

**REPRODUCING AND RESISTING WHITENESS IN A QUASI-
DESEGREGATED SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD
ANALYSIS**

by

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For my family, Melisa, Elise and Jack
When the journey began I did not know you, but I never would have
made it to the end without you. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

I conduct ethnographic research in a quasi-desegregated high school to determine how the structure of the institution in relation with white students' level of interaction with non-resident black students impacts their understanding of the racial hierarchy and their place within it. Bourdieu's notions of field and capital provide the guiding theoretical framework for this dissertation and structured both the collection and interpretation of the data. The data were collected through participant observation and interviews with faculty, white students and students of color and suggests the fluidity of whiteness: white students with objectively similar backgrounds who inhabit the same physical location can develop different visions of whiteness and white privilege. Reproductive tendencies were noted among white students whose experiences led them to observe but not interact with black students and resistance was noted among white students whose friendship circles, athletic endeavors and romantic relationships found them in consistent and personal interaction with black students. In some cases resistance was nascent or marked by contradiction indicating that the institutional tendency toward reproduction was formidable. This dissertation contributes to the sociology of race by illuminating the ways in which whiteness is insinuated within the culture of an institution but simultaneously concealed from whites' view and how this arrangement reproduces normative whiteness and regressive notions of the racial other. In demonstrating the deeply rooted and seemingly non-racial ways in which race operates within institutions

and how this perpetuates and reinforces racialized notions of difference, this dissertation reveals how race continues to structure social life in the post-civil rights era.

Furthermore, this dissertation complicates monolithic notions of whiteness by showing that there is variation in whites' ability to apprehend the continuing salience of race and white privilege while identifying one mechanism—interaction—that serves to explain this variation. The dissertation concludes by considering recommendations for pedagogical practice and institutional change that could nurture the inchoate strains of resistance that are identified.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

At around 7:10 am, ten minutes before classes begin in their predominantly white suburban high school, both Tessa and Alex park their late model cars in the student parking lot and make their way through the double doors that lead to the schoolhouse. There they join the stream of sleepy students as they make their way to class. Both students are white and in their junior years of high school. Both play sports: Alex is a football player and Tessa is a standout in field hockey. Both hail from upper middle class families with two professional parents and live in large well-appointed houses. Both dress in clothing from J. Crew, a brand that they describe as “preppy.” Both Tessa and Alex have been tracked into honors math and science classes and have taken the same history classes, which, in regards to what they teach about race, they describe in much the same way: their classes focus almost exclusively on the past and the south; slavery and civil rights. When asked about their political beliefs both professed that they were undeveloped and reported that discussions of race were infrequent in their households.

Despite similarities, Alex and Tessa hold disparate views about race, whiteness and racial inequality. Where Tessa is unambiguous about how all races have an equal opportunity to succeed, Alex noted that he had an edge because he was white. When asked about what should be done about persistent racial differences Tessa reported that she was offended by affirmative action and characterized it as “reverse racism.”

Although his body language conveyed significant tension and he felt awkward saying it, Alex supported preference programs clearly stating that race should be a factor in college

admissions. Predictably, whereas Tessa was dubious that racial discrimination was still a persistent feature of American social life, Alex was sure that it continues to be.

A closer look at Tessa and Alex reveals that despite their objective similarities their paths have diverged in high school. These two students attend a school that is host to a unilateral busing program that brings students of color (predominantly black students) from the nearby city into their school. For Tessa, she may attend school with these students but she has very few interactions with them. Field hockey is the primary site through which she develops relationships and there are no students of color on her team. As a result Tessa finds herself brought close enough to black students to observe their behavior but not close enough to get a sense of their lives, enter into a dialogue with them or know more than her casual assessments tell her. For example, when I asked her about her perceptions about these students' academic orientation she said:

Tessa: I do see [black students] like sometimes in the cafeteria, waiting for their late bus, but they're just running around like just sitting on the table; they're not doing any work. So I mean I feel like they're not taking the opportunity we are like giving them. Like, this is a great opportunity for them to come to a school like this...I know some of them don't get home 'til so late, but I mean I feel like if you really wanted to succeed and do well in your classes, you would find the time to do it...Like even if it's studying on the bus or like even waiting for the bus, you'd like find the time.

Her observation betrays a number of themes that would be restated by other white students in the course of the research described below. First, their perceptions about race at school are founded on detached observations. Second these students' tend to be sensitive to behaviors—cultural ways of doing things—that are different than the dominant modes of behavior at the school. In this case, she perceives that the students are all at once unable to control their bodies and inappropriately docile (“they’re just running around like just sitting on the table”). Third, observations are often distilled into

judgments about the meaning of racial difference. In this case, her observation about the students' behavior in the cafeteria seems to support her contention that these students are not really serious about school; they do not try.

Alex has had a different experience. Although he had never attended a school with black students before coming to high school and despite admitting that at first he was “intimidated” by them, he became close to multiple black students through his participation on the football team. Unlike Tessa, Alex had developed genuine relationships that often involved having black students stay at his house for extended periods of time. Where Tessa's detached observations of difference led her to conclude that these students do not care about school, Alex took a different view based on personal interaction and firsthand knowledge.

Alex: Sometimes people will insult their intelligence. I don't know; I don't agree with that at all. I've just been around them so much that I know Don gets good grades. Like he made high honors last year. So someone who doesn't know him shouldn't be insulting his intelligence. He takes school seriously and if he needs to get something done he'll get it done. He works. I mean I've seen them write essays at my house. I think in some ways they have to work harder.

Alex comments were also echoed in the comments of other white students like him whose firsthand experiences often, but not always, engendered nuanced understanding of the lives, values and struggles of black students and the advantages of being white. For Alex, the experience of sometimes being the only white student at a social event—and the cultural confusion that this created—had also made him reflexive about what it must be like for black students at his school. For example, he realized that he often struggled to understand them when they were all together, “the talking, the conversations were a little bit different. It's like they have their own words and like different phrases that we're not used to.” This experience had made him realize just how

hard it must be for these students to attend school in a predominantly white community where the cultural expectations are different. If it is hard for him when he is with them, he reasoned, then it must be hard for them “to grow up and then come here to this all-white town.” As scholars of whiteness know, whites often fail to see themselves as members of a racial group at all, a disposition that seems to flourish in predominantly white contexts. Alex and Tessa’s stories, and the contrasts that they present, confirm this suspicion while specifying it. By focusing on stories of students like them, this dissertation seeks to explicate how, at least in one institutional context, whiteness is either rendered normative or forced uneasily into the light of day.

In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal stated in *An American Dilemma*, that the race problem in America was fundamentally a problem with whites. Myrdal was optimistic. As he saw it, the idea of a racial hierarchy that served to elevate some while holding others back was anathema to America’s lodestar penned by Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” Myrdal believed that the contradiction presented by a creed of equality and the fact of a caste system would be resolved as the moral tension in the hearts of white Americans became too much to bear. Although discussions about race in popular culture rarely evoke Myrdal, his framework is still fundamental as the meaning and scope of racial inequality is still debated and contested. Although some trumpet America’s triumph over race—the resolution of Myrdal’s American Dilemma—empirical data tends to tell a different story. Myrdal was correct that any analysis of race must account for the role of whites, yet his belief that the problem of race would be resolved on moral grounds has not been vindicated.

Following Myrdal, this dissertation will focus squarely on whites like Tessa and Alex, what they do and say, and how social position, belief, and interaction come together in ways that either reinforce privilege or disturb it. Whiteness may be enacted in subtle ways, but as whites continue to enjoy unearned privilege in American society and the average white continues to live in a predominantly white neighborhood, attention must be paid to how whites make sense of their position at the top of the American racial hierarchy but also how progressive understandings are generated. Race is a contextual phenomenon, a blend of historical moment, political realities, legal regimes and cultural contestation. It is also textured by geography and inflected by class and gender. By conducting microanalysis of the construction of whiteness, I hope both to contribute to the literature on whiteness and make the case that research on race, and specifically whiteness, must not focus solely on those moments or contexts in which race is overt and obvious, but it must also be attuned to the ways in which race—its meaning, its power, and even its very existence—is constantly being negotiated, even in places where it is assumed to be absent. Investigations of race must consider the predominantly white suburbs, places where, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2001) notes, “very few social scientists have ventured...with a focus on understanding the white racial formation” (201).

This dissertation draws on a multi-year ethnographic study of what will be called “Belltown High,” a predominantly white suburban school in the northeastern United States that has a unilateral desegregation program that busses black students from points in the central city to schools in the suburbs. Relying on interviews with students, staff and faculty this study attempts to determine how the institution is structured racially and how different white students make sense of their own racial identity and the racial

differences in academic outcomes and culture that are put on display daily within the institution. Scholars of whiteness have established the fact that whiteness exists and should be made an essential part of the analysis of race in America (McDermott and Sampson 2005). This study accepts the insights of these pioneering scholars and attempts to move beyond this general insight by providing an in-depth explication of the mechanics of whiteness in a place where most whites claim that race is not a salient category. By looking at a predominantly white school, this study seeks to understand how whiteness insinuates itself not only in practices, but also in the very structure of institutions. It also seeks to push beyond simply describing whiteness and instead elucidate the contextually specific ways in which certain visions and understandings of whiteness emerge. Specifically, this dissertation seeks to engage the following questions: 1) How does a normative understanding of whiteness structure, yet also become invisible within the educational field? 2) How does the interaction of students within that field either reinforce/perpetuate that invisibility, or render it problematic?

This dissertation examines one research site in order to illuminate questions about whiteness on three different levels. First, on a general level it is a meditation on the very idea of race itself. By showing variation and instability in constructions of whiteness, we further our understanding of race as a purely social phenomenon, something paradoxically unreal and real. If race is an unstable and contingent construction, then what are the factors that serve to draw racial boundaries and lead to certain visions, enactments, and understanding about what those boundaries mean? Race is also a product of the interaction of structures and agents. Social structure can to some degree limit how social actors think about race, but these actors also reserve the capacity to

redefine racial meaning. This dissertation looks closely at the factors that seem to account for how similarly situated social actors can develop different notions of race.

On a second level, this dissertation seeks to make sense of whiteness in a specific historical moment, the post-civil rights era, a time in which legal barriers to equality have been largely ameliorated but inequality persists. Despite the continued segregation of schools, persistent racial inequality and shifting racial demographics, much of the contemporary rhetoric about race tends to minimize its importance. Supreme Court Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority in a 2007 case that greatly limited school desegregation efforts, nicely captured this racial framework: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” Or as Gary Orfield (2009) points out, social policy often treats race as if it “should be ignored, inequalities should be blamed on individuals and schools, and existing civil rights remedies should be dismantled” (3). Engaging the question of whiteness is to engage the question of inequality from a specific angle, or better put, with a specific question: How do whites square continued racial inequality with the notion that race is declining in significance? It is also to consider what, if anything, race means to people that often do not see themselves as racialized actors and to investigate the factors that either obscure or reveal whites’ position in the racial hierarchy.

Finally, on a third level, this work will engage whiteness within the specific institutional context of schools as places in which race is constructed and contested. This study will provide a finely grained, ethnographic study of how whiteness is constructed and enacted in school environments—in classrooms, hallways, athletic fields, teachers’ lounges, and in the social lives of students. As Lewis (2001) points out, schools are

dense transfer points of racial meaning in which understandings are challenged and affirmed (783). This study aims to isolate the factors that lead whites to either think critically about their own position in the racial hierarchy or fail to notice it. To understand how a white high school student thinks about her racial identity and to identify the discontinuities between her and her classmates' visions of privilege, inequality and racial difference is to consider race at all three levels listed above; it is to say something about race that has both theoretical and practical implications.

The specific school that served as my research site continues to be deeply structured by the fight over desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s. As one solution to the racial segregation of schools and the second-rate education that this implied for the city's black students, multiple suburban communities in the 1960s voluntarily initiated a unilateral busing program that brought black students from the city into the suburbs to attend predominantly white, and better resourced schools. The program, which will be called "QRED"¹ in this study, persists today and, although this study is not an evaluation of this program, the interactions, or lack thereof, between resident students and the students bussed from the city are critical components of how whiteness is constructed and how it varies in this context. Ultimately, this study is about how white students' visions of whiteness and racial inequality come into sharper focus for better or worse as they attend school with QRED students.

The next section of the chapter will present a general overview of the literature on whiteness, focusing specifically on five of the ways in which whiteness is constructed and put into discourse and practice. This is necessary given the paradoxical way in which

¹ I have chosen the arbitrary combination of letters "QRED" to approximate the real acronym used to refer to the busing program.

whiteness is powerful precisely because it is so effectively rendered invisible and thus left unexamined; taking whiteness as an object of analysis requires some discussion of what that object “looks like” and how one can detect it. I will then outline the theoretical framework for my analysis: Pierre Bourdieu’s *field* analysis. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of the demographics of the research site.

Literature Review:

Enactment One: Whiteness as an Unmarked or Normative Identity

Historically, whites have been at the center of much of the research on race and racial inequality² (Blumer 1958; DuBois [1920] 1998, [1935] 1962, [1903] 2005; Myrdal [1944] 1964; van den Berghe 1967;). Often treated as a discovered identity by white scholars, much of the literature on whiteness claims to reveal a hidden identity and expose the ways in which racial dominance is maintained through whites’ inability to recognize their membership in a racial group³ (McDermott and Sampson 2005; McIntosh 1992, 1989; McIntyre 1997; Sacks and Lindholm 2002; Scheurich 1993; Segrest 2001; Sullivan 2006). As multiple scholars have noted, if awareness of racial identity is derived from the tension between one’s ascribed race and the racial texture of the dominant culture, then whites will fail to see whiteness due to the lack of contrast (Conely 2003; Kenny 2000; McIntyre 1997; Perry 2002; Rasmussen et al. 2001; Sacks and Lindholm 2002).

³ Alice McIntyre (1997) qualitative research revealed that whites simultaneously denied having racial privilege while paradoxically fretting about losing privilege to racial “others” (57).

Ruth Frankenberg's (1993a, 1993b) research has led her to conclude that whiteness manifests in three interlocking and reinforcing dimensions: structural advantage; a standpoint from which to view the social world; and, a set of cultural practices that are perceived to be normal (1993a:53-54). According to her research, whites' social geographies—where they live, who they interact with, how they are educated—structures the way in which they understand their racial identities. She found that even in quasi-integrated environments, whites tend to be more aware of how people of color are disadvantaged and less cognizant of how whites are privileged. She also noted that whites often fail to appreciate the structural dimensions of racism, focusing instead on individual attitudes, actions and dispositions, a propensity Frankenberg (1993b) labels “color-power evasiveness.”

School-based studies have also unearthed evidence of normative whiteness. Angela Castagno's (2008) research on white faculty at two different middle schools—one predominantly white and middle-class and another black and low-income—finds a similar pattern at both schools. She notes that despite the fact that their schools, classrooms, practices and discourse were structured racially, teachers failed to challenge the status quo and instead opted for silence that served to rationalize and justify the logic of the social hierarchy. Castagno argues that this silence allowed white educators to “maintain the illusion that race either doesn't matter or doesn't really exist and to continue schooling in a business as usual fashion” (315). In her work on predominantly white colleges and universities, Diane Gusa (2010) similarly argues that whiteness is institutionally entrenched and manifests in practices, policies and assumptions that whites see as non-racial. “Just as an online teacher cannot be seen, but his or her presence affects

the academic discourse, the presence of whiteness and privilege within policies and practices may go unseen” (Gusa 2010:467). Her work seeks to reveal, and therefore challenge, the core racial practices of predominantly white institutions.

Despite opening doors to new avenues of inquiry, the literature on whiteness as an invisible identity has two fundamental flaws.⁴ First, whiteness is not universally invisible. For people of color, successful navigation of white institutions often depends on understanding whiteness and white culture (Frankenberg 2001; Lewis 2004; Kendall 2006; Rabaka 2007; Rasmussen et al. 2001, Roediger 1998). Second, whiteness is not monolithic (McDermott and Sampson 2005). As Hartigan (2001) notes, the assertion that whiteness is a universally unmarked identity of privilege, as is often inferred in the whiteness literature, would be laughable among the population of poor whites that he studied in Detroit. Bonnett (1996) has also called for scholars to revise how they think about whiteness and encourages research that is attentive to nuance and pays close attention to how race is variable, contingent, and unstable.

Attention to the mutability of whiteness is a central feature of so-called “third wave whiteness studies” which, “takes as its starting point the understanding that whiteness is not now nor has it ever been, a static, uniform category of social identification” (Twine and Gallagher 2008:6). If earlier studies of whiteness tended to employ simplistic conceptions of whiteness, third wave whiteness studies reject the assertion that whiteness is exclusively an identity of privilege and, instead, call attention to differences across whites that hinge on class location, gender, sexuality, geography,

⁴ A third criticism that will not be discussed at length is this: whiteness studies brings with it the problematic temptation to reductively connect all social problems to whiteness—an analytical slight of hand that pushes whiteness to the center by making it the sociological focal point through which all social problems can be solved (Bonnett 1996; Jensen 2005; Rasmussen et al. 2001).

history, and political arrangements (Twine and Gallagher 2008:7). Perhaps most importantly, third wave whiteness studies understand that racial identity is not simply a reflection of objective structures, but is constructed through discursive practices. Scholars in this area thus seek local understandings of how whiteness is negotiated in specific social, spatial, economic and political milieus. In other words, researchers must seek to understand whiteness by looking at the confluence of objective structures and agents' subjectivities.

John Hartigan's (1999, 1997a, 1997b, 2001) ethnographic research on the variability of whiteness in three Detroit neighborhoods is a prime example of third wave insights in practice. Through comparative, class-based analysis, Hartigan (2001) determines that, "racial identities are locally constituted, following place-specific dynamics that are informed by class-position" (139). Hartigan investigates how the boundaries of white racial identity are fluidly constructed, violated, and renegotiated in discourse within and across neighborhoods. Poor whites in Briggs, Detroit are a minority in their neighborhood and do not experience whiteness as normative or privileged; indeed, the very meaning of whiteness remained elusive for this group, despite their attempts to define it. In contrast, the whites in the predominantly white and working-class neighborhood of Warrendale found that discussing race could bring with it accusations of being racist, therefore, there was little discourse about race at all, let alone discursive space within which to define whiteness.

Other empirical research also challenges monolithic constructions of whiteness. Thorough his analysis of American Mosaic Project survey data, Croll (2007) determined that attitudes and beliefs determined whether whites were conscious of their racial status.

For example, whites that were either deeply opposed to programs like affirmative action, or deeply in favor, acknowledged the salience of their race whereas those who did not have strong convictions reported relatively little awareness of whiteness. Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll (2009) use survey data to test the central tenets of whiteness theory in order to determine how many whites actually embody what they define as the three central elements of whiteness: (1) colorblindness; (2) normativity; and, (3) a lack of awareness of privilege. Although they find broad empirical support for central tenets of whiteness theory, they estimate that only 15 percent of whites in the United States evidence all three of the central elements of whiteness. Their data suggest that there is significant awareness of whiteness and white privilege among many whites and that colorblindness is a universal disposition that cuts across all races.⁵ Their findings support the claims made by so-called third wave whiteness scholars, and strongly suggest that research be attuned to the contexts and mechanisms that lead whites to develop different visions of the racial identity. This dissertation will present further evidence that supports the insights of third wave whiteness studies. Far from being a universal set of dispositions, whites students conceive of whiteness in vastly different ways even within one institutional context. While they occupy a similar macro position in the social matrix, microanalysis reveals that even within a homogeneous population, significant differences can be identified.

⁵ This insight is confirmed by Bonilla-Silva's (2001) analysis of Detroit Area Study data.

Enactment Two: White as Post-Cultural

Pamela Perry's (2001, 2002) work on white high school students reveals how constructions of whiteness and the meaning of white culture vary. Because her research was conducted in a high school and isolates context-specific constructions of whiteness, it will receive special attention here. Using ethnographic methods, Perry compares whites in a predominantly white school with whites in a racially mixed school. What she finds is that in both cases whites reassert dominance, albeit in different ways. Perry rejects the assertion that whites are objectively cultureless⁶ (in comportment, language, style, tastes, expectations), but points to how whites in the predominantly white school do not claim a specific cultural style, but instead see themselves as culturally empty. The students at the racially-mixed school are more aware of their racial identity, but most importantly, these whites actively construct themselves to be "post-cultural," which Perry argues eradicates whites' situatedness in history and assigns to them epistemological dominance.

Perry (2002) argues that the students at the predominantly white school were unable to describe themselves in cultural terms instead defining whiteness in vague, language such as "normal." "As the norm and standard, white culture has no definition, only those who *deviate* from the norm have 'culture'" (2002:60, emphasis in original). When asked about white culture, the students Perry interviewed were often speechless and reverted to generic language that served to connect culture to racial "others." Her

⁶ Roediger (1994) has called for the abolishment of whiteness, which he sees as culturally parasitic. Whiteness, he argues, has no culture of its own but instead is founded in relation to what it is not and who it can dominate. This logic implies that abolishing whiteness would have no cultural impact, but instead anodyne social impacts as whites would no longer profit from the subjugation of other races.

findings validate the contention that, from whites' perspective, whiteness can at times be invisible.

At the school in which whites comprised only 12 percent of the population, whites were not afforded the luxury of being invisible; instead whiteness was actively imagined as a post-cultural identity. School practices such as multicultural events and tracking⁷ served to construct whites as beyond culture in contrast to students of color (Perry 2001:79-84). Multicultural assemblies and fairs omitted any mention of European or white culture, thus reifying the notion that students of color were the exclusive bearers of culture. Tracking served to concentrate most of the white students in higher-level courses and students of color in remedial courses; this reinforced the idea among white students that students' of color failed to achieve due to their culture. Furthermore, behavioral problems (e.g., rowdiness) or lack of ability were understood to emanate from these students' connection to cultures that promulgated unacceptable ways of comporting the body or instilled cultures of laziness.

Perry (2001) argues that the belief that they were beyond culture prevented whites from locating themselves in history. The logic is simple: if culture emanates from the past, as traditions that imply modes of knowing, comporting, interacting or speaking, then to be post-cultural is to have no connection to history. While for some students whiteness was embodied in style and taste, none of them defined it as a set of traditions that originated in the past (Perry 2001:80-81). Without history, whites are then free to imagine themselves as present- or future-oriented individuals unencumbered by tradition and the preset and prescribed modes of action that tradition implies. As Perry points out,

⁷ Tracking refers to the differentiation of classes based on ability level. At Belltown, for example, lower level classes tended to be called "college preparatory," and were taught at a more basic level than enriched, honors or advanced placement classes.

western rationality—the hegemonic mode for constructing truth—hinges on assumptions of individuality, objectivity, self-control, and a present orientation (2001:62). Whites, she argues, by envisioning themselves as beyond culture, claim for themselves the attributes that correspond with epistemological superiority; “others” are disqualified for being encumbered with culture which distorts their ability to generate rational knowledge. The construction of white as epistemologically rational has also been noted in other school-based studies⁸ (Gusa 2010; Schultz, Buck and Nieze 2000) and inheres in historical and contemporary pseudoscientific studies of the biological differences between races (Gossett [1963] 1997; Vera, Feagin and Gordon 1995).

Renato Resaldo (1989) has also pointed to the ways in which cultural visibility is connected to social dominance. Anthropology, he argues, defines culture as the exclusive domain of the oppressed. Resaldo contends that post-cultural individualism operates ideologically by reinforcing a mythology of historical innocence. Ultimately, if a social actor fails to interpret her social location in collective and historical terms then she cannot perceive of how her group has been advantaged in relation to other groups or how she has benefited as a member of a dominant group. As a result, all privileges that flow to her are seen as products of her effort and not based on her social position. With the addition of Resaldo’s insight, post-cultural whiteness can be seen as performing two ideological tasks: it reifies notions of white intellectual superiority, and it obfuscates the history of oppression and exclusion that has served to benefit whites.

Pretensions of superiority founded on a lack of culture represents a shift in the fickle tradition of rationalizing racial inequality. As Lewis (2002, 2004) notes, European

⁸ Gusa (2010) refers to this disposition as “monoculturalism.”

imperialism and white superiority were initially justified on the grounds that subjugated people lacked culture or were culturally deficient.⁹ This shift in how racial superiority is imagined speaks to how fungible racial logic is: what is evidence of superiority in one social formation becomes evidence of inferiority in another.

Perry's work suggests that research on racially-mixed high schools¹⁰ must be attentive to how constructions of whiteness vary depending on context. Her research also elaborates the post-cultural construction of whiteness—a variation of whiteness as invisible. Whereas invisible whiteness perpetuates white dominance by refusing to acknowledge white privilege, white as post-cultural rationalizes white superiority through an intellectual hierarchy predicated on the link between culture and rationality. Finally, Perry's work is also important because it calls attention to the ways in which institutional practice shapes students' constructions of whiteness. Research on such practices as multiculturalism or tracking tend to evaluate their impact on students of color exclusively. As Perry notes, “important insights might be gained from more attention to white students and the meanings they assign to their experiences of those same programs” (2001:86). By recognizing how whiteness varies by institutional context, Perry's work avoids essentializing whiteness. This dissertation seeks to extend her analysis by showing that, despite some overarching similarities, whiteness can vary

⁹ As early twentieth century race theorist Madison Grant (1933) stated, “unlike the other alien elements the blacks were brought into this country against their will. They brought with them no persisting language, religion, or other cultural attribute, but accepted these elements from their masters” (Grant 1933:282). Lewis is correct in asserting that pretensions of white cultural superiority are rare, but it should be noted that these sorts of arguments are still deployed. Dinesh D'Sousa (1995), for example, in condemning the idea of reparations for slavery, argues that slavery was good for people of African descent because it exposed them to European culture (113).

¹⁰ Perry's racially-mixed school is dissimilar from the QRED receiving school I study. Her racially-mixed school was 12 percent white, but the students hailed from similar middle-class backgrounds (Perry 2002:18-19). The suburban school that I am proposing to study contains far fewer black students (approximately 5 percent), but these students are highly visible due to school practices such as tracking and class differences.

significantly even within one institutional context. The school under study finds a significant number of students of color tracked into lower-level and remedial classes, with students of color on average attaining a lower grade point average than white students. Some whites certainly did rely on post-cultural notions of whiteness in order to make sense of racial difference, while others were able to generate more nuanced and structural critiques.

Enactment Three: Making the White Self in Opposition to the Racial Other

The idea of race emerged to justify European imperialism and has, through history, functioned to legitimize systems of exploitation and oppression (Dubois [1920] 1998; Gossett [1963] 1997; Lewis 2002, 2004; Omi and Winant 1994; Rebaka 2007; Vera and Gordon 2003). Maintaining a racial hierarchy requires imagination; those with power generate knowledge about and construct denigrating visions of the “other.” In doing so, they elaborate a system of oppositions that produces the superiority of the dominant group by contrast (Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1991). Edward Said (1978) was the preeminent theorist of this process. His work focused on how European (“western”) notions of enlightened superiority were implicitly forged in opposition to representations of the Orient¹¹ (“the East”) as culturally wrought, irrational, hypersexual and passive. For Said, this process was most visible in academic and popular (e.g., travel writing) Orientalism, which “depends for its strategy on...flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 1978:7). The insight that notions of superiority

¹¹ This term is meant to describe a wide geographical swath from Africa through the Middle East to Asia and is used by Said to capture and reflect the homogenizing nature of Orientalism itself. For more on the meaning and implications of this term, see Said (1978, 1-110).

are often forged through discourse about an inferior “other” has proved invaluable to researchers of race in the post-civil rights era. Through analysis of symbolic representations and discourse, these researchers have unearthed how whites’ visions of the other (in some cases, even other whites) serve to co-produce white identity (Hartigan 1999; McDermott and Sampson 2005). As Lewis (2004) notes “The racialization of whites has always been tied intimately to the history of defining *self* both through the symbolic construction of *the other* and through the actual domination of others” (630, emphasis in original).

Fine, Weis, Addelston and Maruza’s (1997) work exemplifies the process through which whiteness is defined through visions of an inferior racial other. Their research investigates how working-class white men have understood the erosion of their economic status during the transition to a post-industrial economy in the 1980s and 1990s. They find that the *lingua franca* of white men is a white-victim narrative that blames the degraded condition of their neighborhoods on black cultural pathology and welfare dependency, and their diminished economic opportunities on racial preference programs that discriminate against whites.¹² Virtuous white working-class-male identities are “parasitically co-produced” as these men talk about the shortcomings and deficiencies of racial “others” (Fine et al. 1997:55). “Parasitic co-production,” refers to a process through which the self is defined by implicit contrast with exotic representations of an “other.” According to the white men in Fine et al.’s study, blacks were undeserving recipients of welfare because they lacked the strong work ethic found among deserving whites. In addition, blacks were constructed as dirty, the beneficiaries of racial

¹² Royster’s (1991) research on working class men has found similar processes at work.

preferences, and inappropriately sexual and lazy (55-63). Whites, by contrast, represented themselves as deserving, hardworking, self-controlled, and the victims of racial preference policies that have left them in a disadvantaged position. In the end, the authors conclude that these discursive practices offer a psychological salve but serve to fracture class-consciousness. In this case, the discourse held out by neoconservative racial projects¹³ exculpates elites as white working-class men, “refuse to look up and fetishistically look ‘down’ to discover who stole their edge” (53).

Along with Fine et al., other researchers have also noted how whiteness is defined in opposition to racial others (Almaguer 1994; Roediger 1991; Blumer 1958; Perry 2001; Lewis 2002; Sacks and Lindholm 2002; Sullivan 2006; Weis and Fine 1996). As noted above, Perry’s (2001, 2002) work on white high school students finds that whites often learn to define their culture by opposition: being cultureless or post-cultural depends on defining racial others as the bearers of culture and that culture itself to be inferior. Amanda Lewis’s (2001, 2003) stellar work on schools as race-making institutions also points to how the shape of whiteness is often molded through imagining the circumstances of the racial other. In her ethnographic study of a predominantly white school, she found that white parents constructed the white suburbs as a safe environment for childrearing through an exotic discourse about the dangerous urban core (Lewis 2001:796).

In a deeply segregated society, it is not uncommon for whites to have very little understanding of the spatial, social, and economic realities that circumscribe the lives of people of color (Kenny 2000; Sacks and Lindholm 2002; Sullivan 2006). Research on

¹³ See Omi and Winant (1986) and Winant (1994).

whiteness must then be attentive not only to how whites talk about white identity, but also how they produce it through imagining the lived realities of racial others (Lewis 2002). It must also explore how this process produces white superiority while appearing racially neutral (Lewis 2004). The data presented in this dissertation strongly suggest that representations of the racial other and, therefore, constructions of the self are structured by experience. White students' visions of the racial other, and by extension their understanding of what it means to be white, varies based on their experiences, connections, and interactions with students of color. For example, similar to Lewis's findings, my research finds that some whites implicitly illustrate the safety of their community through depictions of urban danger. In contrast, other whites, typically those who have ventured into non-white urban areas, find that having to rethink their assumptions about "urban" life often leads to critical reflection on the previously obscured racial dimensions of "suburban" life.

Enactment Four: Colorblindness in the Post-Civil Rights Era

Despite the end of Jim Crow, the discrediting of the biology that supported it and attendant changes in whites' attitudes and discursive practices, racial inequality persists (Bobo 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2000; Opoku-Dapaah 2007; Schuman and Krysan 1999; Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985). According to Bobo, Kluegel and Smith (1996), racism has not abated as much as it has refigured itself in ways compatible with contemporary social conditions and expectations. In their view, racism, as it is transacted in the post-

civil rights era, has taken on a “*laissez-faire*”¹⁴ character. Drawing heavily on Blumer’s (1958) theory of race prejudice as a sense of group position, these authors argue that as Jim Crow social arrangements ended, the need to justify blacks’ social position on biological terms lessened and a new system of explanation emerged to support white privilege.¹⁵

Bobo, Kluegel and Smith argue that the new racial logic is structured by free-market¹⁶ ideology and characterized by cultural stereotypes that explain and reify racial stratification. By rationalizing inequality as the product of cultural pathology¹⁷, whites can both rationalize their position in the racialized social system while vociferously opposing leveling policies (Devine and Eliot 1995; Hall 2004; Opoku-Dapaah 2007). This perspective is supported by the belief among whites that discrimination has ceased to be a major social issue. As research by Kluegel and Bobo (2001) suggests, just over a quarter of whites believe that there is a lot of discrimination against blacks, whereas over three quarters of blacks believe that there is. In a *laissez-faire* racial formation, existing conditions of racial inequality are viewed not as legacies or the product of intentional discrimination, but instead as the natural outcome of the interaction of blacks’ abilities and impersonal market forces (Kluegel and Bobo 2001:21).

¹⁴ The concept of *laissez-faire* racism is similar to Dovidio, Mann and Gaertner’s (1989) concept of “aversive racism” and Henry and Sears’s (2002) “symbolic racism.”

¹⁵ The end of biological racism was impacted by World War Two and revelation of the holocaust. In 1942 53 percent of Americans expressed the opinion that Blacks were less intelligent than whites. That declined to 43 percent in 1946 and by 1956, 80 percent of Americans rejected biological theories of race (Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1996:7).

¹⁶ In a subsequent article, Bobo (2004) has elaborated how free-market ideology permeates contemporary thinking about race. Free market ideology endorses leaving mobility to the market and opposes movements to address the legacies of racial difference and division. In doing so, racial inequality persists as poor outcomes structure representations and understandings of the racial “other,” while at the same time reinforcing whites’ sense of group position.

¹⁷ See Oscar Lewis (1966) and Charles Murray (1984).

