Number of HH Member	Avg: 4.13 Min: 2 Max:6
B1. Parental Configuration most common through age 16: 1. Two Parent Home 2. Single Parent Home 3. Foster Care or Group Home 4. Other, please specify	 5 6 0 1	B1. Parental Configuration most common through age 16: 1. Two Parent Home 2. Single Parent Home 3. Foster Care or Group Home 4. Other, please specify	 6 6 0 0

B2. Female that raised you, lived with the most: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biological Mother 2. Step-mother 3. Father's Partner 4. Adoptive Mother 5. Grandmother 6. Aunt 7. Other Female Relative 8. No mother figure 	8 0 0 0 2 2 0 0	B2. Female that raised you, lived with the most: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biological Mother 2. Step-mother 3. Father's Partner 4. Adoptive Mother 5. Grandmother 6. Aunt 7. Other Female Relative 8. No mother figure 	11 0 0 0 1 0 0 0
B3. Age of female that raised you:	Avg: 39 Min: 37 Max:60	B3. Age of female that raised you:	Avg: 45 Min: 34 Max: 63
B4. Education of female that raised you: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 8th Grade or lower 2. Some HS 3. GED 4. HS Diploma 5. Some College 6. Associates' 7. Bachelor's 8. Post BA 9. Master's 10. Master's Plus 	0 0 0 8 0 2 2 0 0	B4. Education of female that raised you: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 8th Grade or lower 2. Some HS 3. GED 4. HS Diploma 5. Some College 6. Associates' 7. Bachelor's 8. Post BA 9. Master's 10. Master's Plus 	0 1 1 6 1 1 2 0 0

11.	0		0
B9. If guardian ever Received Government Food or Cash Assistance		B9. If guardian ever Received Government Food or Cash Assistance	
1. Yes	4	1. Yes	6
2. No	6	2. No	6
3. DK			
B12. Male that raised you, lived with the most:		B12. Male that raised you, lived with the most:	
1. Biological Father	4	1. Biological Father	5
2. Step-father	2	2. Step-father	2
3. Mother's Partner	2	3. Mother's Partner	1
4. Adoptive Father	0	4. Adoptive Father	0
5. Grandfather	2	5. Grandfather	2
6. Uncle	0	6. Uncle	1
7. Other Male Relative	2	7. Other Male Relative	0
8. No father figure	0	8. No father figure	1
B13. Age of male that raised you:	Avg: 42 Min: 25 Max:81 n=9	B13. Age of male that raised you:	Avg: 47 Min: 27 Max: 69 n=9
B14. Education of male that raised you:		B14. Education of male that raised you:	
1. 8 th Grade or lower	0	1. 8 th Grade or lower	0
2. Some HS	2	2. Some HS	0
3. GED	0	3. GED	0
4. HS Diploma	3	4. HS Diploma	5

5. Some College 6. Associates' 7. Bachelor's 8. Post BA 9. Master's 10. Master's Plus	2 2 0 0 0 0 n=9	5. Some College 6. Associates' 7. Bachelor's 8. Post BA 9. Master's 10. Master's Plus	3 0 1 0 0 0 n=9
D2. Subjective Neighborhood Status 1. Excellent area 2. Nice area 3. Somewhat nice area 4. Bad area	3 0 4 5	D2. Subjective Neighborhood Status 1. Excellent area 2. Nice area 3. Somewhat nice area 4. Bad area	1 3 4 4
D4. Subjective Neighborhood Safety 1. Very safe 2. Mostly safe 3. Somewhat unsafe 4. Very unsafe	3 0 4 5	D4. Subjective Neighborhood Safety 1. Very safe 2. Mostly safe 3. Somewhat unsafe 4. Very unsafe	2 1 2 7

APPENDIX B

Head of HH Occupation, Average Income by Occupation, HH Size, and Title I Eligibility

	HHH Occupation	Median Income by Occupation ¹⁶	HH Size	Title I
HI-SET				
Female				
1	Loan officer	\$38,704	6	N
2	HR Admin Asst	\$26,889	3	N
3	Job Counselor	\$33,482	3	Y
4	Postal Carrier (ret).	\$39,542	3	N
5	Parole Officer	\$31,419	4	Y
6	Admin Asst (comm. coll.)	\$22,705	5	Y
Male				
1	HR Admin Asst	\$22,705	5	Y
2	RN	\$44,893	2	N
3	Hiarstylist	\$20,027	5	Y
4	Proj. Mgr (non-profit)	\$45,292	3	N
5	Bus Driver (ret).	\$25,860	4	Y
6	Fast Food (Mgr)	\$22,422	4	Y
LO-SET				
Female				
1	Event planner (self-employed)	\$35,838	3	Y
2	Admin Asst (mortgage office)	\$22,705	2	Y
3	Admin Asst (food dist)	\$22,705	6	Y
4	Childcare worker	\$14,436	6	Y
5	Childcare worker	\$14,436	4	Y
6	Postal Carrier	\$39,542	5	Y
Male				
1	Admin Asst (museum)	\$22,705	3	Y
2	CNA	\$20,741	5	Y
3	Meter Reader (Water)	\$30,165	6	Y
4	Retail Mgr	\$31,346	3	Y
5	Disability	NA	10	Y
6	Childcare Worker	\$14,436	2	Y

¹⁶ Data compiled by US Census Bureau. "TABLE 2. Earnings by Detailed Occupation: 1999: Michigan: Both Sexes". Retrieved June 10, 2010. (<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/earnings/call2miboth.html>).