The primary method through which whites express contemporary racism is through a discourse of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 2000, 2001, 2003; Forman and Bonilla-Silva 2000; Guza 2010; Lassiter 2004, 2006; Olsen 2002). Derived from the Civil Rights movement—in some cases cynically and in others quixotically¹⁸—colorblind discourse and practice starts from the assumption that race has ceased to matter in the post-civil rights era. Animated by neo-conservative racial projects (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2001) colorblindness posits that the problem of race springs from undue insistence on seeing, addressing, and talking about race. Eliding hundreds of years of state-sanctioned inequality, colorblindness conserves white advantage by abruptly reversing course and suddenly denying that racial differences exist (Duster 2001). By extension, racially progressive policy is predictably condemned as “reverse-racism” (Winant 2001:103). Strangely, as Bell and Hartmann (2007) have shown, more than half of Americans believe that diversity is “mostly a strength” (895) and tend to conflate “diversity” with race. However, despite their insistence that diversity bestows social benefit, most respondents—and on one occasion even an interviewer in Bell and Hartman’s study—had trouble speaking simultaneously about diversity and racial inequality, a fact that suggests that it is not color itself that Americans have trouble seeing, but how race is generative of social asymmetries.

Empirical research lends support for the contention that colorblindness—as discourse that denies the continuing potency of race—has become a hegemonic ideology

¹⁸ As Charles Lemert (2002) notes, “when liberal whites want to signify their excellent racial attitudes they will often say that they are ‘colorblind,’ and just as often something like, ‘I don’t care whether you are white, black or polka-dot.’ They say this in the complete absence of any confirmation that any known black person in America, or anywhere else, has ever taken comfort in it. I would assume that they don’t because all that the friendly white person is doing is talking about himself—how he *sees*, or *thinks* he sees, the others” (77, emphasis in original).

in the post-civil rights era.¹⁹ Guza's (2010) study of predominantly white educational institutions finds that whites fail to acknowledge how race matters. This results in what she terms, "whiteblindness," which she contends "positions equality in an ideology wherein the race of a person is and ought to be immaterial" (477). Sacks and Lindholm (2002), in their research on straight, white, college-age males, found that these individuals believed that racial identification was counterproductive and, unreflexively extrapolating from their own sense of privilege, tended to underestimate the effects of structural racism, relied on cultural explanations for racial inequality and argued that whiteness was a liability (135-137). Royster (2003) has found that discourses of colorblindness, racial equality, and free markets provide whites' with justification for discrimination. In her study of recent graduates of a vocational school, Royster argues that white employers, inspired by neoconservative racial projects, preferred to hire white workers to compensate for the way that affirmative action had corrupted the "free-market."

School-based studies also attest to the operation of colorblindness. Lewis, Chesler and Forman (2000) asked experts on the subject of whiteness—college students of color—to divulge the ways that whites' behavior belies their supposed colorblindness. These respondents reported that white students engaged in numerous practices that betrayed their belief in a racial hierarchy. Underlying all of these practices was what the students of color described as whites' vehement denial that race structures social life (77-83). Schultz, Buck and Nieze's (2000) conducted multi-racial focus groups in middle

¹⁹ My focus is on the specific forms and implications of colorblindness in the post-civil rights era; for discussions of earlier manifestations of colorblindness, see HoSang (2010). Also, for further discussion of different varieties of colorblindness, see (Bonilla-Silva 2000, 2001, 2003; Foreman and Bonilla Silva 2000).

schools and found that race was often minimized through a number of supposedly colorblind discourses and practices.²⁰ Amanda Lewis's (2001, 2003) research on fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms shows that although parents and teachers' report that their predominantly white schools are racially unmarked, their commitment to colorblindness obscures and distorts their perceptions. Colorblindness prevented these whites from making meaningful and critical assessments of the racially homogeneous school and community—one teacher went so far as to claim that she did not know how many students of color she had in her class because she does not see race (Lewis 2001:792). By conflating colorblindness (often expressed in hesitancy to even talk about race) with racial progressivism, whites deprived themselves of the language needed to make meaningful statements about the ways in which race mattered. Racial segregation, for example, was understood as the simple outcome of market forces and individuals' personal preferences (790). She also found that whites' insistence that “we are all humans,” “everyone is the same,” and “people are people” functioned ideologically to protect white privilege by denying the salience and importance of race. Of course, the belief in equality co-exists with the fact of inequality, leading Bobo, Kleugel and Smith (1996) to point out that, “under this regime blacks are still stereotyped and blamed as the architects of their own disadvantage” (21).

Investigating the worldviews of white students requires sensitivity to the ways in which whites seek to protect race privilege in seemingly non-racial ways as described above. However, a major aim of this dissertation is to distinguish between statements

²⁰ These authors noted the following practices and discourses: racism as a problem of past generations; disaggregating whiteness into symbolic ethnicities (see also Waters 1990 and Sugrue and Skrentny 2008) to claim a legacy of disadvantage, while demonstrating that mobility is possible in the face of discrimination; and, a school-wide commitment to avoid discussions of race.

that are protective of the racial status quo and those that seek to disrupt it.

Colorblindness can be deployed in ways that reify the racialized social structure, but it can also be indicative of individuals' sincere desire to deal with or confront racial inequality. As Bailey (2002) points out in his work on Brazil, colorblindness can contain within it an awareness of power and an element of critique. He argues that Brazilians often speak of colorblindness not as an appraisal of current social circumstance, but as a goal or ideal. Researchers who ignore this nuance may mistake resistance for reification. As I will demonstrate below, some respondents in this study employ colorblindness to *acknowledge* the central paradox of race—the fact that it is simultaneously real and unreal. Others claim colorblindness as part of a progressive identity that, despite the contradiction, includes noticing the ways in which race matters. Another group finds that critiques of racial inequality and whiteness are muted by their commitments to colorblindness, specifically the fear that noticing, talking about or challenging the racial status quo is tantamount to being a racist. What is similar across respondents is the fact that colorblindness structures the way they talk about race; what is different is the meaning they make through this discourse.

Enactment Five: The Perverse Effects of Moral Tension

Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal's ([1944] 1964) *An American Dilemma* argued that the problem of race was fundamentally a problem with whites. His painstaking treatises of more than 1,300 pages detailed the social, economic, political and historical dimensions of racial inequality in American life, but despite his emphasis on social structure, the enduring legacy of his work is the claim that racial inequality in

American life formed a moral dilemma. For Myrdal the race problem would resolve as the American creed of equality found in the Declaration of Independence and the fact of racial inequality created unbearable tension in the hearts and minds of whites. Given the persistence of racial inequality in American society, it appears that Myrdal's moral dilemma has not resolved in the way he predicted.

Recent scholarship has revisited Myrdal's original formulation. Colin Wayne Leach (2002) has argued that Myrdal has been misread: instead of predicting the resolution of the race problem, Leach contends that Myrdal was far more circumspect about the potential for racial equality in America. Leach argues that Myrdal understood that racial explanations for social inequality could persist or increase if the *de jure* impediments to equality were eliminated (e.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965), but racial inequality remained. Leach's reformulation of Myrdal points to a paradox in the moral dilemma: with no overt structural mechanism through which to explain racial difference, whites would rely on notions of cultural inferiority to explain the failure of legal equality to produce social equality. In other words, attempts to enhance equality could, ironically, engender racism. Similarly, Joel Olsen (2002) notes that attempts to do away with *herrenvolk* democracy and promote colorblindness in state and federal policy have relegated race to what he calls the "prepolitical" sphere (389). As a prepolitical phenomenon, whites understand continued racial inequality and separation as the outcome of free-market forces. This logic prohibits whites from developing structural understandings of their social position and encourages cultural or biological explanations for inequality. If race and racial discrimination are not produced through public policy then racial difference must be explained by deficits inhering in the

subordinate group itself.

Brezina and Winder (2003) have also investigated the conditions under which racism flourishes in the post-Civil Rights era. Their work on status construction and generalization suggests that whites faced with nothing more than superficial information about others' levels of resources (income, wealth, educational attainment, etc.), will use this information to make durable valuations of ability and worth. Resource-rich individuals are believed to possess greater levels of ability, while the opposite is assumed of those who are resource poor. When resource level is tied to a nominal characteristic in the population such as race, individuals' assume that resource inequity is a proxy for the ability and worth of the group as a whole. Brezina and Winder's research on whites suggests that the greater the perceived gap in resources between the races, the greater whites' estimation of black inferiority will be. They argue that this process is largely unconscious as even whites that embrace structural explanations for racial inequality connect race and resource status to ability and worth. These authors further the insights of Leach and Olsen by isolating a mechanism through which whites' beliefs about the racial hierarchy are solidified and their position within it is justified. As Brezina and Winder note, belief in the meritocratic ideology will encourage whites to explain persistent racialized resource inequality as resulting from black cultural pathology. The result is what Myrdal ([1944] 1964) called "dynamic causation:" structural disadvantage is generative of negative status generalizations that in turn reproduce structural disadvantage (75).

The American Dilemma has not resolved, but instead the social structures that maintain racial inequality — and their attendant ideological manifestations — have been

rearticulated in ways consistent with the presumption of equality (Hall 1996; Holt 2000; Lewis 2004; Omi and Winant 1994). Instead of the resolution of the race problem, the post-Civil Rights era seems to have brought with it perverse effects: as *de jure* racial equality was achieved, racism did not abate but instead changed forms (Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1996). As the dissertation will show, for some white students, overt evidence of racial difference—academic tracking and a significant achievement gap, in conjunction with the demands of colorblindness—is used to structure notions of racial superiority and inferiority. With little systematic discussion among faculty about racial inequality and a curriculum that often implicitly relegates racial inequality to the past, some white students are left with few alternatives than to draw their own conclusions about what accounts for the differences that they see.

The five enactments of whiteness described in this section were all observed in this study and represent the dominant ways in which whiteness was talked about, understood and lived. At times these enactments were observed in isolation and at times multiple enactments would combine in single events, exchanges or utterances. The focus of this study is not the enactments themselves but the contextual factors that lead to the perpetuation or disruption of these enactments among white students.

Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu's Field Analysis

Whiteness as Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu crafted a vision of social practice that sought to meaningfully connect social actors to their contexts and explicate the interplay between structure, culture and agent. Responding to what he viewed as unproductive binaries and debates,

he developed a theoretical and methodological framework that attempted to trace the middle ground between “objectivism” and “subjectivism”²¹ (Bourdieu 1980:25).

Bourdieu found both approaches lacking: objectivism was too rigid in that it envisioned society as a, “self-sufficient system, detached from real usage and totally stripped of its functions, inviting a purely passive understanding”; subjectivism, on the other hand, failed to take sufficient of what Bourdieu referred to as the “necessity of the social world” (1980:32). Ultimately, Bourdieu pointed out the fallacy of seeing objectivity and subjectivity as mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. He argued that a comprehensive theory of practice must appreciate the “reason immanent in practices, whose ‘origins’ lies neither in...rational calculation nor in the determinants of mechanisms external to and superior to the agent” (1990:50). It was in this theoretical middle ground that Bourdieu elaborated his vision of social practice.

The habitus is the locus where the objective and subjective come together.

Bourdieu (1977) defined habitus as:

Systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’...without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. (72, emphasis in original)

An individual’s feel for how to engage her social world is structured by her objective context, but also serves to structure that context, in turn, as her behavior is circumscribed in ways that remake the social structure. The habitus is not a set of conscious dispositions but instead represents a repertoire of possible behaviors constrained by the cumulative socialization of a social actor’s specific social location—what Bourdieu

²¹ In *Pascalian Meditations* (1990) he refers to this as a dichotomy between mechanism (social action is socially determined or constrained) and finalism (social action is the manifestation of free-will or rational choice).

referred to as *field*. Diane Reay (2004) envisions habitus as a “deep, interior, epicenter containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, her external circumstances” (Reay 2004:435).

For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus could not stand alone outside of the larger equation that included *capital* and *field*. By adding the concept of capital²² (cultural, social, economic)—knowledge of, or the possession of symbols of status—a complete picture of social action emerges. The habitus is the set of dispositions that governs the deployment of capital in a given field (Lareau 1999). In other words, fields, such as educational institutions, were not culturally neutral and meritocratic, but instead were spaces in which social actors come into conflict over what will count as capital within the field. Bourdieu understood that the logic of the field, those practices deemed legitimate, were arbitrary and reflected not the pure logic of the field itself but instead the outcome of a social process in which one group is able to impose its culture on the field. Fields then are structured places, places with a “magnetic field” that serves to benefit those with the proper cultural polarity while excluding those without (Wacquant 1992:17). In schools for example, although certain kinds of behaviors, dress, comportment, language may appear to be the immutable logic of the field, the research presented in this dissertation suggests that what passes as acceptable within a school is a reflection of white culture. Because white culture is cultural capital in the field, white students are far

²² Bourdieu understood that a vision of capital that revolved around material wealth was greatly limited and would fail to see the ways in which other social possessions such as knowledge about art, diplomas from prestigious schools, ways of comporting the body, familiarity with social precepts could also be converted for social gain. In this way, we can understand that one’s ability to speak of (or “appreciate”) opera may result from and signal membership in a certain social class. See Bourdieu (1984, 1986).

more able to enact the behaviors and traits that form the institutional expectations at Belltown High. This serves to put non-white students at a disadvantage while also reproducing racial difference as non-white students consistently fall short of institutional expectations. At the same times whiteness is rendered unremarkable or invisible as whites practices are mistaken as universal common sense. Although the field may be structured in race, Bourdieu recognizes that often both those who benefit from the structure of the field and those who are hurt by it accept its logic as common sense rather than an expression of power (Bourdieu 1972:164).

Although Bourdieu was not exclusively a theorist of social reproduction, most of the studies that employ his concepts focus on the remaking of social structures (Reay 2004). Scholars have also tended, problematically, to overlay Bourdieu's social practice framework on their data in a superficial manner. As Reay explains, "there is an increasing tendency for habitus to be sprayed throughout academic texts like 'intellectual hair spray,' bestowing gravitas without doing any theoretical work" (2004:432). Writing specifically about the sociology of education, Reay recommends two ways to avoid these problems and usefully employ Bourdieu's insights. First, she encourages scholars to move beyond employing Bourdieu's work solely in analysis, to instead to see Bourdieu's field analysis as a methodology, a way to structure the collection of data. MacLeod (1995), for example, investigates the lives and understandings of working-class white and black high school students living in housing projects by paying special attention to how their context structured their aspirations and how their actions recapitulated or challenged their social context. Lareau and Horvat (1999) focus on disjunctures between low-income black parent's enactments, and the expectations at culturally white schools to

explain why some black parents have trouble advocating for their children. By structuring their research around exploring and explaining the intersection of agent and structure, the studies of MacLeod, Lareau and Horvat make Bourdieu's framework a primary part of their research, not an analytical afterthought.

Second, Reay suggests that scholars need to appreciate the ways in which Bourdieu's theory attempted to account for change, not simply reproduction.²³ Although his work is often read as deeply deterministic, Bourdieu was attentive to the ways in which tension could create space for social change (McNay 2001 in Reay 2004:437). The habitus is reproduced and largely unconscious as long as it exists in a field that supports it, but, "when the habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjunctures can generate change and transformation" (Reay 2004:436). In other words, when social actors venture into a field where their dispositions and assumptions are challenged, devalued or simply made obvious, the resulting tension can serve to facilitate a critical response. "Thus, while habitus reflects the social position in which it was constructed it also carries within it the genesis of new creative responses that are capable of transcending the social conditions in which it was produced" (Reay 2004:435).

Although they do not refer to Bourdieu explicitly, Sacks and Lindholm's (2002) contend that whites' worldviews are malleable and echoes Bourdieu's insights about social change while also suggesting that closing the social distance that separates whites from the social reality of racial others is a key variable in stimulating change and developing critical responses. They argue that just as social distance serves to prevent

²³ Owing partially to Bourdieu's own interest in education, the concept of the habitus has been employed in numerous studies of schools and their role in the institutional reproduction of social inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Carter 2005; MacLeod 1995; Reay et. al. 2007).

whites from seeing the way society is structured in racial dominance, closing that social gulf—what they call “boundary spanning”—should serve to enlighten them. Sacks and Lindholm conclude with the following statement:

Persuading the privileged to traverse social distances is a critical yet often ignored step in the complicated project of breaking down our system of stratification. An unobstructed view of social structure can only be gained when the privileged come face to face with the fact that their experiences are unique and fundamentally a result of multiple layers of advantage (2002:147).

To “boundary span” is to engender tension and perhaps a nascent recognition of the social structure that could serve to disrupt the ideological scaffold that justifies racial inequality. Of course it would be naïve to assume that “boundary spanning” would always lead to this critical response, as the discussion above contends, exposure can result in a multiplicity of understandings including those that reify notions of racial difference. What is important, however, is to note the possibility for change and be attentive to the conditions under which it emerges.²⁴ This dissertation will seek to consider how the structure of the field along with the quality of white students’ interactions with QRED students inflects their understandings of the racial hierarchy.

Specific Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to determine how white students located in a predominantly white school develop particular visions of whiteness and racial inequality and how those visions are inflected or altered based on these white students’ situatedness in relation to students of color. Of particular interest is how the correspondence between white students’ racial identity and the structure of the field in which they are educated

²⁴ For an example of a study that overemphasizes the notion of reproduction in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (Bonilla Silva 2010).

serve to obscure the operation and existence of whiteness and shape how students think about race and, thus, their enactments of whiteness. At the same time, however, I also seek to investigate those instances in which white students are able to develop some sense of the racialized structure of the field and community in which they live. By contrasting two groups of white students: those who simply observe non-white students (low social interaction, or LSI students) and those who develop meaningful connections and relations with non-white students (high social interaction, or HSI students), I examine the ways in which white students with similar backgrounds make meaning of the same field differently based on the depth and quality of their contact with racial others.

Following Reay's recommendations, I employ Bourdieu's insights as methodology and seek to explicate the ways in which the consonance between white students' racial identity and the structure of the field yield specific ways of understanding and viewing race and difference. By investigating the school curriculum and culture, teachers' dispositions, and social networks, we can begin to develop a nuanced understanding of the structure of the field and how and why white students enact whiteness in the ways described above. Furthermore, this dissertation will seek to move beyond simply identifying the ways in which whiteness is reproduced and will seek to investigate the ways in which whiteness is unsettled or challenged in social interaction. For example, what happens when whites' friendship networks or romantic lives bring them into meaningful contact with students of color? In what ways do these experiences serve to disturb or upset established understandings? Do these experiences help to develop an awareness of the racial structure of the field among white students? As noted above, whiteness is not a monolithic identity but is inflected by social position and

experience. By paying special attention to those instances where students experience tension—in this case, often through close interaction with students of color—we can begin to theorize the potential for social change and better understand the conditions necessary to bring it about.

Belltown Demographics

The research for this dissertation was conducted at one regional high school in a predominantly white suburb in the northeastern United States that participates in the voluntary QRED desegregation program that busses students of color from the city to suburban schools. The town in which the school is located, which will be called Belltown, has a total population of approximately 20,000 people and, according to the 2010 census, is predominantly white with no non-white group (black, Hispanic and Asian) above 5 percent of the population. Since the 1960's, Belltown's class composition has changed dramatically. Once a mixed community of middle class professionals, and working class residents who labored at the regions factories, mills and farms, Belltown has since gentrified. Comprised mainly of generously zoned lots with single-family homes, Belltown has largely lost the working class contingent that was located on the west side of town. The Westside, which used to contain industrial uses and the preponderance of the town's multifamily homes, has increasingly come to look like the other side of Belltown. The other side of Belltown is a series of neighborhood subdivisions that surround a town center of commercial, civic and administrative buildings. Most of the streets in Belltown are lined with large trees and some of the

homes are placed on such large parcels of land that all that can be seen from the street is a driveway.

Race at Belltown High

Despite being located in a predominantly white community, Belltown High School does include a significant number of students of color. In the school year 2010-2011 Belltown enrolled just over 1,000 students, of which about 6 percent were black, 4 percent were Hispanic and 6 percent were Asian. The school population data does not separate Hispanic white from non-white Hispanic. When these categories are disaggregated the percentage of Hispanics who do not identify as white is far lower hovering around approximately 1 percent of the total population.²⁵

Black Students at Belltown High

With the exception of a handful of students, the 6 percent of black students at Belltown High are not residents in Belltown, but instead are part of a voluntary busing program designed to address the racial segregation of suburban schools in the area while providing educational opportunities for black students. Although QRED students' ethnic identities (e.g. Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cape Verdean) are salient markers of difference among them when they are together as a group, when interacting with the larger Belltown school community they embrace the black identity ascribed to them. Despite the existence of a few Hispanic QRED students, the staff and faculty tended to use the terms "QRED" and "black" when referring to these students. Although both terms were used,

²⁵ This adjusted percentage is an approximation and was derived using school level data for the school year 2011-2012.

the term “QRED” was used with far more frequency and essentially functioned as a euphemism, a word that served to allow faculty and staff to talk about race without relying on standard racial signifiers. Because my respondents use the term “QRED,” I use it in this dissertation in order to maintain consistency between my respondents’ voices and my analysis. In Chapters Three and Five, I refer to a Hispanic QRED student and have indicated where that is the case. In all other instances, QRED should be read to refer to non-resident students whose ascribed identity at Belltown is black.

Asian Students at Belltown High

Asian students are simultaneously present as non-white students at Belltown, yet in both the discourse of the students themselves – and, consequently, even in the analysis here – they also occupy a strangely liminal space that alternately grants them tokenistic status as “whites” and/or renders them even more invisible as non-whites. The percent of Asian students at Belltown High has increased dramatically since the early 1990s. These increases correspond with larger trends in the area in which this study was conducted. Notwithstanding the complex location of Asian students within Belltown High, given the specific questions of this dissertation and the discourse of students and faculty themselves, I use the term “non-white” students and QRED students to refer primarily to black students.²⁶ Further research examining the ways in which whiteness is constructed vis-à-vis “Asianness” clearly merits further study, but is not given in-depth attention in this study. The particular position of Asian students at Belltown High will be briefly utilized as a shadow comparison in the final chapter.

²⁶ As mentioned above, in the single instance where I refer to a Hispanic student who participates in the QRED program, this is explicitly noted.

The following chapter will discuss the methods used in this study in greater detail. The three substantive chapters will then draw on ethnographic, interview and focus group data to describe the structure of the field and how white students level and quality of social interaction matters in how they make sense of the racial differences that they experience. Chapter Three will consider the voices of staff and faculty along with some students to give a sense of the how the field is structured racially and how cultural capital is apportioned in ways that benefit white students, but that simultaneously render this racialized distribution of capital invisible. Chapter Four will focus on LSI students and will seek to determine how they perceive the racial structure of the field and the outcomes that it generates. Chapter Five will present case studies of HSI students in order to demonstrate how interaction between QRED and white students provides the latter with a more critical perspective on the structure of the field and the importance of race within it. Although students who forged close contacts with QRED students were not immune to racialized thinking, their contacts and experiences served as a prophylactic against the powerful racial logic that infused Belltown High. These students tended to draw different conclusions about race and difference, and were far more attuned to the ways in which race mattered.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS, SAMPLE AND LOGICS

Belltown High School is a series of flat-roofed buildings and gyms. In front of the school there are clusters of well-manicured athletic fields for softball, soccer, football and other sports. The school is surrounded by parking lots and even though most students are forbidden from entering and leaving at will, the nature of the school campus and the number of entrances and exits in the school building makes enforcement a considerable challenge. The main parking lot, which is divided into student and faculty sections, provides an informal view of the class status of the school's resident student population. Not only can many families in Belltown afford to provide their children with cars, it is not unusual to see students drive into school in shiny new expensive models. The class privilege enjoyed by students of Belltown High becomes that much clearer when their cars are considered in relation to the modest models found in the adjacent teacher parking lot. As one staff member noted: "if it's a smaller foreign car like a Toyota or if it's a beaten up car it's probably a teacher; if it's a Land Rover...it's probably a student's car."

Inside the school, a large library with tall windows serves as a centerpiece around which run long hallways with narrow lockers secured with padlocks, and an occasional student mural. These hallways hold the administrative offices, a cafeteria, an auditorium and the classrooms. Academic departments include social studies, English, math, foreign language, art, music, physical education, science and computer science and are physically divided within the building with each department having its own series of classrooms and

a central location for its faculty. When not in class, students do not have a designated location on campus and most opt to spend time in the cafeteria, the library or, if they are a junior or senior in good standing—or willing to take the chance that they will not get caught—they leave campus.

Bells govern the school day and the students are given a brief four minutes to pass between classes. Many students find it impossible to leave a class, go to their locker to exchange books and then make it to their next class on time. As a result it is not uncommon to see students carry the contents of their locker on their backs in overstuffed backpacks. The packs combined with the general crush of bodies surging through too-narrow doorways gives the school a strange ebb and flow. The 58 minutes that comprise the average class finds the hallways silent and vacant. When the bell rings to indicate passing time, classroom doors fling open and the four-minute rush begins, turning the hallways into a river that seems to be over-spilling its banks. Like clockwork, the river seems to recede after four minutes and the halls are quiet again for 58 minutes.

I was a member of the social studies faculty at Belltown for five years, including the time in which I conducted field research for this study. I am also an alumnus of Belltown High. In this chapter I will describe how I conducted ethnographic research given my particular position in the school as a white teacher and alumni.

Methods

Logics and Methods for Studying an Invisible Identity

How do researchers study whiteness if whites believe that they have no racial identity? How can sociologists examine race among a population that often extols the

virtue of colorblindness? As Edward Bonilla-Silva (2001) asks: How can we even talk about racism when most whites formally accept the equality of the races and the principles of equal opportunity, do not support white supremacist organizations, and are less likely than ever to support old stereotypes about blacks” (199)? As the literature review in the previous chapter points out, whiteness is socially contested, fluid, capricious and often minimized or ignored by whites who cling to their sense of group position while denying the salience of race. If whiteness has been rearticulated in ways suitable for the post Civil Rights era, then the way in which whiteness is researched needs to change as well (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Pager and Quillian 2005). Research methods must be tuned to the specific racial formation that they seek to understand. For example, when Allison Davis and Burleigh and Mary Gardner ([1941] 1965), made their study of the Jim-Crow South they were seeking to unearth the operation of “separate-but-equal” racism—a new caste-based regime of racial oppression that had emerged after the Civil War and Reconstruction had overturned the state-sanctioned slave system. To respond to the ways in which racial dominance had changed, these researchers recalibrated how they examined racial dynamics. By using comparative ethnography (Davis was black and the Gardners white), they examined the ways in which the racial hierarchy had been reasserted through new forms of racist ideology, practice, and exploitation.²⁷ Because

²⁷ For example, ideological frameworks during the slave era often centered on patriarchy and family; slaves were likened to children who needed the support and guidance of their masters. Social theorist George Fitzhugh (1854), for example, argued that slavery was more humane than the system of capitalist exploitation prevalent in the North. He pointed out that because slaves were property, slave owners had an incentive to care for their slaves, and therefore would not overwork, wear-out or physically debilitate them. He maintained that these relations were far more compassionate than a system in which workers could be exploited, used up and then replaced by a surplus labor force. Once the slave system ended, these ideological rationales were supplanted by racial-biology—as noted in the rule of hypodescent—that was better suited to promoting endogamy and maintaining the caste system.

racism today functions in ways far more clandestine and coded than during the Jim Crow era, the methods used to research race and whiteness must be adjusted accordingly.

Edward Bonilla-Silva (2001) has been on the forefront of innovating methods of studying whiteness that take into account the way it functions in contemporary times. He is critical of scholars who employ attitudinal scales and economic indicators developed during the Jim Crow era to suggest that white racism has abated in contemporary times. To do so, he argues, misunderstands the ways in which the racial hierarchy is maintained. For example, an overwhelming majority of whites, when given an attitudinal assessment, report that they would be comfortable living in an integrated neighborhood or having a black person over for a meal. But, as Bonilla-Silva points out, these socially desirable responses are in contradiction with the fact that levels of, “residential segregation and isolation are still extremely high, few whites invite blacks for dinner at their homes, and real social integration is happening too slowly” (199).

Bonilla-Silva is skeptical of standard surveys and questionnaires that ask questions that are clearly written to gauge white racism. In his work with Forman (2000) a questionnaire designed to gauge racist attitudes was provided to respondents before their interviews. The combination of survey/interview was designed to determine if whites would report one set of attitudes on a questionnaire yet betray another in interviews. Through painstaking discourse analysis of whites “discursive moves” these researchers determine that the white students used in their sample, “exhibited more prejudiced views in the interviews than in the survey responses” (75-76).

Bonilla-Silva (2001) suggests that ethnography will play a central role in generating insights about whiteness. White ethnographers, he points out, can gain access

to “whiteness from within” as a way to research “what whites say about blacks in family gatherings, in bars, in Friday afternoon beer-drinking gatherings and in other private white spaces” (199-200). Unlike formal assessments that elicit socially desirable responses, white ethnographers can gain access to how whiteness functions when “nobody” is looking.

Amanda Lewis (2004) has also noted the challenges of studying whiteness in contemporary times and argues, like Bonilla-Silva, that methods must be able to capture the often hidden enactments of white privilege. Although whites tend not to see themselves as a group, Lewis believes that they can be studied as a collective. She does not worry that research on whites’ group-status will serve to create social distinctions that have no social salience. Whites, she notes, may not be self-conscious of their group membership, but that does not change the structural benefits that flow from being white. Lewis argues that whites should be studied as a “series” (626-627). Similar to Marx’s notion of a class in itself versus a class for itself, a series differs from a group in that a group is self-conscious and a series functions as a “passive collective” (627). In describing the difference, Lewis contrasts a neo-Nazi group to an all white Boy Scout troop. Neo-Nazis comprise a white group because their *raison d’etre* is expressly racial. An all-white Boy-Scout troop is not self-consciously organized around race, but can be explained by its existence in a racialized social structure. For example, the history of racial segregation combined with contemporary housing discrimination conspires to create an all white troop because it is culled from the local community. Because its

existence speaks to its position in a racialized social structure, these whites form a passive series not a self-aware group.²⁸

Lewis recommends that researchers focus on ideology as a site through which white privilege is solidified. According to Lewis, ideologies are frameworks that allow people to make sense of their world, but, more importantly, offer explanations for the arrangements of power within that world. Ideology, she claims, “naturalizes and legitimizes the present state of things” and “tends to support certain interests and to subvert others” (632). Ideology is a fertile site for research on whiteness because it is here, in the realm of meaning and explanation that whites often contend with the contradictions inherent in denying their racial affiliation while living in a society deeply structured by race. As Lewis notes, “hegemonic whiteness...is a shifting configuration of practices and meanings that occupy the dominant position in a particular racial formation and that successfully manage to occupy the empty space of ‘normality’ in our culture” (624). To determine how whites occupy a position of dominance, while figuring themselves to be colorblind or the victims of racial intolerance is the defining challenge of whiteness studies in the post Civil Rights era. As Duster (2001) notes, research on whiteness must analyze its, “fluid character,” how “the nature and shape of ‘whiteness’ can change nature and shape (morph!) and yet remain structurally privileged” (132). The third wave of whiteness research acknowledges that enactments of whiteness depend on ideological narratives but is also attentive to how whites’ discursive practices are variable and context specific and can be deployed to either stabilize or destabilize whiteness (Winddance and Twine 2008:6-9). This research will focus on variations in whites’

²⁸ Lewis writes that, “because many whites live in homogenous settings, even as race is shaping their lives, experiences, and opportunities, they may not experience race necessarily as a meaningful part of their lives” (629).

structural conditions and how they lead to statements or enactments that are either ideological or critical.

In order to capture a complete picture what is often an invisible or protean identity I did not simply rely on one method but instead I employed triangulation: the use of multiple methods, including interviewing, focus groups and ethnography (Winddance and Twine 2008). I interviewed white students, staff and faculty at the school in order to not only listen to what whites said, but also to listen to how they said what they said. Often clarity came from instances in which respondents were not clear: moments of confusion, complex qualifications or long rambling internally contradictory statements. Interviewing allowed me to push respondents when I thought they were giving me socially desirable answers and compare their propensity toward non-controversial, scripted responses carefully scrubbed free of racial meaning with comments or utterances made in informal improvised moments. The difference was often profound. These moments yielded a lot of information that would not have been captured in a survey.

I also conducted focus groups with students of color. Whiteness may be invisible to whites but it certainly is not invisible to people of color (Frankenberg 2001). These focus groups generated critical data that brought the mechanics of whiteness into sharper view. I also conducted ethnographic research at the same time that I was conducting interviews and focus groups. As a teacher in Belltown High, I was deeply integrated into the community and able to witness enactments of whiteness at every level. Through close observation of everything from seemingly mundane student-painted murals on the school walls to moments where race was made obvious and salient I was able to enrich my interview data and adjust my interview protocols, tailoring them in order to capture

respondents' views on site-specific phenomenon that I observed in the field. The remainder of this chapter describes the sample and methods used in detail.

Institutional Review:

Before any data was collected, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, confirming that my research presented human subjects with minimum possibility of harm. The IRB reviewed my recruitment strategy, a general version of my interview protocol and procedures for confidentiality. All respondents were informed that the IRB had approved the study.

Ethnography:

As a teacher at Belltown High I was given extraordinary access to all venues of school life. Teaching at the school in which you are conducting research provides unsurpassed access to whiteness and race from within. This insider status not only allowed me to generate a more thorough understanding of the site but it also gave me an inside sense of how race was understood, talked about and lived at the school. Being a teacher allowed me to learn the site-specific language of race that existed in Belltown and then employ this understanding to not only make sense of my interviews but also to structure how I conducted them. However, getting this access also required that I draw boundaries between my roles as researcher and teacher. In order to keep these boundaries distinct, I tried to engage the site in two different modes, both allowing me to generate ethnographic data. In those instances when my teacher role needed to be primary—in the classroom, in conferences, during meetings with faculty—I would wait

to take field notes until later when my obligations as teacher had ended. Although making the transition from thinking like a teacher to thinking like a researcher often required some intellectual gymnastics, I found that reflecting, and writing, after the fact allowed me to not only consider what I had heard and seen, but it also forced me to consider through the lens of a researcher my own reactions as a teacher. Here at the nexus of ethnography and participant observation I drew some of my most nuanced observations.

There were other times when I set out into the school as a researcher first. On free blocks, after school, during extracurricular activities or any other event that I was not professionally mandated to attend, I approached the school as if “in the field.” When appropriate or practical I brought my computer and typed notes in real time. There were times when my role as teacher and researcher conflicted and a student looking to talk about grades or course content, or a parent or colleague who wanted to chat interrupted my experience in the field. For observations of athletic teams and other organized events I asked permission first instead of simply showing up and was not denied access to any venue that I wanted to observe. Despite some students’ passing curiosity as to why I was appearing in venues outside of my usual orbit I would simply tell them that I was working on a dissertation as part of my graduate degree and they tended not to ask any follow up questions.

Total Sample:

54 students and 22 staff members were interviewed for this study in 64 separate interview sessions and three focus groups. My sample is not randomly selected nor

should it be considered suitable for generalization. The samples for this study were designed to maximize the range of respondents interviewed (Weiss 1994), in particular, it was designed to capture the voices of the atypical white students who come in close contact with QRED students.

Interviews:

Overall, I interviewed forty white students: twenty who self-reported little contact with QRED students (hereafter referred to as LSI or “low social interaction” students), and twenty students who both self-reported having close contacts with QRED students *and* were identified as such by QRED students themselves (hereafter referred to as HSI or “high social interaction” students). This included including one biracial (black/white) resident student who identified as black but passed as white. For the white students, the categories of LSI and HSI are meaningful only in relation to one another, and it should be kept in mind that when compared to groups in another context entirely, the designation of students to categories would need to be recalibrated. When compared to a predominantly white school *without* any kind of racially-based busing program, for example, *all* the students at Belltown have some social interactions. This simply highlights the importance of not just examining interracial contact in general, but also the quality of interactions, for even when various groups of students share space, how they engage with each other is another story entirely.

According to Quillian and Campbell (2003) the probability of developing a friendship in a racially mixed school depends on propinquity, shared social situations, and homophily, shared identity. Different schools racial populations and metropolitan

inclusion schemes serve to make these two factors interact in varied ways. For example, in an integrated school homophily will serve to promote segregation while propinquity will promote integration (541). Quillian and Campbell's research on cross-racial friendship formation²⁹ suggests that there are differences in friendship formation between blacks and whites and blacks and Asians. They note that the history of racial oppression and the continued salience of stereotypes serves to limit the frequency of black-white relationships. Even in schools with high levels of propinquity between black and white, homophily often prevails (542). Asians and whites were far more likely to have cross race friendships than whites and blacks (553-554). According to the authors these findings support the contention that there is a comparatively smaller social distance between Asian and white than there is between black and white.

White students as a whole had a greater familiarity with Asian students, their families and their circumstances—in essence, white students and Asian students were objectively more similar sharing the same geographic location and class status. White students did insist that Asian students were simply a variant of white, a view that clearly impacted their racial constellation of friends; however, at the same time Asian students did serve to inform whites' sense of their own racial identity. Although Asian students reported feeling mostly comfortable in their friendship groups they also had no trouble recounting frustrating and confusing experiences in which race intruded calling into

²⁹ Although the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health Data counts romantic relationships as friendships the authors throw out these data, justifying this decision with the simple axiom that, “the dynamics of romantic relationships are probably different than friendships” (546). Given my focus on the impacts of whites' social interactions and the ability of romantic relationships to bring students close, I have included these relationships in my investigation, which, to a small degree limits the applicability of Quillian and Campbell's findings to my research.

question their white friends stated belief that race did not matter.³⁰ The outcomes of white students' relationships with Asian students will be employed in the conclusion of this study as a shadow comparison. Despite white students insistence that Asians were just a different shade of white, Asians were defined as "other." Although they were perceived to be high achievers Asians still held a distinct position in the racial hierarchy somewhere between black and white.

All student participants were recruited through face-to-face recruiting. The study, along with the respondent's responsibilities and rights were described and any questions were answered. Recruiting LSI students was far more difficult than recruiting HSI students. When I asked HSI students to participate in an interview about their experiences, most jumped at the chance often returning the permission slip the next day. Having heard of my research, a few of my HSI respondents, eager to tell their story, actually sought me out and asked to participate. LSI students tended to ask more questions about the study and were far more circumspect about participating. One respondent told me flatly, "I don't want to be put on the spot." These students' hesitancy, I would later realize, was born from their limited experience talking about race and their

³⁰ Quillian and Campbell find that homophily is increased among groups that form a small minority in a school population (especially true they argue when a minority group is less than 10 percent of a school population). They theorize that seeking out same race friends serves as a form of psychological support, a coping mechanism that allows marginalized groups to find support and social shelter from the majority. Although Asian and QRED students comprised roughly the same percentage of the school population, QRED students were far more likely than Asian students to seek out same race friends perhaps speaking to their relatively greater sense of exclusion. Contrary to Quillian and Campbell's findings, the Asians that I spoke with reported trying to fit in and claimed that their lack of critical mass made it hard for them to maintain or create large networks of Asian students at school. Perhaps mitigating their need to develop these friendships, and explaining the disjuncture between what I observed and Quillian and Campbell's findings is the fact that two neighboring communities have disproportionately high Asian populations from which my respondents tended to maintain connections with other Asians. With their white friends they tended to minimize race as much as possible, reserving their need to cope (often through jokes) with the way race complicated these relationships when they were around other Asians.

belief that simply noticing race—a prerequisite for an interview about race—was tantamount to being a racist.

In order to recruit HSI students, I queried QRED students and generated a list of the white students to whom they reported feeling close or who they knew were close with other QRED students. I then engaged in informal observation of students' social networks and their classroom contexts. Closeness was indicated in multiple ways. QRED students tended to view closeness as indicated by being part of an interracial relationship, having close friendships or participating on racially mixed athletic teams. Utilizing QRED students to identify the sample of HSI students had the effect of circumventing potential social desirability problems (whites overstating the extent or depth of their connections) that could have emerged from relying on white self-reporting. It also increased my confidence in the validity of characterizing the relationship as close through the assurance that *both* white student and students of color experienced it as such. When asked to subjectively rate on a scale of one to ten (ten being very close) how close they felt to a QRED student those whites identified by the QRED students reported an average closeness of 8.5 whereas the LSI students' average appraisal of their feeling of closeness was around four. These ratings also showed high levels of consistency when considered against the answers given during the interviews. The HSI students spoke extensively about direct experiences, conversations, and interactions with QRED students whereas the LSI students did not. The following interview excerpts were indicative of the difference between how LSI (Hans, Ashlee and Max) and HSI (Jessie, Justin and Cathy) students described their interactions and affiliations with QRED students.

Low Social Interaction Students:

Chris: Do you spend time with QRED students outside of the classroom, extra-curricular activities or anything?

Hans: Very, very rarely. I mean, there're a few kids I'm friendly with, but not people I'd say like, "wanna go downtown and get ice cream or something." It's more of like just saying 'hi' and all.

Ashlee: I really didn't spend a lot of time around the black kids until I got to high school and even then I don't spend a lot of time with them, I just see them...It's not like I have a black neighbor and I'm around a really mixed environment.

Chris: How much time do you spend outside of the classroom with the QRED students?

Max: None.

High Social Interaction Students:

Chris: How much time do you spend with QRED students outside the classroom?

Jessie: A hundred per cent, probably. The only time I'm not with them is when Charlie³¹ is not staying out at my house spending the night with my family...He's like my brother.

Cathy: One of them who I'm really good friends with, you know, frequently I've been the stay-out-here family. Whenever there's something out here that runs late, often I've been in the place where he can, you know, the house he can spend the night.

Susan: My boyfriend is a QRED student and I'm always just hanging out with QRED students and like on weekends. My friends always have QRED students around the house.

The 22 faculty and staff members that I interviewed were also recruited through face-to-face contact. The sample of staff members was designed to include at least one respondent from each academic department and respondents from special education and the administration. In order to recruit teachers, I visited departments during moments when I was not scheduled to teach and simply asked teachers if they would be interested

³¹ Charlie is a QRED student.

in participating. Although I introduced the study as about white students at Belltown High, the informal conversation that we had before the interview and the trouble that I sometimes had in keeping staff respondents focused on white students leads me to believe that they thought the study was really about QRED, a fact that speaks to presumptions of white normativity and who “has race.” As Lewis (2001) points out, whites in her study in a predominantly white school tended to hear the words “multiculturalism” and “race” as code for “black” (787). White students were not racialized and QRED students and Asian students were, albeit in different ways. On a few occasions I would ask a question such as: “what do white kids learn about race from being at Belltown High?” only to receive answers about the experiences of QRED students.

As with the student sample, I attempted to get a staff sample that reflected a range of experiences. Given that academic tracking often conspires to create classes that either disproportionately represent QRED students or are largely white I made sure to seek out teachers of both advanced placement classes and those that teach lower-level classes in order to get their impressions and descriptions of each kind of classroom. It was also challenging to get my staff respondents (especially those who were classroom teachers) to relate personal stories instead of answering my questions with general explanation as they do in their classrooms. Classroom teachers are used to being asked questions and giving answers that imply mastery of content. I believe that this disposition led many of my respondents to try to offer answers to me as they would their students: they tried to explain to me, in assertive tones, how race mattered at Belltown High and why. When confronted with respondents who answered questions in this manner I both reminded

them that I was seeking to hear about their personal impressions, stories and experiences no matter how fragmented or contradictory they seemed, and I changed the structures of my questions to encourage personal reflection and stories as opposed to general theorizing.

Overall, the student sample consisted on 20 females and 20 males. The average age of the respondents was 17. All student respondents self identified as white (or some variant of this designation such as Caucasian³²), except for one biracial student who identified as black but passed as white. The faculty and staff sample consisted of 8 females and 14 males. All staff respondents self identified as white except for three: two black males and one Puerto Rican female. Although student respondents were asked to report their political affiliation (this question was not worded as a Democrat or Republican binary but was left open ended) most indicated that they either did not know enough about politics to place themselves on the political spectrum although a few took definitive stands pronouncing themselves “Liberal”, “Tea Party Libertarian” or “Independent.” The faculty overwhelmingly identified as “democratic,” “liberal,” or “left leaning.”

All interviews were conducted at Belltown High School between April 2011 and March 2012. On average, interviews lasted about 50 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting about forty-five minutes and the longest interview lasting over 2 hours. All interviewees read and signed a “consent to participate” form before engaging in the interview and all participants also agreed to be audio taped, signing a consent form as a

³² Although Goldstein (1999) suggests that the labels whites use—white, Caucasian, Anglo—to define their racial identity depend on region and level of education, no pattern was discernable among the whites I interviewed. Respondents in this study used all three terms with “white,” a label that Goldstein contends is predominant in the southern United States due to the legacy of Jim Crow, used most frequently.

release. All students were also required to acquire parental permission. The tape recorder was used because as described by Weiss (1994), it allows the researcher to focus on the interviewee without being distracted by trying to record the interview verbatim. In order to maximize confidentiality and encourage honesty all interviews were conducted in quiet private locations such as an empty classroom or meeting room.

Interviewees were not paid for their participation. How the lack of monetary incentive affected the sample is unknown. Many of the respondents, however, confided that they viewed the interview as useful and in some cases liberating as they were asked to talk freely about race. None of the respondents seemed to experience significant discomfort during the interviews although, as indicated above, some students struggled to be comfortable talking about race. Usually once they realized that they would not be put on the spot or interrogated they became more comfortable, a fact indicated by changes in body language, extension of answers, a comparatively relaxed tone of voice and often laughter.

The interviews were conducted in an unstructured format meaning that I did not ask the same question to every respondent in every interview nor did I ask the questions in a specific order. These in-depth interviews typically started with the same series of questions, including: *How often do you talk about race with your friends? What is your ethnicity? Do you have friends or acquaintances of different races?* The answers to those questions typically dictated other questions that then were tailored to the respondent's specific experiences and perceptions. So, rather than impose a structured interview protocol, I favored a fluid approach in which the interview was conducted in a conversational format. Also, during the interviews, I often repeated back how I was

hearing and understanding my respondent's answers; I tried to reformulate their thoughts in my own words so they could confirm or amend my understandings.

The taped interviews for this study were transcribed in full. The transcriptions were then entered into the HyperResearch computer program, which was used to code and organize my data. The interviews were cleaned in order to clarify my respondents' meaning and omit information that might violate the assurance of anonymity. In all cases I have tried to stay faithful to what the respondents said (their meaning), but also the way in which they said it.

Focus Groups:

I conducted three focus groups with students of color: one with Asian students and two with QRED students. Seven black students participated in the QRED focus group and 5 participated in the Asian focus group. Two additional Asian students were not able to attend the focus group and as result I interviewed each in separate individual interviews.

Unearthing white culture by talking with whites is a difficult endeavor. As noted above, dominant groups tend to see their culture as normal, unremarkable or even invisible (Frankenberg 1993b; Lewis 2003, 2004). Determining what white culture is and getting a sense of how whites enact their race by talking to whites can be akin to an archeological excavation: you have to sift through a lot of extraneous material and often get a skeleton views of the whole. In order to flesh-out the description of white culture

and enactments at Belltown High I relied on resident experts: students of color.³³ This awareness of whiteness is not just of passing interest to people of color. Given their historically subordinate position and relative lack of power, knowing how to get along within white culture and read whites' social cues can often be a matter of survival as it can bear directly on their security, mobility or comfort (Collins 1990; Roediger 1998:4; Eaton 2001; Lewis 2004: 639). bell hooks (1998) points out that despite the fact that there has never been an official panel of blacks charged with generating research on whites, "black folk have, from slavery on, shared in conversation with one another 'special' knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people...its purpose was to help black folks cope and survive in a white supremacist society" (38). This approach has been used successfully in other studies to generate rich data on enactments of whiteness and white culture (Lewis, Chesler and Forman 2000; Roediger 2002). Diane Gusa (2010), for example, tries to identify the specific cultural practices found in predominantly white colleges by asking African American students about their experiences of discrimination and exclusion. As she notes these students' specialized insight allowed them to be "canaries in the [institutional] coal mine" (466).

In both the Asian and QRED focus groups, I introduced the study by telling the respondents that I was looking to learn something about white people and whiteness as it functions at Belltown High. I also indicated that although I was white I would not be offended by their observations. Participants in the QRED focus group almost immediately began talking about what it was like to be at Belltown and, as a group gave me a detailed and rich sense of what white culture looks like from the outside. The Asian

³³ I also interviewed almost all the staff members of color including one recently retired black classroom teacher who, up until his retirement, was the only black classroom teacher on staff. During the time this study was conducted there were no black classroom teachers.

focus group was different. These students' resident status and familiarity with white culture made it necessary for me to prompt them with specific questions whereas with the QRED focus group, the students seemed to intuitively understand what I was asking and seemed fluent and comfortable talking about their impressions of their predominantly white school. At times the QRED focus group felt as though I had walked in on a conversation in progress, one that these students clearly have with each other frequently. What was similar about both groups was the way that respondents seemed to build on each other's responses. One classmates' experience often triggered memories that other respondents may not have recalled if not for having participated in the group. The result from both groups was rich material on whiteness that helped me to frame much of the data culled from my interviews and observations.

Other Data:

In addition to the data collection described above I was also able to take advantage of one preexisting data set. One teacher at Belltown had conducted a series of focus groups with QRED students as part of a graduate degree in education. These groups were designed to put students in conversation with faculty about academic struggles. Students were interviewed in groups and then select statements were shared with faculty. I requested and received copies of the transcripts from these groups and was given permission to use them in my research. These focus groups add the voices of about 20 additional QRED students, 8 males and 12 females to the total number interviewed. The Michigan IRB also approved the use of these focus group data. Although the data was not collected for a study on whiteness, QRED students did report

on their perceptions of the school and much of the data was relevant and useful when trying to gain a sense of white culture and enactments of whiteness. Furthermore, the information from these focus groups not only augmented my data but also verified much of what I found as the same general themes seemed to emerge in both sets of data. These data were limited however by vague transcripts that often failed to report the age or gender of the respondent. Also, although the general themes were the same, my focus group data contains far more critical comments about race at Belltown High. This may have been due to the fact that the students knew that their responses were going to be kept confidential whereas in the focus groups conducted previously, the students were aware that their comments would be shared with faculty.

Insider Status: Motivations, Challenges and Benefits

I was a teacher in the social studies department at Belltown High during the time I was conducting research there; I also attended Belltown high. The decision to conduct research at a site to which I was so intimately tied speaks to my motivation in choosing this project in the first place. I wished to return to my former high school and integrate myself as intimately as I could in the inner workings of the school community because I was seeking to gain a thorough and nuanced understanding of whiteness. However, just as Alford A. Young Jr's (2004) research on Black men in the Near West side of Chicago grew out of personal experiences and conversations in his home community in East Harlem, I too wished to discover something about myself and my community. Similar to how Lorraine Kenny's (2000) autoethnography on the construction of unmarked suburban whiteness found her conducting research in her hometown, and Pamela Perry's

(2007) revelation that her “empty” white identity was generative of racism compelled her to investigate the social “routes” that forged that identity, I was seeking to locate myself and other white students who attended Belltown High (many of whom I was still in contact with at the time of the study) who had gone on to involve themselves in careers, activities or lifestyles that acknowledged white privilege and sought to address racial injustice. When I first began to read academic literature on whiteness I was struck by the power of its insights but also felt as though it often failed to consider the conditions under which whites could begin to develop racial self-reflexivity. In reflecting on my own trajectory I began to suspect that Belltown High had played an integral, if unintended, role in my racial self-awareness. Not only did I participate on racially mixed athletic teams and take classes with large percentages of QRED students, but I also developed close connections with QRED students at a young age. One relationship in particular with a kind, artistic, college-bound young man named Fred ended when he was murdered. In order to attend Fred’s funeral I traveled with a number of my classmates into a predominantly non-white part of the city. This journey, and the clear contrast it presented to predominantly white Belltown, initiated critical thinking about race that has continued to this day. Not all my classmates had developed an awareness of racial inequity, but many of us had; I wanted to know if and how our experiences at Belltown High—not just in relation to QRED, but also as a predominantly white institution—factored into promoting this awareness.

Working at and having attended the school in which the research was conducted presented both challenges and benefits. Occupying a position of authority at the research site certainly had the potential to influence my respondents’ level of comfort and

therefore their candor in the interview. The power dynamic that inevitably exists between teacher and student could have served to prevent respondents from recounting certain experiences or expressing certain views. While this dynamic was to some extent unavoidable, I took steps to minimize its impact on the study. For example, I assured students that their identity would remain anonymous and their answers would not have any bearing on their status at school.

Perhaps more important than somewhat routine and clinical sounding guarantees, I divulged my alumni status to all respondents. In my interviews with white students, I shared that I was someone who occupied a position like theirs—a white student in a school with a QRED program—in doing so I sought to encourage honesty. Furthermore, by introducing myself as a peer—albeit an alumni—I hoped to make salient one element of my past self in order to minimize one element of my present self—my position of authority in the school. Instead of hiding or denying the fact that I went to Belltown High I disclosed my past in an effort to make the interviews a collaborative endeavor and to emphasize that in many ways I was a student that also grappled with the questions and contradictions of race in Belltown. In one interview with a football player named Alex it was clear to me that he was struggling to negotiate the challenge of talking about race. Through the beginning of the interview he gave short answers and stared intensely at my tape recorder. When I asked him about his earliest recollections of how race mattered in school he started to answer but then stopped, stymied by his desire to speak about the reality of his experiences without implicating himself as intolerant.

Alex: Um... I mean, I... I mean honestly, I wasn't used to... like I wasn't used to, like black people. It's not like I was like...[he pauses]

Chris: There's nothing... by the way, I mean there's nothing weird about what you're saying.

Alex: Okay.

Chris: When I went here, this was my experience too.

Alex remained tense but he became more forthcoming after I placed myself in his shoes and assured him that I had struggled as well. I found that throughout my interviews, that being transparent with my respondents tended to make them more comfortable and willing to go “off script” when speaking about race. Although I would usually mention my alumni status at the beginning of the interview often by the end, my student respondents would begin to turn my questions around on me.

One exchange is particularly revealing because it speaks to how much I was willing to reveal to my respondents. Upon concluding our interview, Faye, a slight young woman who had dated and befriended many QRED students, made no effort to get up off of the chair upon which she sat with legs crossed and brow furrowed. Luckily my recorder was still on when she simply said: “It sucks that the world has been separated like this. And that like, I like how you’re doing this project, but like if things have gone differently way back when, then there would be no need for this.” The discussion then turned to why I wanted to conduct this research, which inevitably brought me back to Fred. Faye’s interview was effectively over and throughout she had shared a series of insights about whiteness that had occurred to her through her interactions with students of color. I decided to reciprocate by sharing my own story.

Chris: Fred was an artist, lousy basketball player. He wasn’t from a dangerous neighborhood. He went to an anti-gang party one night. He was walking home. Probably was mistaken for somebody else. He was stabbed. I had never gone to his neighborhood before... that’s where the funeral was. I had never gone into a place that was as black as Belltown was white. It happened the last Saturday of April vacation. Here I am, off in San Francisco by the way, on vacation with my family. And I come back and I think to myself, “My God,” you know, “I’m off vacationing, going to a baseball game, and messing around in San Francisco, and Fred was just going to a party, and he’s dead.” And that would never happen to

me in Belltown. And the community I went to in the city was entirely different. And as you just said, separate. And that... it was immediately clear to me that if I was an honest human being I had to realize and I had to acknowledge the fact that the separation wasn't normal. That if I had grown up in his neighborhood, that I would have had to cope with things like this too, and quite frankly, we weren't being given equal shots in life. We weren't being given access to the same stuff. They did an open casket funeral. Right. So we walk by this casket. I'll never forget it. It was like Emmett Till, the story about him. And his... you know, there's a body... I don't even recognize it. I didn't even recognize it, Faye. And his family is there, and they're losing their minds. The church was entirely black. When I used to walk in an entirely white neighborhood, I used to think that... I didn't think about race. Well, that made me start thinking about the fact that Belltown is predominantly white and very, very wealthy. And what did that mean? Had I earned what I had? And could I have ever ended up in that box like that? I realized, no, I probably couldn't have. It would be very unlikely for that to happen to me. And the sense of injustice and unfairness, and combined with remembrance of Fred when we were little boys down at the schoolyard just playing...[pause]...the paintings he used to do and what a talented kid he was. It offended me in a way that I've never lived down.

Although I did not consciously try to leverage my white racial identity in the interviews as I did my alumni status, I believe that being white encouraged my respondents to be forthcoming. Unlike formal assessments that elicit socially desirable responses, white ethnographers can gain access to how whiteness functions when “nobody” is looking (Bonilla-Silva 2001:199-200). Castagno (2008) notes that her white racial identity facilitated her research on white faculty and staff at two high schools. She believes that it encouraged honesty and authenticity as whites spoke to her as if they shared a common set of assumptions. Sacks and Lindholm (2002) recommend using a white interviewer as a way to encourage truthful responses from white respondents but caution that familiarity can lead to truncated answers as respondents assume that they do not need to elaborate for interviewers who “know what they are talking about” (132). As a result I was vigilant about following up with respondents for clarification when I believed that they were failing to elaborate on what they thought were shared

assumptions. By taking a deliberate and reflexive approach I attempted to leverage those elements of my identity that engender trust and serve to minimize the gulf between researcher and respondent.

A Note on Studying Adolescents

Interviewing and listening to adolescents for this research project has disabused me of the idea that adolescents do not have the language necessary to speak about structural issues. Student's views ranged from being deeply ideological to complex and critical, but what was similar was their abiding interest in social issues and impressive ability to articulate their positions. Often their visions and explanations were contradictory but even when contradicting themselves I was impressed with their desire to make sense of their social world. The high school years are formative and must be made a central part of social scientific research that seeks to understand the processes and experiences that either lead to reproduction or resistance of the social status quo. Instead of speaking for young people or assuming we know more about their lives than they do we must listen to their voices and consider how their experiences have shaped their views. In order to capture the authentic voice of white high school students, Pamela Perry (2002) not only interviewed them but also allowed them to evaluate her interpretations for internal validity, giving them final say in how she would present their views. Reflecting on this process Perry concludes that, "too often social science ignores, discounts, or dismisses young people, assuming that they lack the wisdom or maturity to be offered an equal voice with adults...I have come to believe that young people must be equal-status collaborators in research that concerns them." I agree and have made every

effort to preserve the authenticity of my respondents' voices.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD

This chapter will describe the structure of Belltown High, the educational field in which this study was conducted. At Belltown, whiteness may have been invisible, but certain enactments specific to whites, or more easily executed by them, served as cultural capital that refracted student experiences and outcomes along racial lines. These enactments can be broken down into two categories: what constituted proper behavior, and what constituted proper speech within the institution. The data presented in this chapter seek to explain how the school can be understood as a field that “prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles” (Wacquant 1992:17), and within which students’ performance and locations are shaped by race.

Throughout this chapter I refer to the “structure of the field” to mean two interrelated but analytically different phenomena. Structure appears as a set of formal and obvious facts, conventions, rules, procedures and practices within an educational field. Perhaps the most obvious structural feature of Belltown High was its demographics. With the exception of two tutors, one staff member and five teachers,³⁴ the adults in the institution, including the cafeteria and custodial staff were white. The superintendent, the principal, both vice principals and the entire administrative support staff was also white. In addition to demographics, the curriculum, how teachers talk about race and think about treatment and assessment of students all form readily recognizable structural features. The distribution of racialized bodies in physical space is

³⁴ The teachers of color included two African Americans, one Asian and two Latinos.

also an overt structural feature. QRED students, for example, both enter and exit campus on separate busses. As a result, the driveway at the front of the school is both fluid—students stream into the school—and expresses racially distinct character—the streams of students and therefore the racial character of this space rapidly shift depending on the origin of the bus. Meanwhile, the student parking was used exclusively by resident students and therefore is almost entirely white. Geographic separation in metropolitan space is mirrored in the formal and informal spaces that students occupy within the school itself. White students occupy most spaces except for two: one corner of the cafeteria and the QRED tutorial room. Although occasionally a white student enters these spaces, both serve as a hub for QRED students who tend to use them as a home base from which they depart for class or sports and then return. The existence of these two spaces creates a specific orbit to QRED students’ movements around school. As a teacher, the existence of a distinct institutional geography of race made it far easier to find QRED students on campus than white students, who, with the exception of the tutorial room and that specific section of the cafeteria, could conceivably be anywhere on campus.³⁵ As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, the particular ways in which white students make sense of race is largely structured by this separation, a fact that brings them close enough for observation but not necessarily interaction.

Coexisting with overt practices and policies, “structure of the field” also refers to the ways that race deeply penetrates informal practices, the often unspoken behaviors and expectations that on the surface seem non-racial but nonetheless serves to structure the

³⁵ As we will see below, the contrast between how QRED students and white teachers and students make sense of QRED specific spaces speaks to the invisibility of whiteness within the institution. Whereas QRED students see them as a refuge within a white institution comprised of white spaces, whites tended to see them as generative of racial separation in what is non-racial space.

field by race. The absence of a discourse that makes white a meaningful racial category or what passes as acceptable dress, comportment or even student behavior in relation to teachers were inflected by race. These dimensions of the field are far subtler, but they are potent regulative principles just the same.

Part one of this chapter demonstrates the formal and overt ways in which the field was structured by race. For example, the faculty and staff adhered to specific conventions around what could be said, recognized or taught about race. By and large, the faculty subscribed to an institutionally specific form of colorblindness that manifested in the curriculum and in teachers' treatment of students. Although the faculty did talk about race, understanding the boundaries around what counted as proper discourse and what could be taught about race formed a kind of "feel for the game"³⁶ that one had to understand almost intuitively, and that greatly limited what faculty and students could say about race.

The second part of the chapter then considers the more informal and subtle racial dynamics of the field—the understandings, norms and governing principles that lie beneath what is immediately visible. This section contends that the racial structure of Belltown High is far more deeply entrenched than it appears on the surface. Despite being invisible to faculty and staff, whiteness was capital in a field in which expectations

³⁶ Bourdieu uses this athletics metaphor to talk about social actors' ability to enact expected behaviors within a field almost effortlessly. Their subjective understandings are structured by their existence within objective structures, which structure their ability to respond to and negotiate those objective structures. Bourdieu understood that social actors with a feel for the game would fail to appreciate the structuring of their subjectivity as their actions within the field have the feeling of being voluntary. The connection between subjective or practical actions and the objective structure of the field obscures the arbitrary nature of the organization of the field as those with a "feel for the game" find that the correspondence between action and structure lend "sensibleness" and "rationality" to the structure of the field. "Feel for the game" then refers to an unconscious feeling of mastery over the game, a patterned form of social action in which social actors internalize the structure of the field without knowing it and accept the logic of the field without reflecting on it (Bourdieu 1990:66-67).

and assumptions were structured along racial lines. Whiteness was linked with rationality and white practices formed the faculties' definition of what it meant to be a student in good standing, a "good kid." Because teachers differentiated students through grading and a system of tracking, the distribution of capital within the institution was made manifest as hierarchically ordered classes took on starkly racialized characteristics, a fact that served to put racial differences on display. The deep-rooted and covert ways in which the field was structured speak to the insidiousness of race; how its invisibility lends to its potency precisely because it operates in ways that do not appear overtly racial. In this way the informal structure of the field is like the submerged portion of an iceberg: hidden, substantial and powerful.

In describing the structure of the field, I rely heavily on interviews with and observations of the almost exclusively white faculty (and staff) members. Teachers, more than any other group at Belltown high, were in control of defining what counted as capital at Belltown High. Chapters Four and Five will highlight the voices of white students, but this chapter does draw on their voices when appropriate. This chapter also draws on the voices and experiences of people of color from within the institution – students, one faculty and one staff member of color. Given their perspective as "outsiders within," these actors were uniquely positioned to describe elements of the field that appear unremarkable or as common sense to those in the dominant group.

Part One: Colorblindness in Curriculum, Talk and Treatment

The field was structured in ways that supported certain discourses of race over others. Ideological colorblindness was a defining feature of Belltown High, but the ways

in which this was expressed were institutionally specific. Colorblindness at Belltown did not emerge as an unwillingness to talk about or see race, but instead can be used to describe the overall institutional approach to racial phenomena. It would be unfair to characterize the faculty as being in denial of the significance of race. Indeed, many of the teachers at Belltown had taken racial sensitivity classes, had read such texts as Peggy McIntosh's "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," and believed that racism existed. Despite this outlook, teachers reported being cautious about talking about race in their classes and circumspect when having serious conversations with their colleagues about racial difference. They did teach about race, but within boundaries that often relegated racism to the past and to the south. Faculty members often maintained that the solution to racial disparity was to treat all students in the same way. Given the racialized nature of the field, this approach was generative of disparate outcomes as white students were better positioned to thrive in an institution structured in white culture and staffed by white faculty.

Colorblindness at Belltown was not just a proclivity among the faculty; it functioned as a form of cultural capital. Furthermore, colorblindness not only pervaded how teachers talked about race, it informed their expectations for their students as the following quote from Russell, a white teacher attests:

Russell: If I'm in conversation with kids and they're saying you know, "As far as we can tell the QRED students, there's really no difference between us," and the conversation continues to go that way and stays that way; I kind of think: let's leave it alone. I'd say, "All right, that's probably a good way to look at things." I mean that bodes well for the future if you look at it that way; I don't need to necessarily need to say anything here.

The students also embraced colorblindness and, as a result, had only a limited vocabulary with which to speak about and understand racial dynamics at Belltown. In the sections that follow, I describe how colorblindness was insinuated into school practice.

The Curriculum: Colorblindness in Spatial Relation and Omission

The formal curriculum at Belltown high was aligned with state guidelines but also took on institutionally specific characteristics. State guidelines might require that teachers teach about World War One, for example, but how it is taught—what texts are used, what topics are emphasized, and what activities are assigned and how the topic is given social meaning—is often left up to the school and the group of teachers delivering the content. Although colorblindness permeated Belltown High, the curriculum was not devoid of topics that centered on race. Although this may seem contradictory, the way in which race was formally integrated into the curriculum served to construct it along specific temporal and spatial grounds that simultaneously defined northern middle-class whites as non-racial actors when compared to southern whites, and minimized contemporary racism by focusing attention on slavery and the civil rights movement at the expense of discussing the meaning and importance of race today.³⁷

³⁷ In this section, I am speaking specifically about core curriculum. These classes are emphasized because all students are mandated to take them as a graduation requirement and therefore they represent the larger institutional vision when compared to elective courses that tend to adhere closer to individual teacher's interests. Although some non-required classes in both English and social studies did feature extended conversations about race, most students did not take these classes and student interviews suggests that even these classes hewed closely to the themes elaborated in this section. What is of ultimate importance in a school is what the students learn, and despite the fact that some faculty members included more comprehensive discussions about race, student respondents consistently reported that their classes included very little if any discussion about the topic. In other words, there was no mandated class that featured racial dialogues or engaged with local racial issues.

The state frameworks³⁸ for social studies include two units that place race at the center: The Civil War/Reconstruction and the civil rights movement. The topic of slavery in the United States before the Civil War is woven into other units and sections such as the drafting of the constitution and the southern economy of the 19th century. Similarly, the history of Asian groups is subsumed in other units such as the second great wave of immigration and Japanese internment during World War Two. The frameworks are written in outline form and include topics, people, documents, and learning outcomes. The Civil War unit, for example, includes topics such as sectionalism and the Compromise of 1850, people such as Robert E. Lee, documents such as the Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, and learning outcomes like being able to describe the physical and economic impacts of the Civil War, the importance of the Reconstruction Amendments, or opposition of southern whites to those same amendments. The topic of race makes a brief appearance under the heading "The Age of Reform: Progressivism and the New Deal" as students are asked to consider the views of W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey and then appears again in the civil rights movement, which is included under the larger heading "The Cold War at Home: Economic Growth and Optimism, Anticommunism, and Reform 1945-1980."