APPENDIX C

Background & Demographic Survey

A1. Respondent Gender

1. Male
2. Female

A3. Respondent Age

Continuous

A4. Respondent Work Status

1. Yes
2. No

A5. Respondent Household Financial Contribution

1. Yes
2. No

Household Member #n Gender

1. Male
2. Female

Household Member #n Relation to Respondent

1. Partner
2. Own Child
3. Parent
4. Extended Kin
5. Sibling
6. Unrelated

Household Member #n Age

Continuous

Household Member #n Education

1. 8th Grade or lower
2. Some HS
3. GED
4. HS Diploma
5. Some College
6. Associates'
7. Bachelor's
8. Post BA
9. Master's
10. Master's Plus

Household Member #n Work Status

1. Yes
2. No

Household Member #n Household Financial Contribution

1. Yes
2. No

B1. Parental Configuration most common through age 16:

1. Two Parent Home
2. Single Parent Home
3. Foster Care or Group Home
4. Other, please specify

B2. Female that raised you, lived with the most:

1. Biological Mother
2. Step-mother
3. Father's Partner
4. Adoptive Mother
5. Grandmother
6. Aunt
7. Other Female Relative
8. No mother figure

B3. Age of female that raised you:

Continuous

B4. Education of female that raised you:

1. 8th Grade or lower
2. Some HS
3. GED
4. HS Diploma
5. Some College
6. Associates'
7. Bachelor's
8. Post BA
9. Master's
10. Master's Plus

B5. Subjective Class

1. very stable; always had enough for the basics and usually more
2. pretty stable; usually had enough for the basics and sometimes more
3. pretty unstable; frequent difficulties making ends meet
4. very unstable; often uncertain about making ends meet

B6. Frequency Employed for female that raised you

1. all of the time
2. most of the time
3. about half of the time
4. some of the time
5. none of the time

B7. Main Work Activities for female that raised you.

Write-in

B8. Industry of Employ for female that raised you

Write-in

B9. Ever Received Government Food or Cash Assistance

1. Yes
2. No

B10. Racial Background of female that raised you

Write-in

B11. Still Living

1. Yes
2. No

B12. Male that raised you, lived with the most:

1. Biological Father
2. Step-father
3. Mother's Partner
4. Adoptive Father
5. Grandfather
6. Uncle
7. Other Male Relative
8. No father figure

B13. Age of male that raised you:

Continuous

B14. Education of male that raised you:

1. 8th Grade or lower
2. Some HS
3. GED
4. HS Diploma
5. Some College
6. Associates'
7. Bachelor's
8. Post BA
9. Master's
10. Master's Plus

B15. Frequency Employed for male that raised you

1. all of the time
2. most of the time
3. about half of the time
4. some of the time
5. none of the time

B16. Main Work Activities for male that raised you.

Write-in

B17. Industry of Employ for male that raised you

Write-in

B18. Ever Received Government Food or Cash Assistance

1. Yes
2. No

B19. Racial Background of male that raised you

Write-in

B20. Still Living

1. Yes
2. No

B21. # of Siblings

B22n.

1. Sister
2. Brother

B23n. Age of Sibling

Continuous

B24n. Education of Sibling

1. 8th Grade or lower
2. Some HS
3. GED
4. HS Diploma
5. Some College
6. Associates'
7. Bachelor's
8. Post BA
9. Master's
10. Master's Plus

B25n. Frequency of Contact with Sibling

1. almost daily
2. once/week
3. few times/mo
4. few times/yr
5. less than once/yr

B26n. Work Status of Sibling

1. yes
2. no

B27n. Main Work Activities of Sibling

Write-in

B28n. Industry of Employ for Sibling

Write-in

C2. Respondent Place of Employ

Write-in

C3. Respondent Industry of Employ

Write-in

C4. Respondent Main Work Activities

Write-in

C5. Respondent Hours Per Week Worked

Continuous

C6. Respondent Rate of Pay

Continuous per/hr or weekly

C7. Respondent Work Place Racial Composition

Write-in

C8-C9. Leisure Activities and Time Spent

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Academic Enrichment Program	
Extra-curricular (non-sport)	
Extra-curricular (sport)	
Hobbies/Amusement (i.e. videogames, gardening, etc.)	
Homework/Studying	
Household work/Chores	
On the internet	
On the telephone with friends	
Volunteering	