According to the frameworks, the section on civil rights should begin with *Brown v. Board* in 1954 and end with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. No major moments from the long civil rights movement in the north are included in the frameworks. For example, there is no mention of the housing and job discrimination that led to riots in Detroit in 1943, one of the largest race riots of the 20th century (Sugrue

³⁸ The state frameworks are specific to the state in which this study was conducted. The specific state is omitted to maintain confidentiality.

1996:29). Similarly there is no mention of the racial violence that erupted in Levittown, Pennsylvania in the 1950's or the busing crisis in Boston in the 1970s. The events that are included all occurred in the south: the Montgomery bus boycotts, the Little Rock school crisis, the sit-ins and freedom rides, Birmingham and the March on Washington in 1963, and the marches in Selma. Malcolm X is included but texts like "The Ballot or the Bullet" are not. Instead, the three texts that are featured are King's "I Have a Dream" address during the March on Washington, his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," and Lyndon Baines Johnson's speech to Congress about voting rights in 1965. The urban riots that broke out in all parts of the country during World War Two are not included nor are the riots that finally consumed northern ghettos in the mid-1960s. The two outcomes that the frameworks emphasize are positive: the Civil Rights Act and Voting Right Act and "the growth of the African American middle class, increased political power, and declining rates of African American poverty."³⁹ Taken together, the state frameworks imply that the civil rights movement corrected what was an exclusively southern race problem.

How race is covered in the curriculum, and specifically how it is regionalized, is not simply about what students will know about U.S. history, but instead is part of the larger process of constructing racial meaning. As geographer Robert Vanderbeck (2006) notes, race—and specifically whiteness—is constituted in unstable and historically contingent discourses about space that are an essential part of the racialization process. Vanderbeck contends that it is essential to appreciate not only how different spaces carry with them various imagined versions of whiteness, but also the inherently political nature

³⁹ This quotation is taken directly from the state frameworks.

of representing race and space. In other words, we need to not only seek to understand how whiteness is imagined in different places, but also the social processes that lead to these imaginings and what is at stake as race becomes embodied in geography.

At Belltown, the curriculum functioned ideologically in that it simultaneously relegated racial problems to the south while exculpating the north. By focusing mainly on slavery, Jim Crow, Bull Connor, I Have a Dream and Selma, students are not only constructing a vision of the exceptional (backwards, deviant, irrational) south, they are implicitly constructing a vision of the north as separate and virtuous, as closer to Martin Luther King Jr's vision of colorblindness. Although neither Jane nor Russell, both white teachers, taught about the civil rights movement, their comments capture the extent to which northern whiteness was defined in opposition to an exceptional south:

Jane: If you're in the South, people will probably say, "yeah, I'm racist." I mean, you know, obviously there's nothing new here for you. In the North, it's not cool, like, not only is it not cool but it's...geez, I guess in the South, I mean, I don't know much about the South...I've never been there at all...but there is a segment of the population for which you are saying that you are a racist and being a racist or being accused of a racist isn't like this stigmatizing thing for you. You can connect with people that way. Up here, we have this different culture that [it] doesn't look good, right?

Russell: I've been taught that the south was the most racist area that existed—the biggest fights; I'm from the Northern United States, we were on the right side of the civil war, you know? Abolition is more from here, not from down south. We're inside of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Instead of highlighting the complex and regionally specific ways in which the racial hierarchy was maintained in different locations in the north and the significant overlap with the way it was maintained in the south,⁴⁰ students are instead invested with a sense

⁴⁰ This homogenization and orientalization of the south ignores new scholarship that emphasizes spatial convergence in the post war era and casts doubt on the notion of a coherently defined and exceptional south (Lassiter 2006; Lassiter and Crespino 2010). The use of colorblind discourse to prevent busing, for example, was less a northern or southern phenomenon but instead a suburban phenomenon that occurred

that racism involved overt acts practiced by flawed and irrational individuals in defense of racist statutes that prevented equality. This vision not only absolves the north by comparison, but because the stories that accompany the civil rights movement feature overt white bigots, it also places limits on the definition of racism. When framed in this way, acceptable whiteness becomes an inversion of the imagined southerner and the subtle ways that race matters are concealed. If the racists during the civil rights movement were those whites who acknowledged their race and sought to defend its privilege, then the Belltown curriculum implicitly suggests that to be non-racist is to not acknowledge whiteness—to not see it, speak about it or explicitly defend it. Belltown then offers to its white students an imagined southern white other that violates the tenets of normative and invisible whiteness by claiming and defending white privilege, by failing to be colorblind. In doing so, the curriculum strongly, if implicitly, demarcates the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable whiteness.

The temporal and spatial limits in the curriculum in regards to race were reiterated in my interviews with white students. For example, when I asked Noel about racism today, he said, “I’d go south” before I could even finish asking the question. When I asked him to explain he said, “Ah Confederates, and Civil War, and Mason-Dixon Line, and all that good stuff.” Other respondents tagged their answers more directly to material that they had learned in school. When I asked Tessa she said, “Well, naturally it just goes to the South.” When I asked her why she said, “I don’t know, because like the whole slavery in the South. When you’re young, you just learn and it was like slave and then anti-slavery and like pro-slavery and anti-slavery. It was like the whole war, North and

across these regions. As Lassiter and Crespino (2010) point out, “the constant need to mine the South for its symbolic possibilities has come at the expense of exploring the deeper currents of American history and the particular conditions of local places”(9).

South.” Alison saw racism as problem exclusive to locations outside the northeast. She envisions both the South and Midwest as racist and divulges that her contemporary cognitive map follows her general perception of the geography of slavery and the region that had fought on behalf of it.

Chris: Is there a part of the country that you think is more racist than another part of the country?

Alison: (chuckles) yes.

Chris: Which part?

Alison: South and Midwest, you know, I confess; I do.

Chris: Why?

Alison: Because that was where um, slavery was most prevalent. Um, and it’s also the South fought to keep slavery and I don’t know...slavery is kinda the epitome of racism.

Whites at Belltown casually used the word “redneck”⁴¹ as shorthand for racist.

When I asked Patrick what the word meant, he described a spatial logic of whiteness that turned on his understanding of history.

Chris: What’s redneck?

Patrick: ...I think just poor people in the south who lack the education of people in the north. Even northern – southern divisions between white people.

Chris: Is there one region, which you associate with more racism than the less racism?

Patrick: Southern of course, because they have more recent history of slavery and then I think after, the north defeated the confederacy. I think that’s the whole, that’s really a war of ideologies and after the northern ideology sort of enforced itself on the southern ideology, I still think that some people maintain the sort of southern ideology. And they hold a sort of animosity against the northerners for marching in there and destroying any hope of them governing themselves based on their ideology...

The “redneck,” according to Patrick is uneducated and clings to both his “recent history” of racism and his resentment of northern non-racist ideology that was imposed after the Civil War. Despite the enormous economic and technological growth of the “sun belt” in the 20th century and the suburbanization that resulted, Belltown students still seemed to

⁴¹ As scholars have noted, “redneck” is a term freighted with race (white), class (working class) and geographic (the south) meaning (Huber 1994; Beech 2004; Hartigan 2003).

cling to visions of a rural and backwards south (Shulman 1991; Lassiter 2006). Many respondents spoke of the Civil War era and the Civil Rights era in the same breath as if the region was culturally, socially and economically frozen in time. As the curriculum implied, racism was a product of underdevelopment, the imagined economic stagnation of the region both symbolic of and perhaps caused by the underdeveloped white southern intellect.

The association of racism and the south was not only solidified in the curriculum, it was also supported in school policy. In an incident that inflamed anger across the school, one white student wore a shirt to class that featured the confederate flag with text that some QRED students deemed to be offensive. After they protested to the principal, Mr. West suspended the white student who had refused to remove the shirt on first amendment grounds. The QRED students' complaints were acted upon swiftly, a fact that speaks to the symbolic weight that the confederate flag carried at Belltown.

Although the student claimed to be wearing the shirt because he was going to learn about states' rights in his social studies class, Mr. West demanded that he remove the shirt because, as he explained to the school community in an e-mail, it was a symbol of "bigotry" and "racism" that has no place at a school with a core value of "harmony." By taking a strong and unambiguous stand against the confederate flag, Mr. West aligned school policy with the curriculum. Racism was defined as a southern phenomenon and easily condemned on moral grounds. Both white students and faculty greeted Mr. West's stand with approval. The easy act of repressing a symbol so aligned with the overt southern defense of the racial hierarchy allowed whites at Belltown to define themselves

as colorblind by comparison—different from southern white others that see race and seek to maintain the racial hierarchy.

The curriculum was problematic not just for the limited way in which race was conceptualized regionally and temporarily, but also in how it served to implicitly define what counted as content about race in the first place. If the curriculum southerized racism and relegated it to the past, it also drew tight and restrictive boundaries around who had race and what could count as curriculum about race in the first place. The litmus test seemed to be that information regarding people of color, or whites in their explicit interactions with people of color, was racial content whereas content about white people generally—the vast majority of what was covered in most classes—was deemed non racial. For example, students in a European literature or history class approached their subjects not as revealing something about white history, white people or the white experience, despite the fact that the shape of European, world and American history is barely intelligible without understanding how whiteness functioned as a fundamental organizing principle that placed whites at the apex of a socio-cultural and economic hierarchy (Almaguer 1994; DuBois [1920] 1998). The curriculum contains within it more than just specific content about race, but also a particular position about who has race: people of color do, whites do not. To teach about white people, but not point out the relevance or fact of whiteness, is to teach about race by omission in a way that constructs whites as non-racial.

Equal Treatment

Given the racialized structure of the field and the demands of colorblind discourse, the faculty was left with a limited repertoire when trying to understand or address inequities like the significant racial achievement gap that found white students scoring around three quarters of a grade point above QRED students on average. With few exceptions, the teachers at Belltown embraced a concerned but limited approach to addressing racially disparate outcomes. Believing that racism manifested in the recognition of race, most sought to treat all students as equally as possible and hold all to the same standards.⁴² Mary, a white teacher, noted that the “styles that work best across the board in the school work best for white and QRED,” adding that what all kids really need is “structure.” Ted, a white tutor who sat in on hundreds of classes, also equated fairness with equal treatment.

Ted: From what I’ve seen and the classes I’ve been in with lots of QRED students, I think most teachers in this high school do treat them fairly. I see um, last year I was in a Math class and the teacher was very fair with all of them. I mean, they really see in the building – I think the general feeling is just that they – the teachers in the building do give, you know, treat all the students the same way.

Although teachers were required to take a class on multiculturalism, these classes focused largely on white privilege and unconscious bias. Although some white teachers took exception to the somewhat dated⁴³ contention offered in the class that that all whites are racist, others were intrigued. Darren, for example noted that he had heard of white privilege but the course made him aware of the “extent to which I’ve personally

⁴² As Carter points out (2005), different standards do not necessarily mean lower standards. In an institution structured along racial lines, equal treatment is inherently inequitable.

⁴³ See the section in Chapter One titled, *Enactment One: Whiteness as an Unmarked or Normative Identity*.

benefitted.” This recognition did not translate into an understanding of the racial dynamics at Belltown High, however. For Darren, recognition that whites were privileged seemed to make him more hesitant and, as a result, he was cautious about trying to put extra effort into connecting with his QRED students for fear that this would “single them out” and make them uncomfortable. For him, the recognition that whites enjoyed privilege seemed to imply that trying to not see race was a preferable antidote, an approach that failed to take note of the fact that treating all students in the same way would benefit some students more than others. Ralph had also taken a class on multiculturalism. He reported appreciating and even temporarily integrating the content of the class.

Ralph: I took all this information and tried to [use it in my classes], I didn’t forget about it, but I think having used it, it’s changed into different ways of thinking for me now. Now I am more apt to say, “well, okay, like what is the reality of the situation here? You want me to treat you like a black guy or do you want me to treat you like a person who needs some help? You can’t do these problems so sit down,” you know?

Despite some attempts to draw on the material into her teaching, she eventually settled on a colorblind approach common among teachers at Belltown. Cliff, a retired social studies teacher, one of the few teachers at Belltown who openly advocated a differentiated approach based on race (a position he never took with the faculty at large), nicely summarized the well-intentioned but ultimately reproductive position of his former colleagues:

Cliff: I think that the people I have worked with at Belltown have been overwhelmingly decent, hardworking, and care about kids. That extends to a general fairness, at least an intended fairness on the part of teachers. But that fairness begins to fall apart when you bounce up against kids who don’t do so well and are different from you and that we’re more uncomfortable around....The default among a significant portion of my dear colleagues, is just let’s treat everybody the same.

For many Belltown teachers, movement toward differentiation was inherently racist. Lydia, for example, a recently hired teacher, wondered if trying to overcome racial differences would be a form of reverse racism asking rhetorically, “Don’t all of our students have the equal right to my time, effort and consideration? What does it mean if I give more to the QRED students?” Beyond reverse racism, the faculty implicitly equated different treatment with lowered expectations, believing that any deviation from the standard way of administering the curriculum would result in black students being defined as intellectually inferior in comparison with their white classmates. Martha, for example, noted that perhaps additional work with QRED students might be acceptable but,

Martha: If you treat them differently then you are making them into victims and that victimization just adds to the problem. If we dumb down that education for black kids then what are we doing? What are we saying to them? You can make it here! So you are a second-class citizen!

Conflating “different” with “dumbed down,” Martha was sure that any attempt to recognize race would yield perverse outcomes. She concluded by stating that differentiating is the “dumbing down of education and therefore a racist position to take.”

The colorblind perspective was also evident in faculty and administrators’ view of non-academic or extra-academic activities. Noreen, for example, was critical of any extracurricular activities that drew a predominantly black membership like the Christian Club. “I have a problem with the Christian Club here at school ‘cause I don’t really get its purpose and it’s the same thing like, well if you want to say all races like are connected, then do we really have to have a club for the black kids?” Instead of recognizing the need to provide safe spaces for students to cope with the realities of

existing in a school structured in whiteness, she saw the Christian Club and other clubs with predominantly non-white members, as *creating* divisions that were not otherwise present. The fact that most extra-curricular activities and student organizations and clubs were predominantly white was not questioned or seen as a racial phenomenon. Donald shared Noreen's view and criticized as inherently racist and divisive any plan, initiative,⁴⁴ or club designed for or likely to disproportionately draw QRED students. This view was also elaborated by Nelson, a science teacher, who described how a plan to devise an after school program for failing QRED students was met with resistance among the faculty who claimed that targeting black students was inequitable for white students. "One of the first responses we get is: Well why aren't the white kids who are failing, why aren't they being forced to go to the after school program?" Unable to see the racial structure of the institution, Nelson concurred with the faculty, saying affirmatively, "that's a hell of a good question."

For QRED students, having a teacher recognize race and treat them differently was welcome but painfully rare. As Talia's quote below illustrates, seeing race and acting on it could actually serve to provide recognition that not all students in the classroom experienced the classroom in the same way.

Talia: I'm the only black kid in one of my classes. We were going to have a discussion the next day about the greater percent of single parents in black families. The teacher asked to talk to me after class. She told me that she knew it might be hard for me to be the only black kid in this discussion but she said that QRED kids have something to contribute to class and she thought what I could say would be of value if I was comfortable saying it. There should be more teachers like that.

⁴⁴ As mentioned above, there was a separate QRED tutorial and in my final year of field research there was an advisory system put in place that clustered QRED students together. Some faculty and staff criticized this program claiming that it created racial divisions.

The prevailing notion that being attentive to racial differences was tantamount to racism put those teachers who did make attempts to differentiate according to race in a tough spot. Attempts to differentiate or “see race” in the way Talia described were modest, inconsistently applied across classrooms and left teachers open to critiques of not being fair. Following his observation that his QRED students seemed to do better on tests when they were orally administered, Roger tried to adapt the way he designed his assessments.

Roger: I’ve had [QRED] students who just do horribly on pen and paper the traditional book tests that we give. And so we might do a mix of assessments whereby – I’ll say, ‘let’s do a dialogue then.’ You know, create a dialogue – ‘I’ll create a dialogue that you can write and practice with a partner.’ So...

Chris: So they’ll be better on that?

Roger: They’ll do much better on that. Much, much better. So sometimes I require a different approach.

Chris: Do you ever worry about doing that? Like, they...

Roger: Yeah.

Chris: Well, why is that?

Roger: Well, because the other kids again say, “That’s not fair. How come I had to take the test, you know, and Johnny didn’t?” (coughing)

Although he was not sure that his students would see the differentiation as racist, he was clearly reluctant to share what he did in class with me. Shifting in his seat, and with his eyes darting toward the door to make sure it was closed, Roger was clearly uncomfortable. Instead of being proud of having found an assessment tool that actually boosted the achievement of his students of color, Roger kept this insight and technique to himself, acknowledging that his department and the school at large would not welcome a discussion about what he was doing.

The discourse of equal treatment coexisted with the reality that some students at Belltown received radically different treatment based on various psychological or medical factors. The special education department was heavily staffed and intricately involved in the experiences of students who struggled to access the curriculum as it was

presented. One special education class was designed for students with classroom anxiety; another functioned as a quasi-halfway house for students reentering school after prolonged absence due to depression or mental illness, and there were many other offerings along similar lines. Students with learning differences and or disabilities could be placed on either a “Section 504” plan or an “Individualized Education Plan,” and teachers were expected to familiarize themselves with each student’s profile and then to provide the appropriate accommodations. One student may struggle with “executive functioning,” the ability to handle multiple tasks and integrate and organize new information, another may suffer from “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder,” and yet another may have test anxiety. To make the material accessible to these students, a teachers would be required to alter the way she taught and the assessments that were used. Typical accommodations included providing class notes, graphic organizers, orally administered exams in a separate setting, checking in with parents and extended deadlines.

I cannot stress strongly enough that my point is not to compare people of color to people with disabilities based on the nature or quality of their differences, but instead to point out that the social impact of being different serves to set them apart within the field in similar ways. Just as whiteness operates as a form of capital within the field, the field was also structured in ways that supported particular cognitive profiles and levels of physical ability over others. The major difference was that the institution was willing to acknowledge that the field was structured in ways that put students with disabilities at a disadvantage, and took action to address this. For QRED students, the institution was

largely blind to the racialized structure of the field and, with the exception of the QRED tutorial,⁴⁵ did not take coordinated and systematic action.

When asked about equal treatment, teachers were quick to point out that they differentiated their approach for students on education plans, suggesting that under certain circumstances it was expected that the commitment to equality would be suspended. In other words, there was recognition that students were positioned differently in their ability to access the curriculum and, therefore, required different approaches; however, the boundaries of this recognition excluded race as a legitimate category of difference, as this excerpt from Larry, a veteran teacher demonstrates:

Larry: I subscribe to the whole fair is not equal [idea]. So there's equal and then there's *equal*, you know what I mean?...

Chris: Do you also make exceptions based on community origin? So do you make an exception for QRED students?

Larry: You know, not really. I mean I would say to tell you the truth like, I feel like my experience in holding fast is what most of the teenagers need. Like I think that my fair is not equal more applies to special ed kids [so]...If they want to achieve in college or whatever like they need to learn what the standards are and adhere to them, so I feel that's part of my job is saying: 'these are my standards, I'm adhering to them and so here's 5 percent off your paper,' or whatever you know.

Despite the fact that employing the same treatment perpetuated an empirically demonstrated and unambiguous racialized difference in student outcomes, with only a few exceptions, teachers reported and prided themselves on their attempts to deliver the curriculum in the same way to all students.

⁴⁵ The tutorial room, although set aside expressly for QRED students, was designed as a space in which QRED students would be able to seek extra help or work on what were perceived to be deficiencies in their skill sets. Unlike differentiation for students on education plans that requires teachers to embrace a different approach and modify their practice and expectations, the tutorial room speaks to a particular vision of the origins of these students' academic struggles. In other words, the need for a QRED tutorial room simultaneously attests to the fact that equal treatment is generative of racially disparate outcomes while expressing the institutional consensus that these students' struggles are deficit based.

Part Two: Whiteness as Cultural Capital

Amanda Lewis's (2001) ethnographic work in an elementary school started auspiciously. The principal, learning of Lewis's research intentions, informed her that she would learn very little about race because the school was predominantly white. Like Lewis, my own trip to the sterile administrative annex to ask the administrator in charge of research for permission to study race at Belltown High was met with a telling response—he started to talk about the QRED program and linked its students of color to a recent spate of thefts that had left resident students bereft of iPods and other electronic devices. Like the principal in Lewis's study, this administrator had betrayed something fundamental and paradoxical about race at Belltown High for those with power within the field: whiteness is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Whiteness is dominant – the educational field (Belltown) is structured in white culture, but whiteness is also invisible to precisely those who possess it as a form of capital: white faculty and staff did not consider whiteness to be a salient identity and were at a loss when asked to describe the dimensions of white culture.

The faculty is overwhelmingly white and the vast majority of the students are white. The fact that Belltown High is predominantly white appeared ordinary to most white faculty. When confronted with the topic of race at Belltown High, many almost reflexively began talking about the struggles and challenges of the school's non-resident black population. For the small minority of non-white staff members at Belltown High, dealing with a predominantly white institution was a daily struggle. When I asked Tammy, an African American tutor, about her first impressions of Belltown High, she flatly replied, "African Americans are few and far between." She then detailed how she

had taken to playing her own version of racial “punch-buggy” with another African American tutor: “when you see a person of color you punch!” The impact of being white in a school that is predominantly white was nicely, if unintentionally, captured by Ted, a white special education instructor and basketball coach.

Chris: What does it mean to be white here at this school?

Ted: I think it probably means to be you know, you’re in the – you’re in the normal trend. You’re white...you know, this is normal, you know. You’re in Belltown, you’re a white student; you’re just in the mix; you’re normal.

Whiteness at Belltown High is not just expressed in the dominance of one phenotype but is deeply embedded in the structure of the institution and, as Diane Gusa (2010) notes in her study of post-secondary schools, manifests in “an ideological-philosophical infrastructure of cultures cultivated from a shared geography and history that is also construed to be normal” (468). Similarly, in her discussion of how schools are ideological sites that reproduce class and race based inequality, Prudence Carter (2005), points out that “although many of our mainstream institutions are often perceived to be culturally neutral, we, nonetheless, find the primary influence of middle class and Anglo whites throughout them” (165). In other words, for whites, it is not just the numerical hegemony of whiteness but also the hegemony of white culture that serves to make whiteness invisible. As part of every interview, I asked white respondents to describe whiteness or white culture and most responses included at least one of three themes. Some teachers simply found the question so bizarre that they couldn’t answer; others could only talk about whiteness once it was disaggregated into ethnicities; and, others defined white culture in generic and universal terms or simply as the opposite of black. No respondent offered a substantive definition or description of white culture or whiteness.

Ted was one of the respondents who simply could not respond. He repeated my question and then stumbled without recovering: “What is white culture? Oh... (chuckles)...that’s good. It’s a – I’m speechless. It’s a...ta...it’s...” Roger prided himself on how he braided discussions about culture and race into his lessons. He was particularly proud of a class in which seniors are asked to consider how race “plays into how people see themselves in countries like the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, and Haiti.” However, when I asked him to describe white culture he stared at me blankly, eventually describing how culture is often constructed as either universal or the domain of non-white groups—an astute insight, but one which still leaves whiteness undefined. In the end he conceded with a puzzled laugh that he could not answer.

Chris: Then what is white culture?

Roger: Mm (ten second pause). Yeah. Well, it’s – that’s a hard question to answer. Every year we have visitors from other counties and we do presentations of the United States. Typically students will talk about holidays, they’ll talk about foods, they’ll talk about sports; um, they’ll talk about music. But they’re talking about American culture, and typically when they talk about music, they like to talk about hip-hop or jazz, or blues, which, interestingly are coming to us through the African American culture. So...what is white? (laughter)

As Mary Waters (1990) has demonstrated third-generation whites do often maintain an affiliation with their ethnic background, something that often manifests in selective and superficial attachments and enactments. The following exchange with a young teacher named Noreen is indicative of how respondents attempted to define white culture by disaggregating it into ethnicity.

Noreen: I grew up Italian, in Minnesota where there weren’t any Italians so I was different amongst a bunch of white people and I just grew up with that.

Chris: Well but you said before that you actually identify more as white both ethnically and racially, what does that mean? What does a white person do?

Noreen: I don’t think white means being transparent exactly, but...it’s like well here I am in Poland, then here I am in Poland in a different time period, then here I am in America—that is white history, it’s weird, it’s Europe-y (laughs), but also

totally disconnected, I'm not Irish, and I'm not Ukrainian or Russian, I'm none of those things, mostly I'm an American, Italian.

Chris: What is that?

Noreen: Meatballs. (laughs)

Despite trying, and her acknowledgement that white culture exists (is not “transparent”), Noreen was not able to articulate much of substance about white culture or her ethnic Italian culture.

Nelson looked intrigued and leaned back in his chair when asked to define white culture. Eventually he offered that in his old job at a racially diverse school in the city, white was simply anything that was “not black.” Throughout the interview he harkened back to his old job, a place where discussions about race were “just constant, constant and constant” and race functioned as a “flavoring,” a “spice that got thrown into any issue.” By comparison, he constructed Belltown as flavorless due to the relatively fewer number of students of color available to enliven the school culture. This construction emphasizes how the harmony between ones’ racial identity and the dominant culture can serve to render that culture invisible, unremarkable, or even boring. In both his old school and at Belltown, whiteness is constructed as bland and cultureless, the only difference, according to Nelson, is that at Belltown the absence of a “critical mass of QRED students” fails to force people to “taste spicy food,” whereas in his old school, it was hard to “have a meal without a lot of spice as part of that meal.”

For white faculty and staff, racial others were the ones with culture while whiteness was an undefined quantity. Not everyone at Belltown High had trouble tracing the dimensions of white culture, however. When I asked the few faculty members of color and the respondents in my QRED focus groups to describe white culture, their answers revealed that the invisibility of whiteness is really a matter of who is looking.

For Kurt, the question of what whiteness means is more than an abstract academic exercise. As a retired black teacher who occasionally works as a substitute teacher at Belltown and is married to a white woman, he has developed sensitivity to both the operation of white culture and how it appears invisible to whites. When asked to describe white culture at Belltown, Kurt smiled widely at the irony of a white researcher having to conduct a study in order to see his own culture. He started in general terms, as if giving me an introduction.

Kurt: It's so dominant that you don't even have to talk about it. White culture is everything you see around you. It's...saluting the flag. It's so dominant you don't have to think about it. White culture is the air that you breathe. It's what is natural. It's so natural you don't even have to think about it.

By conflating whiteness with saluting the flag, Kurt points out that, white culture appears to whites to be normal and universal—American, and therefore not affiliated with a particular group. Having existed in a predominantly white institution and being married to a white woman, Kurt reported that he had to “work desperately” to get a feel for white culture and has had to be “very careful to fit in.” This process involved changing everything from how he walked to how he talked. As a young black man, he cultivated what he called “the stroll.” “When I was growing up you had to have a little glide to your stride, a little dip in your hip.” To fit in at Belltown he had to adopt a far more compact and linear style of walking. In addition to how he moved, he also realized that in order to fit in at Belltown, and the white world at large, he would have to change the way he talked. With a laugh, he referenced the scene in the movie *Airplane!*, in which where Barbara Billingsley, the white actress who had portrayed June Cleaver on *Leave it to Beaver*, translates the words of two black passengers speaking jive as if it were another language entirely. What Kurt found humorous about the scene from *Airplane!* was that it

reversed the dominant order by making a middle-class woman responsible for understanding the speech of black men. Kurt described how he had to drop his “jive affectations” and learn to talk like a white person, something he realized he had accomplished when he passed “the telephone test.”

Kurt: Have you ever heard of the telephone test? If you call up are you interpreted being black or interpreted white? People never expect that I'm black from my voice and you sort of get that recoil or surprise when I show up and they're looking for Kurt the man who sounded white.

Students of color described coming to Belltown in the same way a person might talk about travel abroad. For example, Rose, one of only two QRED Latinas, said:

“When I first started coming here it was culture shock with the students around here and the way things are taught. I felt alone and like everyone was smarter than me.”

Similarly, Tory expressed a preference for dating foreign exchange students. When I asked him if this was because they might have fewer preconceived notions about blacks he replied, “no it’s not their stereotypes, but now it’s just we’re both foreigners, now we have something in common right there.” Bonnie echoed this sentiment noting the one-way nature of the cultural incompatibility that marked QRED students’ experiences. “We have to try to adapt to them, they don’t need to adapt to us. We have to be someone that we are not.” Students of color also described how hard it was to feel comfortable in a school with an overwhelmingly white faculty and expressed how shared assumptions, knowledge, language, style and expectations served to form an implicit cultural connection between teachers and white students from which they were excluded. In one exchange, Toni noted that, “Belltown needs more African American teachers.” She then

went on to detail how the QRED tutorial room⁴⁶ served as a cultural refuge, a place that she would escape to in order to feel comfortable. “There is an African American woman here that can relate to me and I am not always surrounded by the same color people that are obviously different from me.” Rose, picking up on Toni’s idea of hiring teachers of color recognized that this would be good for white students as they would be forced to “experience having teachers that are not all from the same culture.” An observation that prompted an enthusiastic, “that’s the truth!” from Toni. Speaking to the same issue, Bonnie simply stated, “We have one room; they get the whole school—this is home away from home. They got the *whole school*.”

Who “Has” Culture?

Because white culture was normative and largely invisible at Belltown, whites did not conceive of their actions or dispositions as guided by a particular set of cultural commitments that flowed from particular socio-historical conditions. By contrast, students of color—whose cultural enactments tended to stand out—were perceived to be culturally encumbered and their actions and dispositions structured by cultural constraints that whites could not see in their own enactments. The dominant epistemological frameworks for generating “truth” privilege objectivity and rationality, the twin pillars of deductive or so-called normal science.⁴⁷ In the field of education, being perceived to be post-cultural functions as a form of capital given that those who are believed to be post-cultural are thought to possess superior intellectual qualities and capacities.

⁴⁶ For more on the faculty’s view on programs like this see the section above titled “Equal Treatment.”

⁴⁷ Thomas Kuhn (1970) uses the phrase “normal science” to denote the hegemonic epistemology or “paradigm” that is recognized as the standard method for making valid statements about the social and natural world.

The following two examples describe how whites at Belltown were often constructed to be individuals not beholden to culture. They demonstrate how this normative whiteness functioned as a form of cultural capital by bestowing individuality on only certain students within the institution. The first excerpt comes from an interview with a young, white tutor named Theodore, who related an experience teaching history to students of color.

Theodore: We were talking about something unrelated, um, I can't remember what it was but slavery came up, the topic of slavery. We started to talk about slavery and it was relevant to what this [QRED] student was learning in her class but I couldn't get her to show any interest. The lights just went out and she was staring off. It sucked. Here I have this chance to get her on her history—to really help her understand her culture and where she comes from but she's got no enthusiasm for it. She doesn't seem to care at all. What can that be? What can it be when a black kid doesn't care about slavery?

Here, Theodor wrings his hands about whether or not his QRED student was showing the appropriate amount of attention to “her history” and what he perceives to be a past still relevant to her life today. Theodore, who described himself as a “very liberal guy,” intended to genuinely engage this student with information that he thought was relevant to her: his educational and social goals were admirable. His assumption, however, that this student should be interested in the material because she should have some sense of her own history, legacy and culture is tied to her race. He assumes that the student, *as a black student*, should be naturally interested in a discussion of slavery. When she does not conform to this expectation, he expresses concern on a much broader level, asking “what can it be when a black kid doesn't care about slavery?” What is notable is that Theodore seems unable to consider possible alternative explanations for the student's lack of attentiveness, such as, perhaps she was having a bad day or she was having trouble apprehending the information. In other words, he was not able to entertain

individualized (and non-“cultural”) explanations for her lack of interest, given his preexisting assumptions about which students should feel a cultural affinity to which topics.

Theodore’s anxiety conversely reveals something important about the faculty’s assumptions about and treatment of white students. Anxiety similar to what he felt was a recurrent theme in my field notes. Teachers frequently agonized over the apparent lack of enthusiasm students of color seemed to have with “their history.” When teachers failed to engage these students, reactions ranged from resignation to bewilderment. When it came to white students and “white” history⁴⁸, however, there was no analog to the assumption that black students should care about black history. Slavery, for example, is as much about being white as it is about being black, but teachers simply did not make the assumption that white students should be interested in their history or culture and greeted their disinterest as a characteristic of teenagers (or even the teacher’s own fault for not being sufficiently engaging), not as an inappropriate response from a member of a historically privileged group. These teachers could have seen white disinterest as a defensive reaction to the history of white dominance or inappropriate obliviousness to a history that served to set the foundations for racial inequality today. However, outside of routine encouragements such as “it’s important to learn our history to not repeat the mistakes of the past,” no group-specific demands were placed on white students to engage with their history as a way of understanding their culture or their social position. They were not asked to look backwards in the same way or for the same reasons as students of color and, as a result, white students were alleviated from epistemological

⁴⁸ In short, non-specified, non-specialized “history writ large.”

burdens that history and culture imply. Also, despite the fact that a history of white dominance has served to propel racial inequality into contemporary times, white students' interest or disinterest was not seen as a political or even a group-based phenomenon, but instead was evaluated on a case by case basis that had more to do with the student's learning profile, personal background, or general traits like age or maturity. In sum, in a school where whiteness was normative, when white students failed to engage with history, this was a quality of the individual student herself—not a missed opportunity for that student to locate herself in her culture and understand her group-based social position.

The second excerpt details just one of many awkward racial situations that emerged in the course of my fieldwork. The excerpt is taken from my ethnography notes and describes an incident that occurred when a small group of QRED students gathered in a classroom after school to discuss racial issues.

Excerpt: Today the students decided to hold the “Beyond the Skin”⁴⁹ meeting in a formal classroom. They did not ask official permission from the school secretary to use this room; they had however obtained informal permission from Brenna (one of the Vice Principals). When I arrived at the room the students were angrily packing up their belongings and leaving. According to Toni, the school secretary had shown up and told them that they had not officially reserved the room and had to leave. They refused citing Brenna's support for their meeting. The secretary apparently became agitated and asked Chevy, a white school custodian, to “kick them out of the room.” The students tried to explain their position to Chevy but he became impatient and threatened to “whip them with his bullwhip” if they did not leave. The students, perceiving this to be a racial slight, were furious. When I arrived Toni quietly asks me if we could use a classroom in the social studies wing of the building. I agree. When we arrive in the new room the group talks amongst themselves about Chevy's insensitivity. Brenna then enters

⁴⁹ In the fall of 2011, QRED students started this short-lived group to talk about racial issues at Belltown. I was invited to sit-in. This experience inverted established roles. I sat and listened and the students took the lead in discussing and interpreting racial reality at Belltown. These meetings perhaps more than anything else allowed me to get a glimpse of what QRED students really thought about race at Belltown. In addition, observing these meetings provided me with ideas about what to ask in my QRED focus groups and helped me to validate, discard, or revise my working hypotheses.

and attempts to calm the students. He says, “I understand why you are upset but you don’t know Chevy! You need to get over it. This has nothing to do with race, Chevy is just nuts! Chevy is not a racist he’s just a weird and crazy guy who probably does have a bullwhip! He says all kinds of strange things. You guys just don’t know him.” This explanation did not get any traction with the students. Frustrated, Brenna leaves. Once they are gone the students begin to talk as a group. Toni details what happened for group members who arrived late. Their anger was aroused by Chevy’s comments, but seems to have been enflamed by Brenna’s attempts to mollify them. Most comments seem to follow three dominant and related themes: 1) the students feel as though Brenna’s explanation was as insulting as Chevy’s comment; 2) the students wonder why Chevy should be absolved from having to recognize the racial nature of his comment; and, 3) the students resent the fact that the racial dimensions of the comment are minimized.

In this instance, the students reacted negatively to Chevy’s threat to whip them because it was redolent of plantation violence. What is instructive about this excerpt is not necessarily Chevy’s comment, but rather, Brenna’s response to it. Instead of admitting that Chevy had been insensitive, or engaging the students in a discussion about how they could confront Chevy, he rushed to redefine the incident as a non-racial misunderstanding that could be transcended if the students were familiar with Chevy’s personality. This explanation minimized the racial dimensions of the situation and in doing so defined the students as racially oversensitive; it also placed the burden of resolution squarely on the shoulders of the offended party. They had to get over it by understanding Chevy, but he was not asked to consider how his comments might have offended them. Instead of requiring Chevy to reflect on the meaning and appropriateness of a white authority figure threatening to whip a classroom full of black students, he was absolved as “weird” “crazy” and “nuts”—qualifiers rooted in his individual personality.

Even assuming that Chevy did not mean to be racially insensitive, the students’ anger could still have been validated with a discussion of how little contact many whites have with people of color and how this can be generative of racial insensitivity. Instead,

they were perceived to be manufacturing racial meaning through misinterpretation and Chevy was absolved as the problem was determined to be the students' unfamiliarity with Chevy and his irreverent personality. In other words, instead of seeing his behavior as specific to white culture or connected to a history of racial antagonism, Chevy was absolved of the past—the students simply did not know him as a person, as an individual.

It should also be noted that as an adult staff member Chevy was an authority figure, but his class position no doubt inflected the specific characterization that Brenna offered to explain his behavior. Whereas a faculty member might have been described as “misunderstood,” “joking around” or “not a racist,” Chevy’s behavior was explained in terms that simultaneously diminished the racial character of what he said while reinforcing his working class status in relation to the faculty and administration. In a subtle way, Brenna’s construction of Chevy hedges it bet by drawing on class to further marginalize Chevy and explain his behavior. Chevy is described as an individual, not a racial actor, but he is not an individual like other white adults in the institution; he is a flawed individual, a “weird” and “crazy” working class janitor from whom these things must be expected.

Similar to how white students’ engagement in history was not appraised as a cultural necessity but instead as an individual-level trait that may or may not be present, Chevy’s comments were not seen as manifesting from a racialized cultural and social system, but instead from a peculiar and irreverent working class individual. Conversely, students of color are defined in both excerpts above as connected to a larger social, cultural and racial group. In the first case, when perceived as not sufficiently interested in “their” history, students of color are seen as not connected tightly enough to their

culture and, therefore, unable to appropriately embrace its meaning. In the second case the students were seen as connected too rigidly and, therefore, unable to move away from a racial interpretation. As these examples suggest, whiteness was not only normative but normativity also brought with it the luxury of not being subsumed into a group or culture—the luxury of individuality.⁵⁰

In a school where whiteness was dominant but unrecognized, whiteness was treated as dislodged from history and culture and whites were treated as individuals. In short, whites at Belltown had the best of both worlds: they were viewed as being beyond culture, while at the same time benefitting from the fact that the institution was saturated in white culture.

Who is the "Good Kid"?

Working at the research site gave me an opportunity to listen for themes not just in my interviews, but also in the everyday discourse and informal conversations among teachers. In any institution there will be certain words and phrases that function in unique and context-specific ways. Teachers at Belltown employed a varied but consistent set of signifiers to describe the different kinds of students that they teach. One phrase that emerged over and over was “good kid.” This phrase was distinct from the various markers of high intellect, (“heavy hitter,” “bright,” “something else”) or lower intellect (“limited,” “challenged”), and different from the terms used to describe students dealing with drug, family, or emotional problems (“has issues”). Describing something other than perceived intellectual ability, “good kid” seemed to be employed consistently

⁵⁰ Race, in this instance, is something that is treated as more knowable by white faculty, staff and administrators than other actors within the field. This example clearly demonstrates who had the power to regulate meaning and define capital within the field.

to describe students who met the standards of the school and the expectations of the faculty. It seemed to indicate the student who could anticipate the teacher and conducted herself with “good manners” and in accord with the cultural standards of attire, comportment, and style valorized by the institution. The “good kid” was also a student who could develop something akin to an adult relationship with the teacher, a relationship that could on occasion gently push the boundaries (through jokes and informality) as long as it did not push too far. In all my interviews with faculty, I asked them about the “good kid,” a phrase with which they were familiar, but had not officially or explicitly defined. Their replies showed remarkable consistency and corresponded neatly with white students’ perceptions of what made for a “good kid.” Overall, the “good kid” seemed to be students who were on the same unspoken wavelength as their teachers. They were the kids whose behavior was in harmony with institutional expectations.

The designation of “good kid” had to be achieved. Not all white students were characterized in this way, but being white put students at a significant advantage given that the field was structured in white culture and staffed almost entirely by white faculty. Given that whiteness was normative, the racial dimension of the “good kid” designation was largely lost on whites at Belltown High. Tellingly, when I asked the QRED students to describe the generic characteristics of white students—how they act, dress, behave, connect with teachers—they described many of the same qualities that the faculty and white students had listed to describe the “good kid.” In other ways, just being a QRED student and feeling different created conditions that excluded a student from being the “good kid.” In other words, the “good kid” was really a proxy for those students who were positioned to master and deploy the varied codes and conducts that functioned as

cultural capital within the field.⁵¹ This section seeks to disaggregate the constituent elements of the good kid and in doing so reveal the racial dimensions of what constituted capital in the field.

Below I have presented the general categories of the good kid that emerged in my data according to the white faculty and students. As a teacher at Belltown, I also relied on my own understanding of how this term was defined and its constituent components. The categories that I identify are illustrated with representative quotes from white students and faculty. Those quotes are juxtaposed with both the qualities that my QRED focus group respondents defined as generically white attributes and behaviors, and their reflections on how being a QRED student often subtly disqualified them from being in a teacher's good graces. Each category concludes with a brief analysis.

i. The Good Kid is Confident in her Interactions with Teachers

Teacher Description:

Guy: A good kid is someone who's nice; who is courteous, who follows your deadlines and if something needs to be changed is very good in communicating that, "Hey, I need this extra time," and is very communicative and straightforward with the fact of what's going on. There's this certain ease of communication.

White Student Description:

Edward: Like they can hold a conversation with an adult...Like that kind of thing, just being around adults and you're like respectful; that's kind of what a good kid will do.

Amanda: There's definitely confidence...they seem like well adjusted, you know, outgoing people.

QRED View:

⁵¹ Like the meaning of all social symbols, the qualities enshrined as proper in the institution were socially constructed and said nothing about a student's inherent goodness. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) point out, social actors create their reality while failing to acknowledge their hand in it, perceiving the structures and understandings that govern their life as natural or primordial.

Chris: So when white students participate how do they do it?

Latisha: A lot, really strong.

Claudia: With confidence.

Tory: Yeah.

Chris: Do you guys feel as confident?

Latisha: No.

Claudia: I'd rather not talk at all... At times I'm like I don't know what they're saying, they're just kinda talking just to be heard.

Tory: They do it because they have that label and it's a self-fulfilling prophecy, I would say. If someone tells you you're smarter, you already have that label from the day you were born. So...you will try to act that way.

Claudia: There's this kid in my class and every single time he gets like 10 points off, he tries to get it so he gets at least half of the points back. He tells the teacher, and he's like, "No, look at what I did, I understood it."

Tory: Now that's an expectation in a white...

Chris: It's an all-white faculty for the most part, do you feel as comfortable approaching teachers as you think they do?

Toni: No, not at all.

Bonnie: I don't push it in class. I don't raise my hand because the class is white and I don't really know the teacher. That's why I don't raise my hand.

Analysis: For QRED students, feeling different, alone, or singled out in class made it hard to speak up with confidence. QRED students spoke at length about the unspoken connection between white teachers and students. When I asked the focus group of QRED students if they thought white students had an advantage because the teachers were mostly white, the group unanimously agreed that they did. Tory trenchantly concluded, "I don't think they see the advantage, because they see it too often that it's just left their minds. They just know that...they blend in, that's all it is."

ii. The Good Kid is Quiet and In Control

Teacher Description:

Darren: Eye contact, they're not gabbing with their neighbor, they're not daydreaming, that's a kid that I can tell is trying hard. When they're walking in the hall they're not just sort of sauntering, not that they have to walk in a quick

pace, but that they, they probably are, you know, they're moving in a reasonably efficient, I don't know how to put it, it sounds so clinical; and moreover they're respectful of their body space relative to others in the hallway, and what I mean by that is they're not just, it's not like they're walking like: "I own this place," so everybody's got to get out of my way.

White Student Description:

Tessa: [The Good Kid is] not very wild or anything that feels kind of like...I don't know how to describe it. Kind of controlled and like, some maturity to them, sort of...like not making any disruptions at all, quiet.

Lisa: So, typically they don't like kids that talk it out...talk like loud, off-topic a lot. Like, be disruptive...those are bad kids. And like being respectful, raising your hand and being on topic, being helpful; like participating in class is a good kid.

QRED View:

Chris: Is there a difference in terms of how white kids sit in class or how they behave with each other?

Toni: They're all quiet. They don't really talk.

Latisha: I'm naturally loud, though.

Claudia: A lot of people think it's me giving them attitude and it's like it's not attitude for me....Sometimes when I get emotional, I twist my hands [waving hands and arms] and I'm like "Wha? bla-bla-bla-bla" like I did this morning to Tom [white student]. He got on my nerves; he said I was stupid. And I was like, "You're unbelievable, you think you can say whatever you want," and he pretended he didn't say anything, and I'm like, [emphatically] "I heard you; I have hearing," and like, Mr. Liban then threw me out of the class...

Toni: Oh, so that's when you got kicked out of class.

Claudia: Yeah, Liban's like, "You can either stop talking or leave." And I looked at him and like: "You really think I'm gonna stop talking when this kid just insulted me," and I got up and left.

Chris: Now, in terms of ways of expressing anger...⁵²

Claudia: It's not anger!

Chris: White kids here are different? I mean if someone calls them stupid, how do they deal with it?

Claudia: They like...

Tory: Walk away. They don't really enforce it as much as a black or Hispanic person would do.

Claudia/Toni: Yeah.

Toni: Like maybe that is how we were brought up, we're brought up more rowdy. It's kinda weird because everybody here's like really calm and just; not

⁵² Note that in the focus group transcript I cannot help but read Claudia's description of her behavior as expressing "anger," something that prompted a frustrated correction.

everybody, but the majority of people, is just like calm and don't really express any emotions or anything...

Bonnie: I was in study hall and there was a group of whites in one side and blacks on another side. The black side was laughing and loud but the white side was too. The teacher got upset and asked [the black kids] to be quiet. To the white kids? He didn't say anything. We asked him to make them quiet and he jokingly told them to. We then got loud again and he kicked us out! He seemed to be in on the joke with them. He said nothing to them. From that day forward I was sensitive to being loud with my friends and now I feel like I'm not myself anymore. I am more guarded because I don't know how teachers will respond. That experience really impacted me. White people, I don't want to get close to them because I don't trust them and there is a racial thing that will always be there.

Analysis: Controlling body and voice dynamics were both well-recognized features of the good kid. QRED students widely reported feeling hesitant to engage teachers and talk in class (as noted above) and recognized that this was a hindrance to their reputation. They also felt as though the moments when they expressed themselves authentically served to disqualify them. The white faculty and staff that I interviewed consistently defined QRED students' behavior as falling outside the boundaries of rationality, a judgment that was almost always predicated on interpretations of behavior, rather than ability ("angry," "intimidating," "hard to manage," "loud," "emotional"). The following quote from Cora was typical of how many white faculty members experienced QRED students in the classroom.

Cora: There were a couple of really big [QRED] boys, you know, huge, and they tried to intimidate me a little bit. You know, because they would, this one would stand up, and I just said to him one time, "You're trying to intimidate me?" You know, I said, "What are you trying to do? What is that?" Usually in an all white class, you know at the start they are very quiet, they want to know what's going on... These kids never did that, and it was almost like they were doing things to get me to respond, to act.

Often QRED student's behavior was interpreted as not just lacking control, but as "angry." For example, Ryan, a white teacher, noted: "I bet there's been books written

about the phenomenon of the angry young black girl...It's like a very complex problem in our country and you see it regularly as a teacher here." As Bonnie noted above, QRED students expressions were also more likely to be seen by white teachers as problematic even if QRED students' behaviors were similar to those of white students, suggesting that the assumptions that were attached to merely being white were beneficial. This disconnect certainly excluded these students from the good kid designation and, as with Claudia and Bonnie, expressions that felt normal to them could have serious consequences. Claudia's teacher gave her the option of either conforming to expected norms, something that would involve suppressing her expression, or leaving class. Unwilling to conform to the teacher's expectations she walked out. Disparate disciplinary action was a common complaint among QRED students and, in Bonnie's case, made her circumspect, further marginalizing her and enhancing her sense that what is normal at Belltown is abnormal to her.

iii. How the Good Kid Dresses

Teacher Description:

Darren: He doesn't have jeans going half-mast. Haft-mast is when your jeans are halfway down your ass. That's what it's called. He could be wearing a hat, a baseball hat. But what does that hat have to look like? It probably has to have a bill that's bent, a little; the straight is sort of this hip-hop, a little too edgy kind of approach; it has to be either directly forward or directly backwards the sort of off the side look is maybe a little bit too hip-hop...

Ted: I think more your preppy kid would be, like your button-down shirt you know, khaki pants or shorts.

White Student Description:

Patrick: A lot of the QRED kids in their cities, the pants hang low and the underwear is riding up and the hats in the school. So I think that, that the institution would not want that.

Mae: Preppy, I guess.

Chris: Meaning what?

Mae: Like, J. Crew, Vineyard Vines, Polo or J. Crew.

QRED View:

QRED students recognized that they tended not to dress in the expected Belltown uniform, something that included, for the girls, Ugg-brand boots, “preppy” pants, shirts and blouses and, among the boys, baseball hats with just the right amount of flowing hair curling up from underneath. While they noted that their style of dress set them apart, what upset them the QRED students more was the pressure to wear certain name brands and the social consequences of failing to do so. As Mila noted, “they have their Hunter brand boots, L.L. Bean and North Face and we [don’t wear that]. They have expensive things...I look like a bum.” She believed that her inability to dress in the expected fashions had precluded the possibility of dating white boys, finally concluding that “I am not at their level.”

Analysis: Here, one quality of the Good Kid is explicitly defined in opposition to what whites’ perceive as “hip hop,” the fashion of the “inner-city” or simply “black.” QRED students found that white students’ affinity for “preppy” brands was not only incongruous with their preferred styles, but simply unaffordable. Here race and class converge as white students’ tastes are shaped as much by race as their ability to afford expensive and exclusive brands. QRED students reported that even if they wanted to dress in accord with the prevailing standards they would not have the means to do so. Not dressing in accord with school norms also had other social impacts. In response to a question of

styles of dress, Lori, a student who cultivated close contacts with QRED students, related a telling conversation with a black friend.

Lori: White guys, when they look at someone attractive, it's how expensive the clothes they are wearing [are]. It's like if you don't dress the way I like, I can't find you attractive. I was talking to one of my [QRED] friends...who's gorgeous, she can get any guy she wants, she's a total man-eater, and I was like, "Oh who are you interested in and blah, blah?" And she's like, "Oh my only goal in high school is to date a white guy." And I was like, "Really why is that? You can get anyone, it shouldn't be difficult." And she was like, "No that's the hardest thing that'll ever even try to do is to get a white guy to find me attractive, with the way that I dress, the way that I speak that's different than them. It's a lot different."

iv. The Good Kid is "Good at Doing School"

Teacher Description:

Guy: They're clearly following the lessons, they're doing the tasks, when you're supposed to take notes, the notes are being taken, right? When you're supposed to be having a discussion you're participating; when you're supposed to be asking questions, you're asking questions. So a good kid is a kid who is in the teacher's outline of what the lesson is supposed to be, is doing exactly what the teacher was expecting the students to do at that part of the lesson.

White Student Description:

Hans: [The good kid is] not even high-achieving but hardworking, not disruptive. I think teachers wanna see people that are like good at doing school.... like a guy or girl that sort of just has things to say. I think it's more about the people that have something to bring. Not the people that a teacher has to bring something out of.

Tessa: Attentive, very attentive...raises his hand a lot. I mean apparent...that's what I've witnessed in my class.

QRED View:

Latisha and Clause sat down with me individually outside the QRED focus group to talk about being a black student at Belltown. These conversations were informal and instead of using my audio recorder I took notes.

From Notes: Latisha does not engage as much because Belltown is competitive and she's afraid she won't make it—she knows that she has artistic skills but she

knows that the other kids have advantages: art classes and summer camps. She doesn't try because she doesn't want to "look like a fool." She's intimidated and although she believes in herself she's aware of her disadvantage. She is also worried that in trying and failing, she will present an unfavorable image of black people to the white kids. She notes that she used to get first place in art competitions but now she's anxious to produce anything or even compete.

From Notes: Claude talked about how white students show teachers that they are engaged by going the extra mile in class: doing extra reading, doing extracurricular activities, speaking in class, going for meeting with teachers, attending study sessions and after school academic activities. Many of these things he wouldn't feel comfortable doing with white faculty in a predominantly white classroom, others he is excluded from doing due to the structure of the school day. He has a job, and has to leave after school on the bus or train. He notes that he has no time for meeting with teachers or academic activities outside class.

In a separate interview that was recorded verbatim, Bell nicely captured why some QRED students can appear withdrawn or disengaged in class and vociferously critiqued the notion that QRED student do not care about being good students.

Bell: Sometimes we may seem like we are not paying attention or that we are tired but we do care and we do want to do well and we do want to work hard. I guess the word I would use is scared or even intimidated. Sometimes we are just not comfortable enough to engage as [white] students can engage.

Analysis: Latisha talked about how desired school success combined with academic struggles and a sense that the playing field was not level conspired to make them not want to try.⁵³ Latisha also noted how racial self-consciousness enervated her desire to engage in her classes, even art, a class in which she knew she could excel. Claude explained that he was simply not comfortable enough with white faculty to engage in the behaviors that white students enacted in order to win their favor. Bell illustrates how

⁵³ Latisha's story, which was similar to many of the students of color that I interviewed, speaks to how the distribution of capital within a field leads to social reproduction. Realizing that she lacked the capital to meaningfully participate and meet the expectations of the institution, Latisha simply disengaged. In other words, upon perceiving incompatibility between her stores of capital and the structure of the field, she chose not to participate, thus assuring the reproduction of objective conditions. These objective conditions include both the inequitable distribution of capital and the way in which capital is defined in the field. As Bourdieu notes, "the subjective hope of profit tends to be adjusted to the objective probability of profit" (2000:216).

intimidation leads some QRED students to appear disengaged. Claude also pointed out that the realities of his life outside of school limited his ability do the things that faculty expected while Bell points out that despite faculty's assumptions, she is engaged academically outside of school. All three respondents either implicitly or explicitly noted the relative ease with which white students were able to "be good at school."

v. The Good Kid Knows How and When to Push Boundaries

Teacher Description:

Tania: [The good kid is] polite and deferential is what came to mind, but not necessarily deferential in a like real obsequious way.

Rhonda: We do like the kid that can push the boundaries with us a bit—within limits.

White Student Description:

Rodney: I mean you definitely have to kind of give a shit, [but] you can't be one of those kids who just tries too hard to get the teachers to like them and it's just really annoying and they're like, "Oh actually that's a musket and not a rifle," and go on like these stupid tangents and try to pretend like they know everything. So you have to find that balance between not caring at all and caring but not going over the top with it...

QRED View:

Claude: It's really hard for me to develop relationships with teachers here. When I think they like me, I do everything that I can to preserve that relationship...I hesitate before I joke with teachers because I am so worried about blowing that relationship because it's so hard to make in the first place.

Analysis: The faculty universally seemed to appreciate students that could be irreverent within certain limits. Finding the balance between being casual enough and still maintaining an academic reputation was often hard for students and required false starts

and recalibrations. Without a clearly defined and enforced set of school rules⁵⁴ to fall back on, students had to negotiate informal norms through trial and error with each teacher. This, of course, required that students feel comfortable with their teachers, a challenge, as noted above, that is compounded for QRED students.

My field notes contain multiple entries regarding Kevin, an initially school-resistant white student who successfully made the transition from having “issues” to being the “good kid.”⁵⁵ At first, Kevin refused to complete his schoolwork and argued loudly with his teachers and the other students in his classes. Over time, he adopted a pro-school attitude but was anxious and often seemed to be trying too hard (taking multiple periods to compete a test, nervously asking an excessive number of questions, seeming overly concerned with his grades). Encouraged by his teachers to “relax and have fun,” Kevin eventually decided to play a practical joke on a popular teacher named Ms. Lomax. Enlisting other teachers, he stole a picture off her wall, and concocted an elaborate set of clues and riddles that, upon completion, would reveal the picture’s location. Ms. Lomax clearly enjoyed the game and Kevin’s teachers heralded his informal behavior as evidence that he had found the mean, an acceptably relaxed attitude

⁵⁴ Belltown has a student handbook with rules of conduct, but as the principal pointed out, nobody read it until disciplinary action was impending.

⁵⁵ In my sociology class, I had a student who exploited my well-broadcast distaste for mayonnaise in order to play a practical joke. Toward the end of the semester, she took out a jar of mayonnaise (that she had cleverly filled with cheesecake filling) and started to take exaggerated bites with a long-handled spoon. I did not experience her action as disruptive, but clever, and in retrospect I think I did see her joke as evidence of her maturity (her ability to know that I would not be upset and how the joke did not derail the class but instead provided a laugh at the end of the semester). At the time this did not appear to me to have a racial dimension but when I asked my QRED respondents about it I learned that many of them had heard about the incident and strongly condemned the action as “disrespectful.” When I asked them if they would feel as confident engaging in a joke like this, they unanimously agreed that they would not. Claude, a QRED student that I had developed a relationship with since teaching him U.S. History, noted that it took him “forever” to learn that he could call me “Gauthier, you know, without the mister.” He continued, “I was really nervous when I first did it because I like you and I think you like me and I didn’t want to hurt that. That’s just a name so I can’t even think about what it would mean to eat a food I know you think is gross in your class! I would never do that!”

to complement his studiousness. Shortly thereafter, Kevin earned the good kid designation. This label would prove to be useful as later in the year he was caught and punished for breaking the school's substance abuse policy. What before would have been further evidence of his "issues" his teachers framed as a "learning experience," a "bad choice" made by an otherwise "good kid." In essence, the good kid label, once achieved, could defend a student against the social and academic consequences that flowed from behaving like a "bad kid."

While watching Kevin's transformation take place, I pondered whether a QRED student would feel comfortable engaging in similar antics given the fact that they are often suspected of being thieves. My QRED students respondents were particularly sensitive to this assumption and the impact that it had on their reputation. I asked Claude, Clayton and Zaria about what Kevin had done and when I mentioned that he had taken something from a teacher, eyes widened and jaws dropped. Clayton said, "That's just disrespectful! I couldn't even imagine trying to do that!" Claude added, "I would expect to be suspended if we tried to do that." Janice agreed, saying, "we live a label, so taking things doesn't work. Everyone thinks we steal so I wouldn't dream of doing that." She continued by noting that the only place she felt comfortable was with the African American QRED tutor in the QRED tutorial room. "There I can be myself and joke around, but not with white teachers!"

The challenging process of learning to be good at school, but not too good, was clearly made more challenging for QRED students as the same action might be seen as irreverent or criminal depending on who undertakes it. Taking a faculty member's picture, even as a harmless joke would clearly would bring with it different and perhaps

damaging consequences for a QRED student. Furthermore, as my QRED respondents indicated, they did not feel comfortable with white teachers and what white students saw as fooling around, QRED students often perceived to be “disrespectful,” behavior that might cast them in a negative light or spoil the hard-won bonds that they were able to develop with white faculty. Being able to engage in informal behaviors with the faculty was a challenge for white students also, but the fact that they were not limited by their racial identity—and the fact that the white faculty was not aware of how the “good kid” label was shot through with racialized cultural assumptions—was evidence of a level of invisible privilege not available to all students.

The Good Kid and Tracking: Formal and Informal Structures of Race Converge

Taken together, the ideal-typical Belltown student dresses in preppy clothing, maintains specific standards of “physical control,” and speaks quietly and confidently to faculty with whom they are also occasionally irreverent. With the exception of standards of dress, the faculty did not see the racial dimension of these characteristics. Because whiteness is normative at Belltown, the faculty members were not able to appreciate the ways in which white culture was suffused in institutional expectations that were believed to be neutral, normal, and universal.⁵⁶ Simply put, attributes that were culturally or experientially specific to whites: comportment, dress, familiarity with faculty and a sense of comfort in the classroom were believed to be available to all students. Tellingly, when I asked Peter, the QRED coordinator, what the attributes of a “good kid” at Belltown

⁵⁶ As Diane Gusa (2010) notes, when “unexamined historically situated White cultural ideology [becomes] embedded in the language, cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge, they subtly sustain racial dominance” (496).

were he immediately saw through the question and pointed out how this designation was a cultural code word with racial implications.

Chris: What are the qualities of that good kid?

Peter: I guess the corollary to that is: do QRED kids fit those qualities? I think [many teachers] want students who are sitting straight forward, first row, always attentive, always early, homework always done completely, and you know have sort of a cheerful disposition all the time as if like you know, coming in and saying hello and being polite and compliant are the main criteria for success of a student. And I don't think QRED kids meet that criteria very often, because I think a lot of times [they're] guarded, and with reason, they're apprehensive, they sense all the time that they don't fit in. You know this isn't really their school and it's not a place where they can feel completely comfortable.

The general feeling of not fitting into the culture at large, of being guarded, precluded QRED students from engaging with faculty in the same way as their white peers. Some things like comportment, language, and dress clearly were rooted in white practices; however, as noted above, faculty often expected subtly fine-tuned irreverence from students. Learning how to negotiate these lines required an iterative socialization process that is itself a challenge for white students.⁵⁷ As Peter indicates, QRED students are often alienated and, therefore, guarded and less comfortable when trying to learn and enact the formal culture of the school to say nothing of the culture of acceptable informality. The result is additional layers of cultural practices that are not specific to whites per se, but will be easier for white students to learn, refine, and transact.

Being the good kid did not just defend against the application of less favorable labels, as in the case of the Kevin above, but also could impact a student's grade. As

⁵⁷ For example, swearing is formally discouraged at Belltown, but teachers sometimes swear in class. Students have to learn to negotiate this linguistic double standard and the process is often awkward. Although a QRED student never tried to swear or use explicit language in one of my classes, there were multiple instances in which white students would boldly lace their answers with swearing and explicit references. One young woman, for example, described Elvis's dancing as "gyrating his junk." In these instances, it was incumbent on me to police the boundaries of what was appropriate for a student. Swearing was not a punishable offence, probably because it would be hard to enforce a rule frequently broken by faculty. One common method was to use humor to point out the double standard while also reinforcing the side of that standard that pertained to students.

Peter discerned, “if a teacher’s not able to kinda break through that barrier...they’ll never get to the point where [that students is] excelling.” The “good kid” label was derivative of race-based cultural capital not evenly available to all students and, as a result, served to structure different students’ standing by race. As one teacher admitted, “being a good kid a is a slightly nuanced thing. It’s a kid who gets a B-, maybe deserves a C, maybe earns a B-, just ‘cause they really put in the effort.”

Although it is not possible to link teachers’ perceptions of student behavior directly to their assessment of those students, it is reasonable to conclude, given the evidence presented above, that being white puts students at a considerable advantage given that the school is structured along racial lines. White students are seen as rational individuals whose race and cultural styles of comportment and behavior conform to the cultural expectations of the field. If these factors served to subtly advantage white students, this advantage was made manifest in the aggregate as students often found themselves tracked into different classes, with white students clustered predominantly in higher level and more rigorous classes and QRED students tracked into less challenging classes. The intersection of race and tracking demonstrates that the less visible principles regulating the field did not operate autonomously from the formal structure but instead impacted it.

All subjects at Belltown, with the exception of art, physical education, and social studies, were tracked. Despite a stated commitment to heterogeneous classes, social studies teachers often found that tracking patterns in other departments—math and science especially—imposed *de facto* tracking in their department due to scheduling constraints. Statistics for the math department illustrate how extreme tracking could be at

Belltown High. The math department offers five types of courses. The college preparation courses (CP) were divided into three separate levels with CP3 being the most basic and CP1 being the most challenging of the three. Honors and advanced placement courses represented the highest levels offered by the math department. Looking at the two school years for which data was available (2009-2010 and 2010-2011), there was an inverse relationship between the level of the class and the percent of QRED students enrolled. Although they comprise around 6.2 percent of the school population, QRED students were 32.5 percent of the students enrolled in CP3 math classes in 2009-2010 and 27.1 percent of students enrolled in these classes in 2010-2011. CP2 and CP1 classes were 5.8 percent and 2.4 percent QRED, respectively, in 2009-2010 and 7.6 percent and 2.3 percent QRED, respectively, in 2010-2011. In both school years, there was not one QRED student enrolled in an honors or advanced placement math class.⁵⁸ As a structural feature of Belltown High, tracking served to visibly sort students into a hierarchy that was supposed to correspond to objective levels of intelligence.

When I asked teachers about tracking they struggled to explain racial disparities. Many relied on the contentious⁵⁹ notion of “oppositional identity.” Nelson, for example, said, “when you have an overriding white population, there’s this association of academic success with whiteness and un-coolness.” Others relied on notions of cultural lack. None of the faculty or staff respondents recognized the ways in which whiteness served as a form of capital. Nonetheless, tracking certainly seemed to correspond to the assumptions

⁵⁸ There was no data available for other departments but respondents consistently noted that QRED students were heavily represented in their lower-level classes, often creating class composition that were distortions of different groups’ percentage of the total school population. One language teacher, for example, spoke of a remedial class that was 50 percent QRED and a science teacher reported having two CP1 classes that were almost 50 percent QRED.

⁵⁹ First elaborated by Fordham and Ogbu (1986), the notion of an oppositional identity has been called into question on both theoretical and empirical terms. See Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998), Akom (2008) and Carter (2005).

that white faculty made about race, behavior and culture. As Lori, a HSI white student observed, this structural feature impacted white students' perceptions: "It's almost like an unsaid kind of like understanding, like calling someone black is kind of like calling them a joke and inferior, I guess. And I think that some of it does stand for some of the black kids in our school that aren't in, most of them aren't in the higher honors classes."

Tracking was an overt reflection of the structure of the field and the distribution of capital within and served to explicitly connect race with notions of superiority and inferiority. As we will see in the following chapter, tracking also textured white students' views of both themselves and QRED students.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the racial structure of the field that is defined by faculty and staff and confronted by students. Although the white faculty could not see it, whiteness operated as a form of capital, one which non-white students did not have access, and which even white students had to become adept at enacting properly (even if unconsciously). The standards around behavior, dress, comportment, and the expectations for students' relationships with faculty were both reflective of white culture and more accessible to white students. Being able to adhere or enact these expectations impacted students' locations and status within the field and, therefore, functioned as cultural capital. The inequitable distribution of cultural capital manifested in a system of tracking that overtly linked intellect and race. Colorblindness that served to limit what could be said about race was also a structural feature at Belltown High. This particular way of approaching the topic of race was enacted in the provision of equal treatment and

reinforced by a curriculum that rendered the north racially progressive by defining racism as a southern phenomenon. This chapter has elaborated the structure of the field, the next chapter considers how white students with low levels of social interaction (those students who tend to view QRED students from afar) make sense of what they see and experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHITE STUDENTS WITH LOW LEVELS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

This chapter draws on interviews with white students with low levels of social interaction (LSI) to explore how they make sense of whiteness and racial difference in a field in which whiteness operates as a form of cultural capital. Whereas the previous chapter relied primarily on the voices and perspectives of teachers—those who establish the “rules” of the field—this chapter shifts its attention to white students—specifically, white students with relatively low levels of social interaction with QRED students. Given the structure of the educational field described in Chapter Three—a field that both privileges white practices and conceals whiteness as a viable racial category—how do white students with virtually no close contacts with QRED students think about their own racial identity, as well as that of others? How do white students who exist in a field in which whiteness is normative, enshrined in cultural capital and concealed in colorblind discourse come to understand the racial differences that they see from afar? In short, how do white students within the field make sense of its dynamics and their location within it, and how do these understandings both reinforce and get reinforced by their low levels of interaction with non-white students?