D1. Social Networks

	<u>Family</u>	<u>Friends</u>	<u>Acquaintances</u>
High School Drop Outs			
High School Graduates			
In College			
College Graduates			
White Collar Workers			
Blue Collar Workers			
Currently Incarcerated			

Ever Incarcerated			
In Gangs			
Members of a Church			
Unemployed and a High School Drop Out			
Unemployed (non-students)			
Positive Role Models			

D2. Subjective Neighborhood Status

1. Excellent area
2. Nice area
3. Somewhat nice area
4. Bad area

D3. Subjective Neighborhood Class and Race Composition

Write-in

D4. Subjective Neighborhood Safety

1. Very safe
2. Mostly safe
3. Somewhat unsafe
4. Very unsafe

D5. Sense of Personal Safety

Write-in

D6. Title I qualified

1. Yes
2. No

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

Early Racial Awareness

- Tell me about when you first became aware of your racial classification or identity.

Race Socialization Messages

- What have elder African Americans taught you about being Black in America?

Stereotypes and Black Social Imagery

- What are the most common positive images of Blacks in society?
- What are the most common negative images of Blacks in society?
- What are the most common sources of these images?

Group identification

- In what ways are African Americans unique?
- Are there traits that are specific to African Americans?
- In what ways do blacks differ from other ethnic and racial groups?
- What common interests do blacks have?
- What common interest do most blacks recognize?
- What holds blacks together?

Group Solidarity

- Are there types of blacks whom you personally closer to – closer than you feel to blacks as a group?
- What holds these groups of blacks together?
- How concerned are you about the ability of blacks to improve their status in society?
- How concerned are you about the ability of blacks to secure a good quality of life?
- How concerned are you about the ability of blacks to be treated fairly?

- Should those who are doing well feel obligated to help others?
- Do you feel any obligation to help improve the overall status of African Americans?
- What goals or outcomes related to the status of Blacks in US society do you think most African Americans would agree on?
- Do you feel like there are disagreements across groups of blacks about what those goals should be?
- Can African Americans depend on one another to achieve those goals?
- How important is it for blacks to stick together?

Black Culture

- Tell me a little about your idea of black culture? What do you think of when you hear this term?

Racial Inequality and Racism

- In what ways do blacks lag behind other racial groups?
- What challenges do blacks face that other groups do not?
- How serious a problem is racism in the US today?
- What signs do you see that racism is getting worse?
- What signs do you see that racism is going away?
- How would you define racism?
- Do you believe it is possible for racism to end?
- What do you think you can do about racism, if anything?
- Earlier we spoke about some problems, some ways that blacks lag behind whites and some other minority groups. Do you think these problems are getting better or worse? Why?
- How does racism relate to blacks lagging behind whites and other groups in (refer to whatever areas of inequality they reference)?
- Do you believe it is possible for there to be equality among the different racial groups in the US?
- What do you think you can do to bring about equality?
- How serious a problem is poverty in the US today?
- What signs do you see that suggest that poverty may be getting worse?
- What signs do you see that suggest that poverty may be declining?
- Are the effects of poverty worse for blacks than other groups?
- Do you believe it is possible for poverty to be eliminated in the US?
- Is it still necessary for blacks to work together on problems such as racism, racial inequality, and poverty, or can enough be done by blacks individually to solve these problems?
- If blacks were to create a movement today, what goals do you think they should pursue?

Black Ideological Thought (adapted from Dawson 2001)

- Can depend on each other to raise the status of blacks in the US?
- What have you done to improve the position of blacks?
- What plans or ideas about things you might do to improve the status of blacks?
- How would you describe blacks' current position in society?
- How would you explain blacks' current position in society?
- Are poor blacks treated differently than middle class blacks? Do upper class blacks receive different treatment than blacks who are not upper class?
- Who or what is the enemy of blacks?
- What hold blacks as a group in its current position?
- Who, if anyone, can blacks trust to work together to overcome social problems?
- Is American society fundamentally racist and unfair? Or is it basically a fair society? Why?
- Are whites fundamentally racist and/or prejudice?
- Can they be expected to work with blacks to end racism and racial inequality?

Race and Detroit

- What is unique about growing up in Detroit?
- How is growing up in Detroit different than growing up in some other city?
- What problems involving race in Detroit do you know of?
- What experiences have you had in the areas around Detroit (the suburbs)?
- Have you had any experiences involving race in these areas around Detroit?

Race and Obama

- How will the election of Obama affect the ways blacks think about other blacks?
- How will the election of Obama affect the ways blacks think about the position of blacks as a group?
- How will the election of Obama affect the ways blacks think about whites?
- How will the election of Obama affect the ways whites think about blacks?
- What does the election of Obama mean to you?

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