When I started my research at Belltown I assumed that when I interviewed white students, one of the themes that would emerge would be that all white students would pronounce that QRED had been beneficial in at least one basic way. I expected that white students would universally report that the experience had given them a sort of “multicultural capital,” the ability to exist and function effectively in a diverse world. So

standard is this assumption that some authors reflexively assume that white students derive this benefit (Eaton 2001). Reay et al (2007) characterize this outlook, something I believed to be fairly well established, as social “omnivorousness,” the desire among middle class whites to consume certain kinds of diversity in the pursuit of making their children “culturally fluent” and “well rounded, tolerant individuals” (1044). Although I did not interview parents, what I found among their children was quite different. Although a few suggested that the program had made them recognize, as Elliot put it, “many more similarities than differences,” and that, “there’s no reason to draw differences,” most reported getting virtually nothing from the program. Hans, for example, noted that he did not know many QRED kids and concludes that the program does not create the diversity that I expected him to herald.

Hans: As I’m graduating, it sort of hit me that I don’t know people in my class. There are people that I just have never even met before – I didn’t know they were in our class – and then I look through the [yearbook] pictures it strikes me how many of them are from the QRED program...I mean you could say its just giving them a better education...but I think the part of it that’s missing is getting the Belltown community more diversity. I don’t think it helps all that much.

When I asked Alison what she got out of the QRED program she too was surprisingly matter of fact.

Alison: Nothing (chuckles). I don’t get anything out of it, um, other than we have some variety of, like, race here, which we don’t really have um, but it doesn’t matter because we don’t interact with them. Like, if they’re...if you have a class with QRED kids, they’ll all band together; they don’t really socialize with white kids.

Alison, like many of the white students that I interviewed had traveled the world extensively. She recently returned from Poland and was planning another trip to Europe for the following summer. When I asked her if she would be more apt to write a college

essay on diversity about QRED or her travels to Poland, her answer echoed the position of many of her LSI peers: QRED simply did not count as meaningful diversity.

Alison: Because QRED isn't really much of a cultural diversity here, like, we don't mix at all. There's no cultural diversity going on here whereas in Poland, I was submerged in a Polish Catholic school by myself with no English... And I like had to like, conform to the customs, I had to learn this whole new religion, I had to learn a whole new language...

As we will see, for many white students, QRED was synonymous with lower achievement and questionable cultural traits, whereas being able to consume international difference was seen as preferable by many white students. Rodney, like many of his peers had engaged in international service in places like Peru, and defined this as a far more meaningful experience of diversity than QRED, something that he had limited contact with and felt had not really provided him with anything significant.⁶⁰

Rodney: I guess [QRED] just seems so, it almost seems like commonplace and the other part of it is I don't think I have enough personal interaction with the students, which seems weird 'cause they've always been here and stuff, I can't say I've had tons of them in my classes all the time, um but I mean like Peru just kind of stands out, "Oh you went to Peru?" or whereas like the QRED program seems like, "Oh (in blasé voice) you had African-American kids in your high school...okay," you know.

As discussed earlier, when compared to their counterparts at a predominantly white school *without* a QRED program, the white students at Belltown have more interactions. But, as the statements above attest, a closer look at actual patterns of interaction within the field reveal that not all students at Belltown experience the same level and quality of contact with QRED students. The students in this chapter are the vast majority at Belltown; they are white students who exist in the same space as QRED students but have very few substantive interactions with them. The mere existence of a

⁶⁰ While conducting this research there were numerous school sanctioned diversity enrichment experiences. For example, there were exchange trips to points in Asia and South America. In addition the school encouraged and supported such extracurricular activities as Japanese and African drumming.

QRED program might guarantee contact, but it does not guarantee conversation, and Belltown exhibits significant racial separation in a number of spheres that serves to bring students close enough for observation but not interaction. For example, students tend to move around Belltown in groups and congregate outside the library and in the main hallways. Casual observation shows these groups to be starkly divided by race with only a handful of white students with QRED students (these students will be the focus of Chapter Five) and virtually no QRED students found among the larger groups of white students. Likewise, the cafeteria itself is separated by race with QRED students occupying a neatly defined corner at the front of the room and white students dominating the rest of the space. Tracking also finds QRED students clustered together in certain classes. Although there are white students in these classes, there is still separation in terms of where students sit in the room. Untracked classes tend to have a few QRED students, but, as these students report, they often feel at the margins within these classrooms.

Being LSI does not mean that these students do not interact at all, but it refers to a particular kind of social arrangement that presents QRED students as decontextualized human beings, racial representations that are observed from afar and theorized about. For LSI white students, interactions with QRED students are largely superficial and revolve around negotiating shared spaces without getting to know QRED students. The lack of information does not mean that these white students fail to draw conclusions; in fact, it is just the opposite. These students report valuing colorblindness, but their explanations of difference are animated by notions of racial inferiority that are easily discernable despite their dissembling, qualifications and instrumental use of vague language. Not addressing

contemporary racial issues does not mean that it is not part of the curriculum—to ignore race, it turns out, is just a particular way of teaching about it. Despite existing in a space where colorblindness is capital, racial differences abound. These differences demand explanation and the form and content of these explanations is attributable to students' relative level of interaction.

As we will see in the next chapter, students who have higher levels of social interaction (HSI) tended to interact through friendships, athletics or romantic relationships, all connections that brought them into a very different orbit with QRED students when compared to LSI white students. These students did not start out as relatively more progressive than the students in this chapter; LSI students were not more prejudiced and as a result did not develop connections with QRED students. All the white students interviewed for this study reported coming from homes in which race was not frequently discussed and reported struggling with the demands of colorblindness and the general lack of useful institutionally imparted tools with which to make sense of the racial differences that marked their local environment. Instead it was the students' relative level of interaction—the way in which they were simultaneously in the same space but still worlds apart—that found them making sense of race in particular ways. When we look, we see these white students actively seeking to make sense of what they see, but greatly constrained by the cultural “tool-kit” at their disposal, to borrow one popular analogy (Swidler 2001). Inculcated with media representations of people of color and trying to reconcile what they see with the dominant forms of cultural capital within the field, LSI white students tend to overlook white privilege entirely, focusing instead on racialized notions of cultural deficiency.

In the first section of this chapter, I will describe how LSI white students' enactments of and relationship to dominant cultural capital in the field prevents them from recognizing the racial structure of the field itself. To these students, the nature and distribution of capital in the field appears as *doxa*: its racial character is unacknowledged and its validity seems to emanate from the neutral logic of the field itself (Bourdieu 1990). I will outline how a particular narrative of race, paired with LSI students' experience of consonance between their racial identity and dominant cultural capital in the field prevents these white students from apprehending whiteness as a form of privilege. Although all white students at Belltown are subjected to these factors, LSI students' experiences and observations lead them to conclude that Belltown is a racially neutral space.

In the second section, I consider how these students make sense of the racial differences and outcomes they observe in daily life at Belltown High—what they believe explains the differences and what, if anything, they think should be done about it. LSI white students tend to perceive QRED students as the bearers of culture, constructing themselves as post-cultural and rational in comparison. Furthermore, because of their inability to see the racial dimensions of cultural capital in the field, they tend to embrace notions of cultural pathology to explain the racial differences patterned into social life at Belltown High, and to resist as racist leveling policies such as affirmative action that acknowledge and compensate for the inequitable distribution of capital in the field.

Part One: Obscuring the Existence of Whiteness at Belltown High

The students in this section were unable to comprehend the ways in which the field was organized to benefit them. White normativity and the demands of colorblindness were compounded by limited interactions with QRED students, thus making it hard for LSI students to apprehend how whiteness mattered at Belltown. The correspondence between white culture and cultural capital at Belltown created conditions in which capital within the field appeared “natural” and universally available, rather than structured by race. Bourdieu employs the term *doxa* to describe how social actors come to misrecognize cultural capital—something arbitrary that results from antagonism and power within a field—as common sense. In other words, he understood that for some social actors the existence of and functioning of cultural capital was not always evident and often what passes as proper in a field seems to participants within that field to emanate from the logic of the field itself. As Bourdieu (1972) explains:

When there is quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization ...the natural and social worlds appear self evident....The instruments of knowledge of the social world are in this case...political instruments which contribute to the reproduction of the social world...seen as self-evident and undisputed (164).

In Belltown, for example, the characteristics of a “good kid” are not derived from an immutable and essential notion of school behavior. Wearing certain kinds of clothing, relating to teachers in a specific way and maintaining a quiet demeanor are not expectations that derive “naturally” from the field but are instead culturally specific ways of being that are imposed on the field and serve to delimit or facilitate certain outcomes within the field, in this case racially disparate outcomes. This section will describe how for LSI white students, colorblind discourse and white normativity together obscured the

racial structure of Belltown High rendering what passed as cultural capital to be common sense. The regionally specific way they thought about race in conjunction with their position within the field, which prevented them from seeing themselves as racial actors, made them blind to the ways in which the institution was structured in ways beneficial to them. The first two sections will investigate how both discourse and social position are employed by LSI white students to make sense of their racial identity. The third section will demonstrate how these white students fail to see how race matters at Belltown.

Colorblind Discourse

LSI white students evidenced both hesitancy and difficulty when asked to talk about contemporary racial issues, a fact made clear as I struggled to recruit these students into the study. Jenny, for example, a high performing student who took multiple advanced placement classes and played the French horn, took three weeks to return her permission slip. She described how when confronted with the question of race as it pertains to her life, she lacked the language to speak about it.

Jenny: Like [in class] when you're talking of something that might connect to race, we don't really talk about race as a topic really, ever. And I guess I mean even I myself am kind of like, it's confusing...it can be a very loaded topic but then it's sort of like, how do you – like you can't really talk about something unless you have knowledge about it or unless you're like – if you don't know the vocabulary surrounding something you can't really talk about it. And it's just sort of like this thing that's there and like it could sort of be approached in a conversation but there's sort of like this little screen thing that like separates it from actually ever being discussed because I mean how would you discuss it? Like I don't know that I can really, specifically, picture having a conversation directly centered on or about race. When you say "race," at least for me the first thing that pop into mind is sort of the black void thing.

Jenny prided herself on being competent and knowledgeable, but for her there was a screen, something that made race an untouchable or unapproachable subject that she

simply could not imagine discussing. As we have already seen, at Belltown, the faculty set the discursive standards around how race should be approached and talked about: colorblindness amounted to speaking or teaching about race without speaking about race at Belltown. Coming from a family that avoided the topic of race, having virtually no contact with QRED students and existing within a colorblind institution left Jenny uneasy knowing that I was planning to ask her questions about race as it pertained to her—on this issue, a student with an uncommonly bright mind was left with nothing but a void.

Although Jenny felt ill at ease to talk about herself in racial terms, she could fluently describe the discursive limits of formal discussions of race at Belltown high.

Jenny: But when it does tend to come it tends to be like about a very specific topic like in talking about you know, the Civil Rights Movement and stuff like that, that's just like a big one and it's like that we're talking about the Civil Rights movement now and it's like you don't...[think] so much about race and sort of race as a concept and how it applies to you, it's more like: okay, this is the thing that happened and like review again the historical context of like slavery and like you know, how okay, it was good they had more rights like that sort of stuff. Um, and it doesn't get connected so much to sort of, current life.

Predictably, her perception was that discussions of race were historically and geographically bound. She describes a curriculum that places issues of race in the past and does not make students contemplate how race “applies to you.” When I asked student respondents about what they had learned in class about race and how often it came up, most reported similar experiences. Although some students related an isolated discussion here or there, for most, race boiled down to a single narrative that placed the issue in the past and relegated it to one geographic location. The data presented below strongly suggests that students at Belltown were not just passive recipients of the curriculum on race but actively employed the frameworks conveyed through the curriculum in constructing their understandings of race today.

As part of every interview I asked students if they thought that racism was still a problem and if so, where. Their responses closely followed the historical and spatial boundaries reinforced in the curriculum. For LSI students, their experiences and interactions did not call the narrative presented in the curriculum into question. For example, Lisa believed that racism was genealogical. It started in the south and persisted as descendants of southerners passed on racist beliefs to each successive generation. Despite admitting to having never been to the south, her understanding of history finds her extrapolating about contemporary racial dynamics. Concluding that racism is a southern phenomenon she deduces that there must be few blacks in the south. Despite living in a predominantly white community nested in a metropolitan region deeply divided by race, her supposition about the south is utilized to construct a vision of racially tolerant and diverse north. For Lisa, racism is so firmly rooted in the south that she believes that racists living outside the region must be able to trace their lineage directly to it.

Lisa: When we learned about like slavery, and all these things...like there's like slavery so it's like family like, thoughts and traditions and feelings get passed down and then passed down and passed down. That like, I don't think they're very like, ah, like we're very like, we have black people everywhere; you know what I mean? So it's like we're like you're used to seeing them and I feel like, I would feel that like, in the South that they're not like everywhere necessarily. I don't know; I've never really been [or] lived in the South, but like in my mind there's a lot of white like, um, not all people but I feel like maybe some people are like still racist today. I know that there are people that are still racist today and I would typically think that either their family, their like, either grandparents or parents are from the South or they're from the South.

Searching for solid evidence (and eliding almost a century), Lisa then evoked the freedom rides of the early 1960s to solidify her claim that racism was a southern

phenomenon. She concludes with a clear regional dichotomy that draws on her understanding of history to neatly divide who is a racist and who is not.

Lisa: Um, because the ideas of like slavery and racism because you know how like the thing with like the bus. Like the freedom bus or whatever got like really bad with like when they came out in Alabama or something. And like, all the stories that we heard about like in US History– all the stories that I’ve heard, the most aggressive racist like, huge events that have happened are...in the South. And like, I – learning about like the Civil War like the not racist people were in the North and like, we’re not racist up [here], like you know what I mean? The people that wanted no slavery in the top and people that wanted slavery on the bottom. Like that’s what I remember.

Amanda also viewed the south as the epitome of racism. Revealing the often unspoken other side of the regional binary, she refigures my question noting that an alternative answer could be that racists simply do not exist at Belltown.

Amanda: I guess probably the South...I mean we learned about this. I mean when we learned about the Civil War and talking about that kind of thing, and we learned about you know, race in that context...When you think about I guess the political spectrum um, and when you think like, white supremacy you think the South. If you ask that question I feel like the other answer that some could give would be not here, because just on if it’s based on what we see every day. I mean I guess, I don’t really see a lot of racism day-to-day and when I do, it’s kind of the really subtle, not implied kind. There are no like, racial slurs really.

Both Amanda and Lisa drew on the curriculum to make sense of the meaning of race and racism today. Given this framework, and their level of social interaction, it was not surprising they concluded that race was not really an issue in Belltown. Although Amanda makes reference to the subtle racism that she sees, what she has in mind, she would later tell me, is the “reverse racism” that forces non- racist whites to be politically correct. As a LSI student, Amanda was largely unaware of the ways in which race mattered at Belltown. This in conjunction with the curriculum led her to conclude that any demands for racial sensitivity were deemed unnecessary or potentially regressive. Furthermore, her answer not only externalizes racism to the south, it also describes a

particular vision of what racism is. Having focused exclusively on events and incidents that feature overt racism, Amanda's definition of racism against people of color centers on "racial slurs."

When I asked LSI white students what racism is, how they would know it if they saw it, their definitions tended to focus on overt racism (e.g. name calling, bullying, *de jure* segregation) or even simply seeing race. With images from Selma and Birmingham held up as examples of racism *par excellence* the persistence of race and its contemporary manifestations were overlooked. When I asked Max for an example of racism, he argued that reverse racism was the most pernicious kind, something perpetrated by students of color who by "looking down on" and "staying away from" whites were adopting the color consciousness that had previously marked some whites' attitudes.

Max: Like a lot of them are just trying not to interact with white students and stay away from them and look down upon them...It reminds me of what whites did in the 20th century when they looked down upon blacks and sort of shunned them to the side.

Noel argued that race might still matter in the larger Belltown community, but not as an active fact but a holdover from the past. When pressed he firmly stated that Belltown may be predominantly white due to past racism but that the residents were not active racists, something he defined as "acknowledging a difference that is intrinsically untrue, and making false separations." Similarly, Elliot argued that race did not matter at Belltown because he felt like it was hardly ever talked about, "I would say there is less and less racism. Because people talk about it less; these ideas are floating around less and um it just, it leads to less racist thought." With only overt racism as the litmus test, Rodney was able to both recognize the racial separation built into the Belltown community and, through a free market, class based explanation, make this a non-racial

phenomenon. With Bull Connor as the reference point, Belltown whites were framed as tolerant and willing to accept anyone who was able to afford a house in the community.

Rodney: I couldn't say that Belltown is racist; I would say that we just seem to have such a high concentration of white people. But I don't think that it's like, it's not, I mean the reason for that is just 'cause there's not as many African-Americans with a lot of money in our state and it's less common for them to be able to afford a house in Belltown, um...

Like Jenny most respondents were at a loss to describe race in contemporary times, instead falling back on a curriculum that provided them with a limited formal language with which to talk about race in contemporary or local terms. By concentrating on stories about slavery and the southern civil rights movement, students envisioned racism as regionally specific—overt acts that grew from the undeveloped south and flowed through undeveloped people. With this as the benchmark, the full extent of what racism could be, these students were able to construct a vision of themselves and their communities as racially innocent and colorblind by comparison with the southern white other.

Resisting the Particular

When I asked LSI white students about their racial identity, about what it meant to be white, they often stumbled. When I asked them what their race was at the beginning of the interview they all answered with some variant of white (Caucasian, Anglo-American), but when I asked them what it meant to be white—if there was a white culture or any unifying feature to whiteness—they were largely unable to elaborate. One factor that prevented them from seeing themselves in racial terms was described above: self-conscious whiteness was a quality assigned to “rednecks;” the white racial other. This section expands on this interpretation to consider how consonance between white

students' race and the dominant forms of cultural capital in the educational field in which they existed, left them with virtually no ability to describe the contents of their racial identity. As Horace Miner (1959) has pointed out in his classic critique of mid 20th century anthropology, members of dominant groups struggle to comprehend their own culture. Indeed his description of the exotic, narcissistic and barbaric “Nacerima” (American spelled backwards) was intended to simultaneously prove this fact while also shocking his colleagues into being self-reflexive. When asked about black culture, LSI white students drew on media images along with their casual and removed observations of QRED students to list styles, music, behaviors, linguistic usages that were specific to blacks, however when asked about whiteness they were at a loss to be as specific. In other words, a lack of in-depth interaction had simultaneously failed to engender racial self-reflexivity while presenting an exotic racial other to whom culture could be ascribed. Instead of embracing or describing whiteness, these students resist the limits that the label implied.

Pamela Perry (2007), in her research on white high school students, noted that white students tended to reject any notion of white as coherent or particular identity. As she argues, for whites, it is racial others who have “*particular* characteristics, which they, as whites, could not claim for themselves...‘they’ —people with ethnicity—had identity, community, traditions, rituals, ancestry, and culture...” (382). In her research Perry was able to isolate a particular discourse in which whites describe whiteness as “collectively more ‘general,’ ‘diverse’ ‘heterogeneous,’ and eclectic” (383). The LSI whites at Belltown that I talked with overwhelmingly embraced a discourse that rejected white as a particular or cohesive identity. Elliot, for example, a soft spoken student who talked

through a crooked smile, observed that white culture “varies a lot,” too much, he contended, to pin down. Feeling like he had to give me something more concrete he finally, and half-heartedly, concluded that “white culture is bumper stickers—white people are the only people who put stickers on their cars.” Ashlee was in agreement with Elliot noting that despite the existence of a “stereotypical white culture where you can’t dance, your dad has a moustache, you wear a gown, and you live in the suburbs” in reality, white culture defied meaningful explanation. Whites are post-cultural, or as she says, becoming more independent and severed from the past.

Ashlee: There are whites everywhere, okay? There are rednecks that live in the south and there are the people out in California who worship comets. Those two white people don’t share the same culture; the only thing that’s the same about them is that they are the color white...I think we are moving to a more independent culture, you know, we are ever moving far, far away, we are trying to separate ourselves from our family and our past...So that’s just a very casual illustration of the fact that you know, we’re trying to figure who we are and we don’t really care that much about whether we’re Irish or German.

Grace pointed out that although whiteness was all around her, it was “a lot more diverse” and had no unifying characteristics. When I asked her if there is anything that white people share, like Ashlee, she weakly replied “their skin color?” In similar fashion, Hans said, “I don’t really think there is really a white culture. It’s like kind of the umbrella if you don’t have a culture, you’re white.”

Max, who used music as a proxy for culture, perfectly captures the ease with which racial others were rendered particular and the simultaneous inability to do the same for whites.

Max: I don’t know, I see white students, the same white student can listen to classical music on one day and rap on the other day, and hip-hop on another day, and rock and roll on another day. I don’t really feel like there is...I feel that it’s more mobile too because I can picture a white student getting a hip-hop CD, but I can’t picture one of the African-American students picking up an opera CD.

For Max, whites can cross boundaries and at the same time are not defined by them, a luxury not afforded to black students whose culture, and, given the way opera is freighted with class meaning, their socioeconomic status, limited their range of acceptable options, in this case precluding them from enjoying opera. Not only did Max describe a vision of whites as culturally unrestricted, he noted that there were social designations for whites who attached too closely to culture—who made themselves particular—especially if it was black culture. In passing, he had referred to “wiggers.”⁶¹ When I pushed him on this term he said the following.

Max: It’s white students to try to behave and follow the like, social standards of the unruly African-American students.

Chris: Describe the characteristics of one of these “wiggers.”

Max: So, one of those people would be somebody who tries to act like a stereotypical African-American. I’m not saying all African-Americans are like this, but um, like baggy clothes, rap music, you know, drugs, alcohol, sex, clothing with profane words written all over it.

Chris: Care about school?

Max: Not really.

Mae’s view was similar. White students were allowed to partake in black culture as long as they did not go too far. Those who did risked being labeled and reminded that they are “just white,” an identity, that when properly enacted, should be immune to cultural classification. Describing white kids who try to rap she described how white onlookers would police the boundaries of whiteness—in this case to keep them undefined.

⁶¹ Although Max did not name specific students, he was probably referring to HSI students some of whom reported selectively and contextually adopting and enacting the cultural attributes of African American students (speech, dress etc.). For example, Michelle, a white student who was close friends with multiple QRED students, noted that when she on occasion used black English she had received looks and had been admonished by other whites that she was, “acting like them.” When I asked her what that meant she replied, “sometimes I talk like they talk, I was just picking it up or something, and they will say like, “Hey you’re talking black!” Max was the only respondent who employed the term “wigger” in an interview to describe students like Michelle and I did not hear the term used around school outside of this interview. Regardless of the frequency with which this particular term was used, multiple LSI respondents did indicate that they deemed cultural migrations like the one that Michelle described to be inappropriate for a white person.

Mae: If you're rapping someone might say, "Oh you're so white trying to be ghetto." Like there's stuff like that.

Chris: What does it mean to be ghetto?

Mae: To be like a gangster rapper, to like dress the part and like, be rapping the part.

Chris: What does it mean to dress the part, what does that look like?

Mae: Ahh, your pants are like (giggles) half-way down your legs, umm and you like big baggy clothes and I guess a hood and like a train. But I feel like um, yeah. So with jokes it's funny when white kids are like rapping and you're like, "wow, you know, you're just white," that's the joke.

The cultural consonance between white students and the dominant culture at Belltown prevented them from being able to comprehend the styles, language, expectations, dress and comportment that constituted white culture. In other words, there was "quazi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization" that rendered white culture as doxa—the way the field was structured was the "self-evident and undisputed" way that things should be (Bourdieu 1972:164).

With little friction between their embodied culture and the dominant cultural capital at school, whiteness appeared unremarkable and white students were free to imagine it as an expansive and universal identity, unencumbered by expectations, socialization, or cultural limits. This erasure of whiteness as a meaningful identity also served to make it almost impossible for them to comprehend how Belltown was structured racially and how being white afforded them unearned privilege. For example, if whiteness is conceived to be indefinable or too diverse to characterize then it would be difficult to comprehend how labels like "good kid" flowed predominantly from fluency and comfort within white culture, something that as we have already seen was not hard for students of color to comprehend and describe.

Perceptions of White Privilege

When I asked students to be more specific about how race mattered by considering if being white at Belltown was an advantage, their answers were fairly consistent: only a few LSI students conceded that being white might be an advantage at Belltown but they were unable to meaningfully elaborate how. Alison, for example, imagined that perhaps if she attended a school in which she was a minority she might, “feel kind of scared, unhappy and maybe I wouldn’t be paying as much attention or doing as well.” She hesitated to carry this thought through, finally concluding that she did not know if being white was an advantage and perhaps QRED students’ struggles were a result of the fact that they are, “just students that don’t care and they just happened to get sent here.” Elliot was also among the few white students who were willing to consider, even if just abstractly, that being white was an advantage.

Elliot: I think it’s still a slight advantage, and the reason for that is I think people’s even subconscious thoughts—I don’t know, this might be just um... this is just a guess – but I feel in a teacher’s mind, somewhere subconsciously, when they see a QRED student come into a room they’re thinking, “Oh what if I need to help that student more?” And I think that might be because of past QRED students or...and I think it’s less so because of their racial stereotypes, but just because of their past sample size.

Despite his admission that whiteness might matter based on teacher perceptions, Elliot minimizes the impact of racial stereotypes explaining teachers’ perceptions of QRED students as rooted in past experience, times when race mattered.

Overall, LSI white students tended to see being white at Belltown as neither an advantage nor disadvantage, as the following representative exchanges with Jim, Tessa, Lisa and Jenny demonstrate.

Chris: Do you think being white is an advantage? Disadvantage?

Jim: I’d say it’s not either.

Chris: Do you think that cruising through as a white person is an advantage or a disadvantage?

Tessa: Not really either, to be honest.

Chris: When you imagine being white here at Belltown uh, in your daily life, is it helping you; hurting you? What do you think?

Jenny: Um, I guess I don't think of it as helping me because I'm white...

Lisa: I don't think it's necessarily an advantage or disadvantage, because the teachers aren't racist or that I think like they don't make a big deal about race if they are. Um, the kids – I don't think they're racist just because we're so used to having QRED students everywhere that it's not like: "Why are you here?" like, "Get out of my school," type of thing...

For these students, the invisibility of whiteness had left them with no way to talk about the racial structure of the school and how it conferred unearned privilege. Both Patrick and Max give voice to a similar perspective. They too agreed that being white was not an advantage, instead suggesting that QRED students enjoyed special privileges.

Patrick: I think pretty much [teachers] do a pretty good job teaching them equally...I think, a fear that teachers have and that if you really are hard on QRED kids you might be accused of being racist...And then you might be accused of just doing this because they're black; to them, which I think puts teachers in a very tough situation. I think equal disrespect deserves equal punishment and maybe if you give harsher disrespect, you deserve harsher punishment. I just think um, being accused of being racist is a big part in society, not only with teachers but with a lot of professions.

Max: I think being white at Belltown doesn't really make too much of a difference, I think in some cases African-American students are treated a little better than white students in some classes.

Chris: Tell me about that kind of thing. Give me a specific example.

Max: I think a lot of the teachers here went to school in the '60s and '70s, back when affirmative action was a necessary, back when there was something that we had to do to pull these people up. And I think they still go by a lot of those values, and often when they see an African-American student they put them in front of the room and...they are sometimes more lenient to them in terms of like homework and tests and like give them a couple of extra points...but I mean it's not something that's a major, that happens very often; it happens but it's not something that happens all the time.

For Patrick, teachers were hesitant to discipline black students as they might white students for fear of being labeled “racist,” a problem that he notes is not just specific to teachers who are white. Max flatly denies that being white matters, suggesting instead that teachers clinging to the past actually give QRED students special privileges not enjoyed by white students.

Ashlee believed that being white was not an advantage and that being a minority could help a student stand out. For her this was not just useful at school but could serve to make a person of color a more attractive candidate for a job.

Ashlee: I think that being white isn’t really helpful, as I said before. Being minority is a chip on your shoulder. It’s something that makes you different, and when you get hired you want to be different because you [need to] set yourself apart.

Amanda, admitting that perhaps she does not know, felt as though being white was not an advantage. She reported feeling as though being white hindered her by limiting her ability to express her full range of opinions due to restrictive politically correct requirements.

Chris: When you think about being white at Belltown, do you have the sense that it matters, that it’s an advantage or disadvantage?

Amanda: Um, I think for the most part, it’s a non-issue, but that again, I don’t know how much I’m missing, you know what I mean? Um, I think sometimes it’s a little bit uncomfortable because there’s kind of a little bit of a double standard when you think about, I mean because of you know, because of history, white people have to be more careful in what they say than what other races can say. You know what I mean? In terms of racial things because it’s kind of a sensitive issue, so there is some of that; there is some restrictiveness and there is some holding back. I feel like a lot...and people are so um, trying to be politically correct and so afraid to say anything wrong. I feel like that’s one of the biggest things.

Chris: Do you ever feel also like I can’t say exactly what I’m thinking here?

Amanda: Yeah. I do feel that, to some extent.

Hans noted that being white might result in “handouts,” but, in his view, these were inconsequential when compared to the special services and experiences that he perceives QRED students receive.

Hans: Growing up here in Belltown...going through this school system, I think you don't get as many...I mean you get handouts by the nature of being white but I think that you also have to advocate for yourself. And like no one else is going to do that for you. I think you to a large extent, have to be self-motivated. You have to like want to be intellectual; whereas if you're a QRED kid, you have these programs...like you have resources available. And I think that's a very different experience than like being just sort of part of the school system. And I think you can very easily get lost as a white kid...and there are a lot of kids that do.

Hans continued his explanation by noting that there were the motivated white students who took it upon themselves to succeed. On the other hand there were the white kids that he characterized as “the losers,” the white kids who get lost. The QRED program, he said, was in the middle. “Because they have the resources it's...sort of like a safety net preventing them from like completely going out of school.” For Hans, white students' success depended on their individual level of initiative with some rising to the occasion and others failing to do so. In his view, whites were not afforded the same privileges as QRED students. The modest accommodations that they received appeared to him to be special privileges denied to the white students whose success or failure rest almost entirely on their individual striving.

The only place where students consistently concede that living in Belltown was an advantage was in their perception of what it was like to have to travel to school from a town perceived to be far away. As Grace said, “they got to get up at five in the morning [laughs], and they don't get home until seven...they're on the bus and probably don't get as much sleep as us.” Although QRED students' experiences on the busses varied dramatically, with some riding for over an hour to get to school and others having

relatively shorter rides, almost all LSI white students pointed to the bus ride as the most salient feature that divided QRED from resident students. These white students theorized that rising early and getting home late clearly put QRED students at a disadvantage that resident students did not experience. Strangely, throughout all the focus group, interview and observational data that I compiled only one QRED student suggested that the bus ride was problematic and even then it was raised as a minor annoyance, not the primary site of their struggle. The vast majority of comments centered on the difficulty that confronted them as they tried to navigate existence in a predominantly white school. Also, white students' concession that distance was a factor squared neatly with their commitment to colorblindness, after all, pointing out that these students live far from school is to employ a geographical explanation not a racial one.

Part Two: Making Sense of Racial Difference

This section will focus on how white students with low levels of social interaction take the information available to them at Belltown High to draw conclusions about the racial hierarchy. Faced with clear differences in culture and academic outcomes that break along racial lines, these white students tend to construct narratives that reinforce notions of inferiority and superiority. Because QRED students cultural enactments tend to provide sharp contrast with prevailing cultural capital within the field, LSI white students tend to link these students to culture in a way that both disqualifies them from academic esteem while also serving to construct whiteness as post cultural and rational in contrast. Given that these students experienced the field as racially neutral and meritocratic, and their relative lack of contact with QRED students, these white students

drew problematic assumptions about QRED students' home cultures and the communities in order to make sense of academic differences. Finally, given that these students did not see themselves as racial actors and did not perceive that race mattered at Belltown High, they forcefully rejected ameliorative programs that seek to address racially disparate outcomes.

The Meaning of Difference

Even though whiteness was an invisible identity, LSI students still had a strong sense of what constituted acceptable behavior within the field. For these students, standards of dress, speech, behavior and comportment were fairly rigid and those students who did not conform were perceived to be violating what white students experienced as universal, common sense standards of good conduct that derived from the essence of the institution itself. By defining what was not acceptable, white students betrayed a strong understanding of the cultural rules; however, instead of making whiteness overt and forcing them to reflect on how the institution valorized their culture, the cultural incompatibility between what white students regarded as normal or expected conduct not specific to any group, and the enactments of students color, served to reinforce notions of racial difference. In other words, white students' interpretations of QRED students' behaviors led them not to reflect on the advantage that accrued to them as whites, but instead served to render exotic those who could not meet institutional expectations.

One of the most common characteristics of difference that white students noted was how QRED students dressed and what this meant. Max for example claimed that QRED students, "behave in a way, not decent for high school." When asked to elaborate

he said, “you know; pants that hang off below like the middle of the *gluteous maximus* area. I just don’t think that’s appropriate for school. School should be you know, an organization where everybody carries himself with class and confidence.” As Max implies, failure to meet cultural standards did not only make you different, it said something about you as a student, a sentiment echoed by Lisa who noted that QRED kids dress “ghetto and scrubby” adding that, “I think that like the way that you dress tells a lot about a person, I guess. So if you dress really scrubby it’s like: ‘oh, you don’t care.’” Mae also noted how QRED students dress set them apart, contrasting what they wore to the fashions and brands that she deemed normal at Belltown. By linking acceptable dress to expensive brands, her comments also suggest a class component to what passed as appropriate in the field.

Mae: QRED girls wear really bright colors, just something I’ve noticed. Really bright colors and umm... I feel like color um, is connected to quality, and I’m not saying they have bad quality clothes or anything, I feel like, that’s just it. ‘Cause I feel like you don’t see really bright colors in J. Crew or The Gap and stuff...

Ashlee, speaking a mile-a-minute and taking deep gulps of air, disjointedly linked her description of how QRED students violated the unspoken dress code to her observation that they tended to be in lower-level classes.

Ashlee: The baggy pants, that’s just honestly something that I don’t like. Oh, and then boys do this: okay, the jeans at the knees and then their basketball shorts, and then the boxers. Aww! “Are you cold? Pull up your pants.” From what I see, mostly honor classes are white, CP classes are more QRED-ey, because kids I know who are in CP classes know QRED kids that I’ve never seen and I don’t take that many honors classes, but if I’m not in an honors class I’m at the level right below it and I just don’t see many black kids there, I guess, if you’re QRED-ey. And I think, a lot of them, they just dress differently.

To further her point, she related a story about walking down a school hallway talking to a biracial friend from Belltown (white and black, but identified white) about QRED

students. Although she does not remember the content of the conversation, QRED students' behavior and dress seemed to confirm the core point that QRED students did not fit and failed to conform to the cultural rules.

Ashlee: I forget what we had just said, but were walking along, and she was saying something about black kids and whatever, and then a big group of QRED kids comes running down the hall disrupting everyone, very loud, all wearing the stereotypical clothes, like the girls really tight with like a lot of bedazzled stuff, guys with like the jerseys and the hats, and the fly kicks, and the just running around, disturbing everyone, and then she looks back, she looks at the ground, she goes “stereotypes come from somewhere.”

In summary, Ashlee said, “I don't really avoid them, but being really loud, and wearing tacky clothes is annoying.” Ashlee, like all LSI respondents, develops her views not in complete isolation from QRED students but in the context of a social relationship that allows her to observe from afar. In the anecdote above, Ashlee is talking to a friend about QRED students who then, almost on cue, intrude like moving objects through Ashlee's field of vision. She does not address them or talk with them, nor does she seem to apprehend them as individuals. Instead they are a collective that disturbs the scene through inappropriate dress and comportment. As Ashlee's comments make clear, this particular kind of sharing space, in which QRED students are representations, leads to conclusions that confirm racialized notions of difference.

As Ashlee mentions, QRED students' propensity to be louder than white students – or, more accurately, to be *perceived* as being louder – also figured prominently in white students' descriptions and observations. Far from being neutral, white students tended to view this propensity as a disqualifying feature, something that defined them as irrational—less serious students who did not care about school as Lisa articulates. “I would just think that like, that like, so like I would think of, like, not as serious like you

don't expect them a lot to, like be not loud. Like *be quiet!* You are not being serious; you are not being professional." Rodney noted that loudness was noted by white students and served to reinforce notions of racial difference.

Rodney: I feel like in some sense it's like, I mean like a lot of the kids can be kind of like you know like "hood" or whatever, I mean it can kind of like exacerbates stereotypes in some people's minds. I don't know it's kind of tricky to say – but I feel sometimes [QRED students], they'll be really like loud and people like kind of laugh 'cause they think it's funny or whatever, but in the back of their mind just they're thinking like, "Oh, it's just black kids, whatever."

An accomplished athlete with long, straight, red hair, Tessa shared her observations of the QRED section of the cafeteria and related how white students had come to expect "loud" and "obnoxious" behavior from QRED students.

Tessa: I notice in the cafeteria, like that back corner's just where like all the QRED students sit and then it's just all white and then it's like one little corner and there's like a lot of like, issues sometimes like, girls, like a lot of, like you go by and they're these like, fighting and like screaming. You just, you see that. And people do make comments about that.

Chris: What did people say about that?

Tessa: I do hear like people being like when you hear like someone obnoxious and loud in the hallway, you turn around and it's, for goodness sake, a black girl... That you hear that around.

LSI white students also focused on how QRED students talked, something many students, including Mae and Elliot, acknowledged led to joking and ridicule among white students.

Chris: What do they say? What kinds of jokes?

Mae: Umm... Oh, boy. Umm... I feel like the jokes are about the way they talk, I remember seeing that on facebook, some of them was like, I think someone made of fun of the way someone was speaking in slang or something. I think they said, "ain't that," and like, it was improper grammar (giggles). Umm, and it's just not speaking clearly I think, it was, and then umm... I feel like jokes about appearance are also made.

Elliot: With 'black English' I think, I don't know ah ... black English is what I also think of as Southern English, um and yeah I see that mainly in jokes where people are trying to talk in different accents or um, if they're trying to talk like an

African-American person of—or would impersonate an African-American actor. Yeah, it happens from time to time, but it hasn't been particularly hurtful to anyone...

The linguistic difference that white students observed was clearly not beheld to be neutral. Elliot claimed that the jokes that resulted were not “hurtful” but whether that is true or not, white students tended to perceive QRED student speech as not just different but outside the bounds of acceptable usage. As both Hans and Mandy say below, the way QRED students speak is seen as less refined, not as academically acceptable. As Mandy states, her encounters with what she calls QRED “slang” led her to conclude that their language was “not pretty” and lacked her extensive vocabulary.

Hans: I think they speak differently.

Chris: How so?

Hans: I think, I mean it's hard to describe but it's sort of like the, like the city sort of not perfect grammatical English. With some, I can...there are people...I mean not everybody obviously, but like um, I think some of that sort of gets prevalent and I think because some people speak that it ends up being what you're supposed to do as a QRED kid um...

Mandy: They were really, really loud and they were using slang I had never heard before. Okay, and there's this one girl who's in my math class and she's been in all my classes and she's a nice person but she says “hate-ch.” It just bugged me so much.

Chris: What does “hate-ch” mean?

Mandy: “H.” She says “hate-ch” instead of “h”. I just, I was just kind of like, “what?” They just use a lot of slang and they, I guess that lack of vocabulary I guess a lot of kids do that, maybe I have big vocabulary, I don't know, I just didn't hear a lot of words that were “pretty” in my opinion.

With virtually no understanding of how the school was structured racially, many of the LSI white students that I spoke with were disturbed and distressed by what they characterized as QRED students propensity to “self-segregate.” As Noel observes, separation was a fact of life at Belltown that played out most obviously in the cafeteria. “You go into the caf – and it's been this way for decades I'm pretty sure – that there is a

table of QRED students, and there is some diffusion but it's pretty concrete like *that table*." Some students did explain the racial divide as a product of both races levels of comfort with each other; however, despite pointing to cultural differences, none of the students seemed to acknowledge how QRED students might feel like cultural outsiders in a predominantly white institution. For some of these white students, QRED students' propensity to stick together was not a reaction to an existing racial situation but something that made race salient in what was otherwise a non-racial space. These same students did not understand white students' proclivity to sit together in the cafeteria and travel the halls together as a racial decision. Not seeing themselves as racial actors, as tethered to a meaningful racial identity, and being part of the dominant culture, they saw it as incumbent on QRED students to join the mainstream, something that to them appeared non-racial, normal and therefore equally accessible.

Max: A lot of the students from Belltown try to integrate with the QRED students, but the QRED students, sort of stay in their own cliques, in their own groups. Because they are talking during lunch, there are two tables that there are only African-American students, and it's usually just they don't integrate too much.

As Max implies, QRED students' decision to stay separate is just a choice that they make. Hans believed that to integrate QRED students, the modest accommodations available at Belltown to support them and make them more comfortable would need to be eliminated. Unable to see how these accommodations were necessary in a culturally white space, he saw them as race-making factors.

Hans: I personally believe that [QRED is] like a great program and it's great in its intentions but that it ends up self-segregating itself. They have these long bus rides together so they become friends, they have like they have their own tutorial and I think it's just like the uh, where they can do work. And they have like the QRED office and I think all these programs are great in like it's good to help them

out but it also makes them a very close-knit community sort of segregated from the rest of the Belltown community.

LSI white students were sensitive to the cultural differences that they perceived between themselves and QRED students, but far from being neutral, how QRED students talked, dressed and behaved set them apart not just as different, but also as less academically equipped and positioned for success. With little understanding of how the institution was structured racially these students also deemed QRED students propensity to stick together as generative of race, not a reaction to it.

Whiteness and Rationality:

LSI white students' inability to see white culture not only served to make them blind to the advantages that accrued to them, but it also served to construct a vision of white as rational, objective and controlled when compared to what appeared to them to be a culturally-bound racial other. LSI white students' often imagined QRED students to be tied to their culture and their past, a vision that that cut two ways. In one way, QRED students were seen as unrestrained, authentic, and physically and artistically gifted—qualities that were not seen as individual accomplishments but that flowed from their membership in a group with culture. In another way, and especially in a classroom context, the same cultural characteristics—especially their supposed lack of physical control—were used to question their intellect. Both constructions served to produce rational whiteness in binary opposition. Whether their culture was seen as a benefit or a disqualifying feature, African Americans were defined as controlled by the past, something that individualistic and objective white students had escaped. As Tory, a QRED student incisively observed, “whites think of blacks as people who know what’s

going on with the next new dance or social thing—that’s what they look to me for. They see themselves as people who know presidents and economics.”

Walking through the cafeteria one day I came upon a table of students who I had previously had in class. Not having talked with them in a while I sat down. Within a few moments the topic turned to race, Elmer, a biracial (black and white) student noted that his white mother code switched when she was with his father’s family. He laughed as he related how she made this switch, lapsing from a stiff, nasally sounding voice that was supposed to represent a white person to a more melodic, dynamic sounding voice that was supposed to represent a black person, eventually adding that it was good for his mother who he believed had a propensity to, “start to act too white.” I asked him what he meant by this: what does it mean to be too white? “Formulas!” he replied. White people are the types of people who walk around “reciting scientific formulas and simply can’t be ghetto.” When I asked him what it meant to be ghetto, Rose, one of his white classmates, and an accomplished dancer, stood up from her chair and started swaying and dancing, moving her hips, hands and head in a slow serpentine motion. “This” she announced to the delight and laughter of her friends “is ghetto.”

The LSI white students that I talked with seemed to agree with Rose. Mae, for example, perceived blacks to be more physically than intellectually gifted. “I think I know something that black students really excel in is athletics because for athletics you know it’s you’re physical capability not intellectual, it’s your physical strength and endurance and capabilities.” Alison noted that it was foolish to “pretend there are not differences” between whites and blacks. “African Americans” she reasoned, “have better rhythm.” Later in the interview, she contrasted African culture with Asian culture stating

that, “Africans aren’t like primitive or anything. It’s just, they’re not known for like their amazing medicine or whatever, you know? They’re kinda still in the tribal states; not everywhere but somewhere.” She then drew a line that linked “tribal Africans” to slaves to contemporary African Americans. Rodney also imagined blacks to be members of an exotic culture, something that contrasted sharply with whites, who he imagined in formal clothing suitable for professional pursuits.

Chris: Uh when you think about black culture, what do you think about?

Rodney: I mean that first thing that just pops in my mind just now is some people dressed in those colorful clothes, dancing with hand drums and stuff and all that.

Chris: White culture?

Rodney: White culture? I thought of a guy in a business suit.

Amanda, frustrated as she attempted to make her point, sees white as “wimpy,” something that is a liability when she is asked to sing in her choir, a task that requires more emotion, or as her choir director says, less whiteness.

Amanda: Um, the classic facts of white [is] when something is um, I guess wimpy or...you know what I mean, like ahhh, my choir director says that all the time. Um, if we’re singing something and we’re not powerful enough, it’s so white: too stiff, too controlled, too reserved.

Cody, a talented performance artist who had gained entrance to a prestigious school in a diverse neighborhood of a nearby city, imagined that neighborhood as culturally authentic but threatened by post-cultural whiteness, something rootless and imperial. Cody envisions whiteness to be a hollow, corporate entity whose presence strips away genuine heritage in favor of emulated or fake culture.

Cody: [The neighborhood] actually kept a lot of its cultural background even though people were afraid that African American culture would go away just ‘cause a lot of white people and hipsters have moved in.

Chris: What happens when whites move in?

Cody: There’s like, like it starts out like, it’s good. But then like Starbucks and Urban Outfitters are popping up and like parts of neighborhood are so like *fake*

now. But a lot of the original African American neighborhoods have kept their like, their heritage, and they're still like genuine.

Noel saw being white as a barrier that would prevent him from ever being able to really play jazz, a musical style that values spontaneity and improvisation. Even white drummers that he deemed to be exceptional as were missing an indefinable cultural quality, a deep rootedness stretching back to Africa that made blacks inherently better at playing jazz.

Noel: I was transcribing like Max Roach and Elvin Jones and Lewis Nash were these black drummers that I just idolized and I had deified them at this point. And I was like, "I can never be that good because I'm not black." And then I found some really good white drummers, really good white jazz drummers that were equally as good, but there was something so much more to the black drummers, it almost seems like it's in their roots, like it's in their blood to play jazz, because jazz it really does sort of come from Africa at the end of the day. And then I started getting all that better at jazz, and I was like, okay, and then I transcribed Lewis Nash and I transcribed an entire song that he played on, played like every note he played and then it got to the same level of confidence. And I was playing drums like I was black, that's what it seemed like.

Noel only felt black when he learned to play the same notes as Lewis Nash. For him, no matter how refined his improvisational skills became, to reach the pinnacle he had to become black, and the only way he could rise to that level was to transcribe and then literally play the same notes as the black musician he idolized. When it came to music, Noel was in awe of the benefit that culture bestowed, but in another realm, being cultural was an epistemological penalty. Later in the interview when expounding on what he described as QRED students' "loudness" he ruminated that perhaps it was just a product of their culture and home life, "a place where people heard you when you were loud rather than using reason."

Although their perceived connection to culture was constructed to be an asset in athletics and expressive arts, it was seen as an intellectual liability. Liam drew a contrast

between what he thought talking with a QRED student would be like with his experience talking with white students. Although he reported only really casually talking with one QRED student, he drew a clear line between long, thoughtful discussions that he could have with whites (“suburban kids”) and the radical and free flowing conversations that he perceived were characteristic of QRED students (“city kids”).

Liam: With the small time suburb kid, I can sit down and have like a, you know, long conversation. And with city kids...you know, when I say “city kids,” in this environment the city kids are the QRED kids. So it just seems like, you know, conversation isn’t going to stick on one topic, it’s just really radical. It’s not as intellectually based. It’s more just like free flowing, which I’m not as good at. You know, I can’t really do that as well as like think about something and then explain how I think about that.

Liam points out that he is not adept at conversations that require spontaneity and is better equipped to be thoughtful and methodical. Lisa, who had observed that students of color were tracked into lower level classes, linked race to notions of control and “acting out” remarking that she simply expects QRED students to lack the control that is supposed to be standard for white students. Imagining herself as a teacher, she relates a hypothetical scenario in which she contrasts the expectation for Toni, a QRED student, with the expectation of “control” for Freddy, a white student.

Lisa: If I were a teacher and like both a black and white kid were acting out, I would be more like – “oh, that’s just Toni.” Or like, or I would be like: ‘Freddy, why would you do that kind of thing?’ like, I’d be more like shocked that Freddy would act out more than like... because it’s like what I expect of Freddy is different than what I would expect from Toni...I would just think that like, that like, there’s like no reason why [he] should be acting out. You need to control yourself, like, I expect more from you...

In a way similar to Lisa, Max linked notions of control to classroom behaviors and expectations. Like many of his LSI peers, Max found support for his vision of cultural differences between QRED students and white students in the tracking system at school.

He contrasts the behaviors of resident students in his honors physics class, to the behaviors of QRED students he observes in his language class. Like all LSI students, Max's conclusions are drawn from afar. He was not close to QRED students. He did not sit near them in language class or interact with them. Instead, his observations of them, in conjunction with how the structure of the field appeared to him as common sense, leads him to position respectful, controlled and moral resident students, in stark contrast to "off the wall" QRED students whose are inculcated with a home culture that predisposes them to behave in irrational ways.

Max: I'm in Honors Physics. No QRED students in that class.

Chris: You walk in that door, what's that class like?

Max: Yeah. It's a class that everybody really has a moral code and they behave by it. The teacher usually walks in after the bell rings. So usually, just all sit down, get settled, take out our notebooks, homework; teacher rarely checks homework, but it's highly unusual for someone not to have done it. Generally there's no disruptions, no conversations, people take notes, listen to the teacher....People have self-respect and they respect the school, and they respect the teacher.

Chris: And language class?

Max: Like in language class, some of the QRED students, they're completely unruly and they're extremely distracting and loud, and they have their ipods in class with their headphones, and how could they possibly hear the teacher? And um, they're just completely off the wall...But I don't think it's their fault. I think it's the fault of the society that they were raised and the school they went to before Belltown and their parents' fault. Because it's not their fault; it's just the way they were raised....It really reminds me of 7th grade because all my other high school classes everybody behaves by a certain ethic code; everybody walks in, sits down, takes out their notebooks, takes note, sits quiet, no texting, no music, you know, none of that. And then this class, it seems that I'm dealing with a bunch of 7th graders....[who] don't seem to realize that it's school.

The meaning of the cultural incompatibility that these students perceived was not racially neutral. As demonstrated above, these white students had a clear sense of the cultural expectations of the school but did not see them as evidence of racially specific cultural capital. Instead, these students tended to see cultural expectations as flowing from the

essence school itself—as self-evident and universal school behaviors. Having noted the QRED students struggles to meet cultural expectations and perceiving them to be more cultural—something that was perceived to provide an edge in affective and athletic pursuits—these students defined themselves as post-cultural and rational by comparison.

There's Something Wrong at Home

As noted above, given the narrow construction of what counted as racism and who could be a racist, LSI white Belltown students tended to see racism as something endemic to whites others in southern locations. Although most of these students did not deny that racial inequality might still be an issue in general, they were unable to explain how and they tended to speak about it as having diminished importance. When the issue was made more immediate, they tended to express the belief that racism might exist in other locations, but in their community and in their school it was not an issue.⁶² This construction coexisted with the reality that race did matter at Belltown and was evident all around white students. Not only were these students sensitive to cultural differences, the racialized tracking system and the achievement gap created a physically evident correlation between race and lesser achievement in school. Not only were classes tracked

⁶² When I asked them if race still mattered in Belltown most reported that it did not. Grace, for example, said that the only thing keeping race alive was our insistence on “hanging on to it.” Similarly, Jim argued that race was not a meaningful category anymore adding that, “we need to focus on what brings us together.” When I asked him if the residents of Belltown had achieved colorblindness she nodded and said, “Yeah, for the most part.” Elliot and Hans agreed stating that we had, for the most part, reached a “post racial society.” Lisa pointed out that “the only separation is that they live in the city, we live in Belltown.” Max noted that if his immigrant parents could make it than anyone could, finally stating, “I think mobility is definitely possible for every group in America.” Amanda suggested that although race was of lesser importance there was still great sensitivity around the issue. Cody declared “I don’t think we should talk about race anymore.” For him discussions race should be shelved in favor of discussions of culture. He rejected the idea of being colorblind but extracting the power of race to structure social life arguing that instead that what should be celebrated are the cultural differences that manifest in things like food and music.

by race, but class level itself came to be a sort of racial shorthand with QRED students associated with lower level classes. The faculties' reluctance to talk openly about these racial difference, the narrowness of the curriculum and the fact of racial inequality created a situation that was generative of racism.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2000, 2003) has mapped colorblind discursive practices among white students, pointing out that in the post Civil Rights racial formation, racism proliferates albeit in a different and more covert form. He has found that their belief that equality was largely achieved during the Civil Rights era combines with the fact of persistent racial difference to yield a series of frameworks that both deny racism while placing blame for continuing inequality on people of color themselves and specifically pathological black culture.⁶³ With a plethora of damaging stereotypes perpetuated in the media and in popular culture,⁶⁴ these explanations have supplanted the belief in innate inferiority while achieving the same ends. In some ways the cultural explanation is more damaging: there is a element of voluntarism in culture that seems to suggest that black people have created the conditions that hold them back; at the same time most visions of black culture tend to be as deterministic as biological explanations as they center on the intractability, deep rootedness and self-perpetuating nature of culture (Murray 1984; Lewis 1965). Despite the existence of opportunity, the story goes, blacks are culturally ill equipped to seize it.

⁶³ As Joel Olsen (2002) points out, "whiteness in the colorblind state functions as a norm in which white privilege is sedimented into the background of social life as the 'natural outcome' of ordinary practices and individual choices, making it difficult to discern any systematic explanation for the advantages whites continue to enjoy after the civil rights movement" (390).

⁶⁴ Devine and Eliot's (1995) work on the prevalence of stereotypes among high school students suggests that cultural stereotypes about blacks are not fading. In their study students reported familiarity with a range of common cultural stereotypes, a finding that was robust regardless of the student's stated personal beliefs about race.

The possibility that equal rights might be generative of racism was predicted by Gunnar Myrdal years before the apex of the civil rights movement. Although he predicted the end of the “American Dilemma” he also cautioned that if the provision of rights were accompanied by persistent racial difference then more racism would result as whites would find confirmation that racial others really were intrinsically inferior (Leach 2002). Brezina and Winder’s (2003) work on status generalization has empirically demonstrated this process. These social psychologists found that when race neatly corresponded to an observable lack of resources, observers explained these differences through group-based generalizations about cultural deficiencies—a view that is often as rigid and deterministic as the belief in innate inferiority. As the authors conclude, “our results suggest that the perceived disadvantaged position of blacks helps to buttress the very stereotypes that are used to explain and justify racial inequality in the first place” (416).

At Belltown, tracking and cultural difference served to set QRED students apart. LSI whites were left to make sense of the differences coded into a milieu that they believed was racially neutral. As Brezina and Winder predicted, this was generative of racism and as Bonilla-Silva found this racism was expressed through visions of a deficient culture. At the end of our interview, Lisa, a thin senior with penetrating blue eyes, leaned back in her chair pondering her experience at Belltown. Going back to the issue of tracking, she shook her head while saying reflectively “There aren’t any QRED kids in our classes. Like, our leveled classes; like I’ve had this conversation before with people. Like, typically I don’t have QRED kids in my class.” When I asked her to elaborate she noted that she had only had a few classes with QRED students and was

aware that those classes were untracked. In her tracked classes, the absence of QRED was conspicuous. As she explains:

Lisa: I've never really had on like the...on the level classes, I never had QRED kids in my classes. Like in history, that's not a certain level you need to be in. That's why I had a few QRED students in those classes, and English, that's why they are my class...like, you know what I mean? But in Math, and in Science like Enriched Physics, you typically don't see QRED kids. In Honors Physics you typically don't see QRED kids; in AP Physics you typically don't see QRED kids. Occasionally, you do but usually you don't like in low level Chem, there's a lot of QRED kids; CP2 Chem, there was a lot but fewer than in like, low level Chem.

I then asked Lisa how she explained QRED students' placement in lower level tracked classes.

Lisa: There's just like I guess, just kind of like the expectation, what they're provided, like what like...as like, what their like told when they're led on like what is expected of them and like, what's provided of when they're little. Like, you know what I mean? Just like things that have like, affected them negatively at home.

Lisa reasoned that QRED students' home culture was resource poor and held these students to low expectations. Although this view manifested somewhat differently in different students' explanations, the core idea was essentially the same. Mae recalled actually having talked about this in one of her classes. When a student asked about tracking, the teacher related his own confusion about the phenomenon finally, as Mae remembered, offering the class the explanation that, "it's the parents or it's the culture they live in." In a class with no QRED students, Mae, her peers and her teacher enact a mode common among LSI students. Lacking the presence of QRED students—their voices, experiences and perspectives—Mae's class is free to develop whatever theories make sense to them. Of course, given that they were unable to see how the field was structured in race, the explanation that the class eventually settles on, via the teacher, is that tracking is simply an overt symptom of deeper race-based cultural inferiority.

Tessa, who reported that although she had in the past taken a few classes with QRED students, her current classes, mostly honors level, contained no QRED students. Her casual observations of QRED students' public behavior after school led them to believe that these students simply did not care about school. As Tessa explains:

Tessa: I do see [QRED students] like sometimes in the cafeteria, waiting for their late bus, but they're just running around like just sitting on the table; they're not doing any work. So I mean I feel like they're not taking their opportunity because I mean we are like giving them. Like, this is a great opportunity for them to come to a school like this...I know some of them don't get home 'til so late, but I mean I feel like if you really wanted to succeed and do well in your classes, you would find the time to do it...Like even if it's studying on the bus or like even waiting for the bus, you'd like find the time.

Making casual observations led Hans to conclude that there was pressure in the QRED community to not do well. Rejecting biological notions of difference, Hans pointed to the how he perceived QRED students were nurtured. Without prompting, and conceding that he is basing his views on observation, not first hand knowledge, he compared the significant impact of cultural nurturing to what he described as the relatively insignificant existence of institutional racism; something that he does not deny but thinks is overblown.

Hans: Just from being an observer, I think there's a very anti-intellectual vibe in the QRED community in that it's not necessarily cool to be smart....So I think that, definitely, you see them in a lot of the lower classes but that I don't think that's necessarily talking about their intelligence. I think it's partially the pressure not to do well in school...I think that we all start with the same stuff and it's just how that gets nurtured. There's a lot of outrage about how standardized tests are tailored to white kids more. And I guess that could be a problem but that's the sort of me that is like making mountains out of mole hills when the real problem sort of lies somewhere else.

Lisa, Mae, Tessa and Hans, were relatively vague about exactly what it was about black culture that led to racial difference. They referred to expectations, a lack of pro-school attitudes but did not elaborate. Other students, like Max, not only explained racial

difference on cultural terms, but they expounded at length about the content of that culture. Max started by simply saying, “It’s the way they’re raised and the community they’re raised in. The values of that community are different from the values of the community [in Belltown].” Without having to push, he then offered the following description of derelict parents and role models who encourage social pathology.

Max: The inner city environment, it’s more like a lot of the kids have single parents who work all day, and they don’t really have a positive role model in their life. Like here, almost every kid has a positive influence, somebody who, when they’re 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 years old, who tells them every day, “Did you do your homework”; and like checks their homework and makes sure they do what they’re supposed to. A lot of the students in [city] don’t have positive role models. They often envy like rappers, like P. Daddy, Puff Diddy; whatever, Sean Coles, I think his real name is. Like they often look up to those people and think like, “Wow that guys is so successful, I want to be just like him.” And then they follow everything that they do and oftentimes those are really bad role models because all those people do are drugs, alcohol, children out of wedlock, gun crimes, really stuff that you should be staying away from. And I think just the prevalence of those role models, and lack of positive role models in the community just teaches them, indoctrinates them from an early age that it’s not that important to do your homework.

As Max describes, the cultural conditions in the “inner-city” encourage anti-school behaviors. To punctuate his comments he placed QRED students in stark comparison to President Obama a man who, unlike the QRED students, had actually worked hard. “I think also with the way Barack Obama is marketed it’s like: he is just like you. Like they don’t really realize that no, he’s not just like them, he worked really, really hard for his entire life.”

Patrick described QRED students’ struggles as resulting from a cyclical condition of poverty and despair that eroded black peoples’ work ethic.

Patrick: I think maybe they don’t have as hard of a work ethic that I think could also just be part of poverty and frustration. If they’ve never had given the opportunities to work really hard at something and achieve something, what is

there to show you that if you work really hard, you can achieve; you can achieve. So they don't associate with taking advantage of resources with success.

Other LSI white students, despite having no direct knowledge of QRED students' home lives, offered this as part of their explanation of racial difference in academic achievement. Liam, for example, posited that, "maybe the home life is really different. It's just they value academics a little less. They're not all just stupid, you know. It just seems like they don't put as much into it maybe." Amanda noted that in communities outside of Belltown, "parents are less willing to do as much for the kids." For Noel and Rodney, the problems at home extended to what they perceived to be violent parental behavior. As Noel said, "there's more violence and stuff over there, there's more conflict within the household." Rodney, despite admitting that he was "not really sure" suggested that family life can be really hard." When I pushed him to expand he said, "I've heard about kids going home and getting beaten. I've seen some of them come in with bruises on their arms or whatever."

Cody picked up on a recent set of events to flesh out his description of QRED students' home environment. According to the rumors that circulated throughout the school—both among faculty and students—there had been a public fight between the mother of a QRED student and another woman in the city. I had heard the story told and retold, each time with a new outrageous twist. In one telling it was a physical fight between two women, in another telling the women did not fight each other directly but instead smashed each others' cars with baseball bats. Despite having no actual knowledge of what happened, for Cody, this heavily filtered and distorted story spoke to the essence of QRED students' home life and home culture. The versions that I heard pitted two mothers against each other in various antagonistic formations; Cody's vision

moved swiftly from a fight between two students to what sounded like an indiscriminate community free-for-all.

Chris: Do you have any idea what that was about?

Cody: Uh mm... I don't remember what it was about. I was told it was about something. I don't think it was a very big thing, but it was like mom against mom, dad against dad, kid against kid.

What is notable about Cody's brief version of the story is the dimension of the conflict that he describes. Instead of an altercation between two people he seems to be describing a riot in which men, women and children all indulge in violence. For Cody, the motivation or cause was an afterthought, forgotten or perhaps not believed to be necessary information in a story that was clearly designed to express the irrationality and danger that marked QRED students' home communities.

LSI students reported that they hardly ever visited the city and those that did described traversing only well-worn tourist sites or specific locations such as restaurants, stadiums or museums. Only two students, Amanda and Cody, reported having ever visited one of the four neighborhoods in the city that together comprised the dominant QRED sending communities. The combination of having virtually no firsthand experience in QRED students' home communities and embracing visions of pathological inner-city cultures served to construct racial geographies that set the suburbs apart from the dangerous and dilapidated urban core and its imagined residents.

When I asked LSI students about what they imagined QRED students' home communities to be like some felt uncomfortable. Tessa for example twirling her red hair around her finger, said quietly, "you know just a small neighborhood," following up her comment by saying, "I don't want to sound racist." Jim also seemed hesitant to reply commenting finally, "I'd say the population there is a lot more dense. Um probably

the...yeah, the residences there not as large or in some cases probably not as attractive looking.” Rodney described “rundown duplexes and stuff” located in “slightly sketchy areas of town” before he acknowledged that he really did not know. Starting again, and trying to imagine how Belltown might look to a QRED student he landed in essentially the same place. From their point of view he imagined that they would exclaim, “wow, this so much nicer than where I live, it’s so much safer.”

Alison reported that her friends were uncomfortable around black people, that “because they live in certain locations they will say they’re uncomfortable around Black people...[that they] don’t trust them or it’s like they’re afraid of them.” When I asked for more detail she described her friends’ thinking. Although she could understand her friend’s fear she felt as though this friend crossed a line when she divulged that she feared being raped.

Alison: I wasn’t OK with what this person said, but she was alone and there was this really big, tall black guy and she was like: “I was afraid that he was going to rape me.” Which I think is...I didn’t know what to say to that; that was just so... (sigh)...unpleasant and really judgmental. That’s a really bad thing to accuse someone of. Um, but I feel like there’s fear because there’s a difference and, you know, they aren’t exactly all around in our community so we’re not used to the differences and so there’s always fear with the unknown.

Patrick too chose to talk about his friends’ perceptions of QRED students, something that revolved around violence and deviance.

Patrick: Hearing other people’s views of maybe talking about the QRED kids and sort of uh, like the way they feel sort of scared around them and sort of being associated of being violent...I’ve heard people not being mean in a racist way, but having sort of the associating the QRED students with bad, something with, somewhat being bad; being violent, being mean, actually.

Ashlee admitted sheepishly that they had negative associations with QRED students.

Ashlee: I really don't spend enough time with black people, I'm really uncomfortable around the stereotypical black kid, it's like the kids who embody that stereotype make me guilty for having that stereotype.

Tracking and the cultural differences that were so readily identifiable at Belltown combined with the presumption that the institution itself was a racially neutral place to engender the construction of cultural explanations for racialized achievement differences. White students with low levels of social interaction elaborated visions of parents that do not care, unmotivated students and communities marked by pathology and dislocations to make sense of the differences that they observed. Because these students deemed the institution culturally neutral and believed that success was accessible to anyone regardless of race, observable racial differences in outcomes led to racial explanations.

Reverse Racism and Affirmative Action

In order to get a sense of LSI students' notions of merit and whether the structure of the field made mobility available to all students I used affirmative action as a proxy. The school had no official preference policies, and as demonstrated in Chapter Three, the faculty spoke passionately about equal treatment. The students knowledge about affirmative action depended to a great deal on their class year, with older, college-bound students more aware, and younger students less aware. My goal however was not to get a sense of what these students thought about the politics of affirmative action or how much they talked about or thought about these policies. Instead, my aim was to use affirmative action as a proxy, as a way to get a sense of how LSI students thought about the opportunity structure and the possibility for mobility within their school. If they believed that the field was meritocratic—that it was not structured racially—then I anticipated that

they would be against ameliorative programs. After all, there is no need to ameliorate a problem that does not exist. What I found was that LSI white students tended to profess a strong predilection for meritocracy, and believing that mobility was open to all, they were highly offended by what they deemed “reverse racism.” In my interview with Tessa, she started to blush as she described her heartfelt vision of how the opportunity structure should work. Despite stumbling and speaking in fits and starts, her point is clear.

Tessa: We’re like built on like meritocracy. I don’t think it’s fair for example like when a person with a 3.2 GPA gets in but someone who worked so much harder and if you’re supposedly awarded for you efforts, it’s not like you can change your background because all these people would want to have like a more diverse background and so like it would be easier to get in. So I mean I feel like it kind of contradicts like what this country is supposed to be built on like it sounds like really cheesy, but...

Tessa’s statement is admirable and conveys her firm belief in equality. Of course a society structured in racial dominance is not an equal society and therefore to treat everyone as equal assures that inequality will result. Statements like Tessa’s were identified by Bonilla-Silva (2000, 2003), along with cultural racism, as one of the central frames of colorblind racism. He calls this view “abstract liberalism,” arguing that it allows whites to decry race based ameliorative measures such as affirmative action on supposedly race neutral grounds. This discourse is resonant because it marks a significant discursive break from the caricature of the overt racist openly defending white privilege, a position that is in clear contradiction with the American creed. Abstract liberalism (termed “abstract” to denote what Bonilla-Silva sees as whites’ theoretical commitment to equality) is attractive precisely because it allows whites to ground their defense of white privilege in core American principles. Although Bonilla-Silva seems to imply that whites profess this discourse cynically, in the process of generating my data I

got the impression that my respondents were earnest. Tessa for example turned red and was self-reflexive about the overly patriotic tenor of her belief, qualifying her statement as “cheesy,” a word that in my experience with high school student was often used to label something that sounds overly sentimental. Given their experiences, this was a reasonable response to what they felt was unfair policy. If racism was seeing or acting on race, and Belltown was a racially neutral space, then affirmative action was racism. If equality had been achieved between 1964 and 1965 as the state frameworks implicitly suggested, then to benefit one race over another was inherently unfair.

When I asked LSI Belltown students about affirmative action, the response was overwhelmingly negative. Only two students, Lisa and Jenny, agreed that it should be used in limited circumstances and even then their answers betrayed ambiguity and internal contradiction. Lisa, for example, argued that “in a perfect world affirmative action would be racism, but the world is not perfect.” She then acknowledged that in some cases people of color might be passed over for a job due to race and in that case preference would be permissible. At the same time she was undecided about taking race into account in college admissions, something that she felt gave students of color an advantage and colleges simply did to make themselves seem more accepting. Jenny was vaguely supportive of affirmative action in college admissions but the more she elaborated the further she strayed from that position, and when she added class to her analysis the impact of race seemed to be minimized as she noted that it would not be fair to privilege a poor black person over a poor white. Speaking in fragments and half thoughts she eventually left me unable to determine what she truly believed and searching for a question that could disentangle her response. I failed to find it. In the

case of hiring for a job, she was far less opaque stating with a clarity that had eluded her previously that, “if we’re looking at a job, it doesn’t really make sense to me in that context and that it would make some sense that you’d want to hire the person who’s most qualified for the position.”

Often how these students really felt about an issue—indicated with a head nod, an assured hand gesture or a qualification such as “what I mean is”—would only come at the end of their statements. As Bonilla-Silva notes (2000) often white students will preface answers with socially desirable frameworks before defeating them with the central frames of colorblind racism (e.g. abstract liberalism or cultural racism). He calls these discursive techniques “semantic moves” and as I found, they pose a challenge when interviewing respondents and interpreting their answers. I interviewed Rodney relatively late in the process of my field research. Having conducted numerous interviews with whites at Belltown by the time I sat down with him I had learned that I had to be patient when listening to their replies and to watch how body language, word choice and sentence construction lent meaning to their answers. When I asked Rodney about affirmative action, he started and stopped, eventually gaining more confidence in his answer, the end of which he punctuated with a definitive head nod accompanied by sober but assured facial expression.

Rodney: Hmm... I mean, personally I don’t really — I mean I think it’s like, I don’t know I’ve mixed views about it. ‘Cause I feel like it is kind of like, a good opportunity to try to get some of these people who come from poor upbringings and it’s not necessarily that they did not try at all in high school, it might be just that they had a really hard time with their home life and everything, and maybe they can really like, flourish and be a lot better in college. But at the same time I feel like, in some right, it is kind of racist that you’re giving some people an unfair advantage over a white kid who might have actually worked really hard to get into that school.

Rodney, who has earlier articulated visions of dysfunctional black culture, initially states that affirmative action could be useful to offset the impacts of “home life” but, because he sees racial inequality as largely originating in the communities of people of color, he finally concludes that it is not fair. Imagining a white student who has worked hard being denied from a school due to race, Rodney concludes that affirmative action is in itself racist. The scenario that Rodney relies on, the hardworking white that is deprived admission to college due to race, is a statistical anomaly (Kane 1998; Espenshade and Chung 2005). Regardless, this framework looms large in the imaginations of whites. As Bonilla-Silva (2000) and others have shown, the “*my friend didn’t get a job because a black man got it*” storyline and related variations are primary ideological constructions that not only obscure the operation of racism but turn whites into the victims of it (Royster 2003; Fine et al. 1997). Noel for example talked extensively about playing the race card, something that he described as “turning a disadvantage into an advantage.” He reported that he agreed with a friend’s assessment of affirmative action: “she said if me and a black student have the same grades, or I have better grades than the black student and I have more extracurricular and all that stuff, that’s not fair.” Tessa and Ashlee’s statements below are representative of how respondents utilized this storyline.

Tessa: I know one of my friend’s friend from California has like, he’s half black and half Native American. But he has like a 3.2 GPA but he got into Cornell. From that, like and I mean there I’m sure there are people with a higher GPAs and the 3.2 that are not accepted just because of their background.

Ashlee: One of my good friends, she’s honestly one of the smartest people I’ve ever met, she does crazy math on her head, she doesn’t really sleep because she does things like where she creates new formulas, like she’s making a new type of curve, she has always been in the highest level classes and she’s always really, really bored. And there’s this other girl who’s like, she’s...both of them are like pretty wealthy, but one girl, she’s only one of two kids and she has a movie theater in her house, so she’s a little wealthier, and she’s from India, both of her

parents are from India and she's really, really smart too. But I think Alley is just like a little smarter and the other person was kind of like, not liked so much socially. So one girl the who was white, the one I talked about first, she got in to a good school but didn't get into this other school that she wanted to go to, the other girl got into both. The other girl said she tested better than the Indian girl, she said she went on the interview and the other girl didn't, and she was kind of just like, "I think she's getting in there, 'cause she's Indian," she says that because there's a grant that they get from this person, and apparently they only get the grant if a certain percentage of their kids are minority.

During the course of our interview, Tessa, who earlier had professed her steadfast belief in American meritocracy, divulged that she had received a sports scholarship to a prestigious college. Seeing no contradiction, she articulated her distaste for affirmative action by drawing on a secondhand story of a racial minority being accepted over others that she was sure had done better. Ashlee condemns affirmative action by utilizing class, calling into question the impact of race by pointing out that the Indian woman who was admitted to both schools was actually wealthier than the white woman who is elaborately constructed to be a genius. By holding class constant, she diminishes race, a key variable structuring social life independent of class status and suggests that any program, scholarship or admissions initiative that takes race into account is cynical, disadvantages hard working whites, and is anathema to meritocratic individualism. These students were against affirmative action and the stories they chose to tell, while slightly different, turned on similar themes—affirmative action is abused for unearned advantage and it disadvantages whites.

In Max's view, race had ceased to be an issue and any continuing inequality was due to cultural issues and a lack of hard work. Peering through thick glasses and sitting bolt upright in his chair he clearly articulated his view of affirmative action.

Max: College is an achievement thing; if you...the college should accept the person with the higher level of achievement. If the African-American student has

a higher level of achievement, by all means accept them. I mean I'm extremely against discrimination, if somebody, if a college didn't accept a person because they're of a different race, I'd be extremely opposed to that. I think the institution should be sued and action should be taken. Equality. Because I think giving a person preference because of the color of their skin is racism. Basically saying to the white person they can't get in because there's a black person who wants to get it in, is just as bad as saying to the black person they can't get in because the white person wants to get in.

Max's answer is a prime example of abstract liberalism. Bracketing the impact of race entirely, Max is able to stand confidently against race-based initiatives by employing core principles of equality and fairness—at one point he simply blurted out the word “equality.” He also burnishes his colorblind credentials by pointing out that he is against discriminatory policies of any kind that benefit either race. For Max, mobility should be left up to the market and any movement to take race into account is in itself racism.

Jim and Mandy were also strongly against affirmative action, largely echoing the essence of what Max said while adding their own flourishes.

Jim: Well, first-off um...my qualm with things like affirmative action is, I believe that no one should ever be given special treatment for the color of their skin and that applies equally to all races. And okay, so now that we have that out of the way, the way I see it is say...say there's two people um, ah...who want to become brain surgeons or something, and they're both equally qualified, have these same credentials and all, but one's black and the other's white; if we give priority, I mean priority to the black person then people, well, people will start thinking that that guy was given priority just because of the color of his skin and they'll start preferring white doctors because that'll be the only way to make sure that they have all the proper training and experience. So in effect it'll have, it'll cause exactly what it's trying to prevent.

Mandy: I'm against affirmative action. The reason is because I don't think people are so disadvantaged due to race. I think you can have a rich African-American growing up in Belltown that has much of the same opportunities. I think it's the worst thing ever to say you got in because you're black. I have a legacy at UCLA and like that was one of the reasons I didn't apply because I just like wouldn't want that nagging question at the back of my head, like, why did I get in? I think affirmative action ends up making kids feel worse and I think it ends up not necessarily being helpful...I think you end up putting them in a school that they're not necessarily ready for and you end up not learning as well

because you're not ready for that. I don't think every kid should be destined to go to a great school. I think you can get just as much out of a state school and you won't be overwhelmed.

Jim's explanation raises the specter of perversity. Embracing a somewhat deterministic notion of intelligence (students are imagined to enter and leave college with the same ability to acquire information and develop skills) he defends his opposition to affirmative action by describing a scenario in which the suspicion it generates leads to discrimination. Like Max (and most of the LSI respondents), Jim assumes that racism had been largely eradicated and is able to condemn preference initiatives using a reasonable sounding framework that ostensibly supports equality. Mandy, who claimed, "we're in a more post-racial society," offers a view replete with contradiction. Like Ashlee and Grace, she collapses race into class imagining affirmative action benefiting a rich black person from Belltown. By denying the fact that race matters regardless of class, Mandy defines affirmative action as a program that benefits wealthy people of color, a selective move that utilizes the few black residents of Belltown to criticize affirmative action as opposed to keying in on the same fact to support it. In an awkward admission, Mandy acknowledges that she is the recipient of affirmative action in the form of a legacy at UCLA, but turned her own refusal to apply to that school into a lesson on what is wrong with affirmative action. Where Jim saw discrimination resulting, Mandy saw self-doubt and struggle as students that she assumes will be ill prepared would not only have to question the origin of their mobility but would also fail to achieve. Upon completing his statement Mandy sat back concluding, "I'm so against affirmative action. My gut says that the sole act of being white is a disadvantage."

On two occasions, white students shared moments of social reverie, daydreams that accompanied having to fill out demographic information on forms. By revealing the internal processes that they engage when confronted with the idea of race, these moments said a lot about their perspective on whiteness and the existence of racial inequality. During my interview with Grace, a soft-spoken student who smiled awkwardly and tended to bend her head forward and talk with her head toward the table, she divulged that she had paused when filling out information about race on the SAT.

Grace: There's the little check box in the beginning when you're filling in all of your ethnicities and you're planning to go to college, and a million other question that have nothing to do with what the SAT is about, those the little boxes like: "If you are black, would you like to apply for the scholarship?" And that kind of, made me stop a little and I thought of it afterwards, that I kind of wondered what would have happened if I'd checked that box.

Chris: Hmm, what do you think would have happened?

Grace: I don't know. If they had a box saying "if you are white and you would like to apply for this scholarship," they would probably get about 50 people jumping on it and saying, "that's not fair!"

Chris: Would you agree with them that it's not fair or should we be able to do both?

Grace: I don't think there should be a scholarship for just black people just because they're black. I mean maybe if you don't have this much money, but...

Chris: But not just because you're black?

Grace: Yeah, like it's kind of silly, I think. I think people are pulling at it harder than they should.

In this private moment Grace shared with me her vision of race and what it meant. She wonders what would happen if she "checked the box" for a black scholarship but does not follow up when I prompt her to describe what would happen. Instead she ponders the fact that there is no box for her to check, concluding that if there was there would be a protests and objections—unreasonably so in her opinion. To her, the absurdity of race seemed to be peoples' insistence on keeping the concept alive.

Similarly, filling out his college application leaves Cody pondering an act of resistance.

Cody: I think of [ethnicity] as sort of like, it's like an internal idea. Like when I was filling out my college applications I was like kind of toying with the idea of putting down something other than white, just because white, if I did get in and they're like, "You're not African American." I'll be like, "Well prove it."

Chris: Tell me a little bit about that. So you're thinking maybe, about putting down African American?

Cody: Yeah or Alaskan, Hawaiian or something like that. Um just 'cause like, I know there's no biological or very, very few biological differences, so like there's really no way to prove that I'm not, so it's a sort of like a state of mind, I guess.

Chris: ...when you thought about toying with the idea of putting down something like African American, was that also because there was some recognition that maybe that would help you get into college?

Cody: Sure, yeah, that was part of it.

Chris: And so, in some respects when you wrote "white," which I imagine you ended up doing, were you thinking to yourself: "Crap, this is not gonna help me"?

Cody: Yeah I thought that.

Cody, like Grace, rejects to potency of race. As he argues, there are no biological differences and therefore race does not exist. Believing that biological reality is indicative of social reality, Cody imagines claiming to be black and challenging those who did not believe him on biological terms. Unable to see the social world from any other perspective than their own, Grace and Cody both imagine race as nothing more than a ticket, a label that can be employed to access privilege unfairly denied to whites.

These LSI white students' views are understandable given the context described above. Unable to perceive the operation of race in their school and how it benefitted them, while also defining racism and exclusion as something endemic to other whites in other places, these students viewed affirmative action as a form of racism. It was a contradictory and unnecessary solution to a problem that was both overblown and, given that they viewed racially disparate outcomes as flowing from deficient culture, misdiagnosed. These students' resistance to affirmative action corresponds with their

view of the structure of the field at Belltown High. Because they had no sense of how cultural capital was distributed within the field, they could not countenance policies that would serve to redistribute capital. Policies of redistribution like affirmative action, that seeks to both account for structural inequities while also providing students of color with access to cultural capital that is easily convertible into economic capital, were viewed as a form of reverse racism.

Conclusion:

LSI white students had virtually no sense of their own racial identity and the way in which the distribution of cultural capital served to benefit them as members of the dominant race. Trained to speak of racism as a southern phenomenon perpetrated by defective whites and positioned within the institution in a way that rendered whiteness normative and invisible, LSI white students were unable to understand themselves as members of a racial group and therefore reproduced normative whiteness in their views and explanations. As Sacks and Lindholm (2002) argue, LSI white students vision is filtered through the lens of what they call “cultural imperialism,” the tendency to see their experiences and advantages as universal and openly accessible to all. Their understandings and observations led them to conclude that QRED students’ styles, behaviors, and language were antithetical to normal, pro-school practices. In other words, these students were apt to see the qualities of a “good kid” as culturally neutral and QRED students’ difficulty in embodying these attributes as a failure on their part, not the outcome of racial asymmetry. Cultural invisibility also served to position white students as beyond culture and therefore epistemologically rational when compared to

racial others who appeared tightly connected to culture, tradition and history. Having no sense that capital was unevenly distributed within the institution, and resolute that whiteness did not confer privilege, these white students were strongly against race conscious measures that would seek to redress the outcomes that flow from racial asymmetry. As we will see in the next chapter, not all white students at Belltown High came to the same conclusions. Those positioned closer to QRED students, while not evidencing a complete break from the views of their LSI peers, were able to draw on first hand experiences that called attention to the potency of race, and had the potential to complicate both the development of their sense of what it means to be white, and the racial theorizing that marked the thinking of the students presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHITE STUDENTS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

The students in this chapter exist in the same field that I described in Chapter Three, alongside the students described in Chapter Four. The key difference is that the white students with high levels of social interaction (HSI) in this chapter both describe themselves, and are described by QRED students, as having close contact with students outside their racial group. Although HSI students rely at times on the same tropes, understandings, and frameworks as LSI students, they think about, enact, and reflect on whiteness and the reality of race differently, albeit to varying degrees. For some, their close contacts with QRED students and the experience of forging relationships, have forced them to look back at themselves, their community, and their school with a critical eye. Others have a harder time making sense of their experiences, and find that the contradiction between what they have been taught and what their experiences imply leaves them confused. For instance, many students found that they lacked the language to talk about the racial differences that they saw while, at the same time, honoring their commitment to colorblindness. For a few students, their narratives were replete with contradiction as they moved from idealistic pronouncements about how they do not see color to anecdotes and experiences in which they realized that race mattered and served to separate their fate from the QRED students to whom they had become close. In short, HSI students are situated differently, but they still have to exist within a field that both expresses and obfuscates racial inequity. As a result, their experiences, while different from LSI students, are often uneven.

Taken together, these students can aptly be described as existing on an overlapping continuum with LSI students – a continuum that acknowledges gradations of both similarity and difference. Consider, for example, Tim, an athlete who, with other white players, actively recruited QRED students to play on the Belltown lacrosse team because he wanted to “integrate the sport,” adding, “we don’t like it being an all-white sport, and plus let’s face it, QRED kids are also a lot of time very good athletes.” In my interview with Tim, he showed awareness of racial dynamics that seemed quite different from what I heard from LSI students. At the same time, when I asked him why QRED students tended to not perform as well academically as white students, he offered an explanation that sounded close to the vision of cultural deficit put forth by his LSI peers.

Tim: I think some of them do [care] and some of them just kind of say, “whatever,” toss it to the side, and don’t really care about their grades because I don’t know; I just in all honesty just think their parents don’t push them enough to make them really think they need to do well and need to get into a good college with good grades, but at the same time there’s definitely some QRED kids who are a lot smarter than me. I’m not saying they’re all less smart, but yeah at the same time I just think some of them really just don’t care sometimes about their schoolwork.

The point is not to claim that HSI students are exceptional or make claims that contact with QRED students transforms them, these claims simply would be too strong. What can be said is that not all whites at Belltown develop the same understandings about race and privilege and that contact and experience—and how students make sense of contact and experience—matter. Having been in the same classes, raised in the same socially isolated community, exposed to the same media message, HSI students do not speak about race like critical race theorists—qualifications, tensions and contradictions abound. Some of them are able to construct remarkably powerful and self-reflective statements that artfully and articulately draw on their experiences to challenge the racial status quo;

however, some do not. For some, their experiences imply critiques that the students have not yet fully formed and for others their experiences have simply left them wondering about race and what is to be done. For all of these students, their experiences have taught them something profound, something that they thought was significant even if they did not know how to make sense of it. Taken together, the students featured in this chapter had experiences that disrupted doxic understandings. More often than not, high levels of social interaction complicated the “quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization,” and in doing so disturbed students’ sense that the logic of the field emanated from the nature of the field itself, that it was “self-evident and undisputed” (Bourdieu 1972:164).

Although I have no official estimate about the frequency of the kinds of relationships described in this chapter, my informal sense from being at the site is that they are far less frequent than white/white and white/Asian relationships.⁶⁵ At the same time, in talking with students who had made close contacts it became apparent that these relationships were not uncommon and certainly happened with some frequency.

In sharp contrast to the LSI students described in Chapter Four, the students in this chapter, who were selected based on the recommendations of QRED students, reported learning something powerful through the close relationships that they developed. The difference in what these students perceived speaks the usefulness in analytically separating high social interaction students from low social interaction students. Like the LSI students, the HSI students had also traveled abroad, some extensively, but when I asked students like Patricia about what she would be apt to write a college essay about

⁶⁵ Some of this is clearly attributable to numerical difference.

she gave a very different answer than her LSI peers who said they would focus on their international travel.

Chris: When you apply to college, they might ask you an essay question about your experience with diversity. Would you be likely to mention QRED or Ecuador or both?

Patricia: I would mention QRED, absolutely.

Chris: Why?

Patricia: Because I had interactions with them and like I know stuff about them and whereas in Ecuador, I saw racism, I saw, like, people on the streets and...but I didn't...I just watched. I didn't do anything. I'm more interactive with the QRED program.

Chris: What would you say in an essay that you've learned from it?

Patricia: I'd probably say that everything was white for me, like I had no knowledge of anything, like I'd have no black connection to anywhere. And then when I came to high school I saw them and I kind of knew them but I didn't think anything of them and then I began talking to them and I had them in my classes and I actually thought they were hilarious and we actually made a connection. I didn't think they'd like me because like, I don't talk to black people or any colored people and then I absolutely loved them and I learned about them and I found out about their families and about their home life and about the good things and the bad things. So I feel like I just found myself opening up to people that I didn't know anything about.

When I asked Jessie the same question he smiled because it was not an abstract question for him: he had written his college essay about QRED. When I asked him about it, he sighed and then, as if it were too big to put into words, he tried to summarize his experience.

Jessie: It changed my life. It made me see people...I mean if I...there was no QRED I'd be stuck being friends with those [racist bullies]⁶⁶ still, and wouldn't be living life the way I wanted; I'd be probably not doing so well in school that much, maybe. And now I like life a lot more and know what I want to do. I want to go out and help the world now. I want to...I think I might join the Peace Corps after college, you know, see the world. And just teach in other countries, if I choose to be a teacher.

⁶⁶ As we will see, this is how he characterizes his former group of white friends.

Mark, who was ready to attend an ivy league college and had played on multiple sports teams with QRED students and forged a strong bond with one QRED student in particular also chose to write his essay about his experiences breaching racial lines.

Mark: Well, I wrote a lot about how a sport helped me connect with um, a kid of a different culture and how we kind of worked together to kind of work on a common goal. He was a little immature when he came and he still is a little immature, but he's...not only me but my family has helped him kind of become more mature and realize what he wants to do in the future. And he's kinda helped me in a different way, like showed me a different culture, a different type of life and everything so...

Lance, another athlete, who, like Mark, had made close bonds, noted what he had gotten out of the program.

Lance: I think I've definitely experienced a lot more from a different life perspective outside of Belltown. If there wasn't QRED I think I would have a whole different...I'd be a whole different me right now, definitely because I've experienced what they've been through, what I've been through; differences and similarities and everything like that. I think it's something really needed definitely in our school.

Not all students at Belltown got something useful out of the QRED program but those that did spoke about it as if it were an integral part of their life and development.

The students featured in this chapter are remarkable because despite so many social similarities, they are, in some notable ways, different than the students described in Chapter Four. All white students at Belltown enjoy race privilege, which in some sense gives them an incentive not to see the social world and their position within it. In other words, unlike the poor black men that Alford A. Young Jr. (2004) studies, for whom seeing the operation and organization of power and the way the social world is structured by class and race is a precondition for potential mobility, for the white students in this study, catching a glimpse of the racialized social structure means confronting their own privilege and the inequitable distribution of cultural capital that marks their experience in

school and society. When taken to its logical conclusion, what they see could impel them to give up some of that privilege—a step some were willing to take and others could not countenance. What I kept on asking myself through the study was: why are these students willing to look?

Although I would like to say that their willingness to look was vindication of Myrdal's dilemma framework, I think the answer is much more simple. These students were willing to look at race, think about it and even challenge their own social position because the injustice or difference that they perceived did not just threaten the notion of equality, it threatened Tory, Toni, Claude and Bonnie. That is to say, it threatened people that they cared deeply about. Put another way, they were not interested in racial issues and as a result forged a relationship with QRED kids that helped them generate insights—this is simply not how high school students work. They came to develop relationships through three primary domains, friendships, romance and athletics, and it was through developing these bonds that they began to perceive how the rules of the game are stacked in their favor. For some it was the experience of watching a teacher consistently treat a QRED friend differently in class, for others it was dealing with the way the Belltown police treated their QRED friends and how they had to cope with this. Some students reflected on the culture they had taken for granted as they experienced the awkwardness of trying to fit in with their QRED friends, others had to confront racial assumptions within themselves or their parents that they never knew were there. For many of these students, trips to segregated neighborhoods in the city (sometimes without telling their parents) yielded insights that complicated notions of pathological urban culture while making them think twice about how they defined equality. Not all of these

students had revelations, after all, they were largely developing their understandings on their own with little explicit help from their teachers and parents and with the strong but subtle influence of the structural features described in the last two chapters. What is unique is that despite congruence between these students' race and the structure of the educational field which tends to conceal how the field is organized in bias, these students, to varying degrees of success, were finding different ways to think, even if their thinking was still inflected to some degree by the same assumptions as their LSI peers.

This chapter is organized differently than the last two. Having already described the field and functioning of capital within it and having described how social interaction impacts white students' views, this chapter will present the stories of HSI students whose relationships with QRED students can be characterized as either friendship, athletic or romantic. I have chosen these three domains because despite significant overlap (e.g. teammates often report strong friendships) these contexts differ and as a result create somewhat different understandings. Each context will be explored alone and, because the experiences themselves are essential in understanding how these white students develop their views, how these students understood their experiences and what they learned from them will be explored in-depth. Case studies are used because unlike their LSI peers, these students tended to think of their experiences as narratives, trajectories in which experiences were accumulated and new understandings emerged. Decontextualizing and dissecting these narratives in order to analyze across respondents would force me to leave out an essential part of the story: how these respondents used their specific experiences to tell a personal story of emerging awareness. The stories presented below were chosen because they are representative examples, students whose understandings both overlap

with their LSI peers while differing in significant ways. What unifies all of these stories is that these students tend to “do whiteness” differently and perceive of it with clearer eyes and the difference is their connection to QRED students.

Part One: Friends

Charlie, he's like my best friend, he's like my brother

-Jessie

Nine of the twenty students with close contacts with QRED students characterized the nature of these relationships as friendships.⁶⁷ These were not passing relationships and unlike some of the LSI students who reported being friendly with QRED students (acquaintances), these students forged exceptionally tight bonds. These bonds were evident based on the sheer amount of time that these students spent together and the intimate knowledge that they had about their friends' lives.

Jessie was one of the first students that Tory, one of my QRED informants recommended that I interview. Tory's view was echoed by other QRED informants who noted that Jessie and Charlie, a QRED student, were about as close as friends could be. At first when I approached Jessie he did not seem interested in participating, his eyes seemed to be looking through me. When I was done telling him about the study I was surprised when he smiled widely, pulled the permission slip from my hands, and said, “I'd love to talk about this.” We set a date and met about a week later. After we moved through basic demographic questions I asked him if he ever talked about race at home. In a low and thoughtful voice, he indicated that the only thing he was ever told about race at home is that race did not matter.

⁶⁷ One of the female respondents, Deb, reported that she had dated QRED males but that her closest contact was a friendship with a female student.

Jessie: My mom, when I was growing up, told me like, never to judge someone based on the skin color, or the shape of their eyes like the Asian; you just think of them as people. You know whenever we said like, “I have a black friend.” She would correct us and tell us we can’t do that and just say it as, “My friend is blah, blah, blah.” Like the name.

His mother’s admonishment would serve as an interesting counterpoint for an interview that was full of observations about the ways in which race did matter.

For Jessie, high school and middle school before had been a horrific struggle. A slight boy, Jessie had always wanted to play football but was the smallest on the team. He also described how his learning disability that made it appear that he was distant when in reality he was listening hard. Together his size and his disability had conspired to make him into a target that was teased mercilessly. As he described it, his antagonists, students that he thought were his friends, punished him physically and emotionally. Jessie reported that talking about the bullying was hard for him and offered to send me his college essay that included a description. In this document he writes about one especially painful incident in which he was taunted by his own teammates during a football game. He describes how the adults who were there did nothing, including his coach whose own son was one of bully ringleaders. As he wrote, “as I sat on the bench the taunts and name calling echoed in my ears as the tears streamed down my face. Shielded by my helmet, no one could see my tears; shielded by a false veneer of apathy no one could know my pain.” In the interview Jessie talked briefly of these days, describing how the other students would call him “rainbow.”

Chris: Rainbow means?

Jessie: Gay. But even though I’m not gay they still said that and back then it was not good to be called; they called me like, words like "bitch," "retard." So I had a learning disability so that I do sometimes I go outside the classroom to get extra help. They would make fun of me for that.

Upon entering high school the bullying continued and he felt marginalized. Realizing that he had to extract himself from his group of so-called friends, he found himself gravitating toward similarly marginalized students, QRED students. As he wrote in his essay, “the people that I befriended were the inner city black kids who were part of the QRED program...I could relate to them...They understood what it was like to be labeled and bullied and they also knew how to stand up for themselves and others.” As he explained to me:

Jessie: They wanted to accept me and defend me. So someone saying, “You’re retard,” they’d be like, you know, “Back off, that’s my boy; don’t mess with him.” And it gave me a kind of something to, you know, fight for like, defend myself.

One QRED student in particular, Charlie, was particularly protective of Jessie. Bonding over a mutual interest in sports solidified their relationship and by his senior year Jessie and Charlie found themselves practically inseparable both in school and out, so much so that Jessie’s mother dubbed them “the old couple” because of their tendency to bicker and debate.

It was in his choice to spend so much time with Charlie that Jessie first realized that it would be hard to remain colorblind. As he tells it, his former white friends, kids he characterized as “rednecks” continued bullying but because of Charlie the bullying was given racial tones.

Chris: Who are the Rednecks?

Jessie: Ah, the really racist kids who [just] shit on the black kids. I used to be hanging out with all of them like best friends. And then Charlie starts hanging out with us, and they would say to me, “why do you hang out with those N words all the time and like, “Jessie stop like hanging out with them, blah, blah, blah.” “They’re gonna steal from you.” I got that a lot. Like, “Have you adopted him yet?” “How much food do they eat?” Just, “How much stuff do they take from you?” And I’d just, tsk; that part really hurt me because I saw Charlie as a brother

and kids constantly crapping on them, and I can do nothing but say stuff like, "stop." Eventually I could not be friends with them anymore.

Like his LSI peers, Jessie used a southern framework to describe racist kids, but unlike them, the world is applied directly to kids in his own community, a move that prevents him from externalizing racism to other whites. As already established in Chapter Four, Jessie was not alone in using southern shorthand (“redneck” or “hillbilly”) to refer to those who acted racist. The difference was that these terms tended to be applied to incidents and people in his own school and town.⁶⁸

Jessie also noted that despite the stereotypes, it was his former white friends who actually seemed to embrace pathological behaviors. They were the ones who drank, smoked marijuana, and seemed to not care about school. Unlike his LSI peers, the more time he spent with his QRED friends the more he saw that they were deeply committed to school even working harder than white students. Charlie, Jessie observed, was “anti-drugs, anti-alcohol, anti-anything. Grades, sports, do what you have to do to succeed in life.” Jessie even attributed the increase in his GPA from 2.5 to 3.1 to QRED students’ work ethic and the seriousness with which they took school, even if they were not always successful.

⁶⁸ When asked a few socially isolated students did say that they associated racism with the south. When I asked Stephen about the geography of racism he said, “The south, it’s not very accurate but that’s the first thing that popped into my head.” Others qualified their answers, Patricia for example said, “I feel like a lot of racists live down South because of, like, slavery and everything that’s gone on down there. I feel like it’s down South that, like, is very focused, like, people brought the slaves up here to free them, I feel like it’s more open up here. At the same time I feel like there’s definitely racists in Belltown.” Still others, like Dalton refused to categorize race geographically, “I think everywhere has their own form of it and it’s you know, whether it’s blatant in your face or it’s you know, subtle it’s just as damaging and it’s everywhere, you know.” I then asked him what he believed his classmates would say to that question and he responded, “Oh, they’d probably say in the South or something.” In most interviews with HSI students they did not actively use the southern framework and in some I failed to ask the question simply because it seemed absurd given their opinions about the salience of race in their school and hometown.

Being the only white kid, Jessie describes how Charlie would introduce him to his circle of friends. “He’d say like ‘white brother’ or someone would be like: why is there a white kid with you, the only Belltown guy with you? And he was like, ‘No, he’s an honorary black member.’” Despite this label Jessie was cautious about transgressing certain cultural lines. Like his peers, Jessie had observed that QRED students at times talked differently. He noted how on trips into the city Charlie’s language changed more than at Belltown.

Jessie: When we go to the city, they feel a lot more comfortable like, lose sight when they speak the slang, it’s like they’re actually being serious.... sometimes it confuses me.

Like his LSI peers, Jessie draws a contrast between what appears to him to be “normal conversation” and “normal words” to the “slang” Charlie speaks with his friends.

Language was not something to be imitated however. Jessie reported that he rarely if ever tried to talk like Charlie, something that he felt would be taken as a sign of disrespect, a conclusion that he had drawn from watching his white peers mock QRED students. For Jessie, language difference was not a sign of inferiority but something culturally specific that he did not feel as though he had the license or ability to coopt.

Although Jessie was sensitive to the overt behavior of his peers, he was also aware of the more subtle ways that being white was an advantage at Belltown. When I asked Jessie about why QRED kids tended to struggle with academics at Belltown he noted that there were differences between white students and QRED students that most people in Belltown could not see. He cited how his QRED friends seemed to be under a lot of pressure to balance school, getting up early and a long commute, after school jobs and the stress that came with the reality that they school was their ticket to something

better. White students, he said just get to go home and relax, they “see themselves in a town like this, big house like good job, and they don’t understand that there’s people who don’t even get to have the option of even wanting to do that.” Instead of employing explanations of cultural pathology, Jessie noted that QRED students often were, “people who are in ‘not the best situation’ – they don’t have a lot of money, some situations of bad neighborhoods, parents really working hard to try to help them.” At the same time, going to the city and noting the difference in the size of his house compared to Charlie’s, had allowed Jessie to draw a sharp contrast in the availability of resources. When I asked Jessie if being white was an advantage he agreed that it was, noting that most whites are unable to see it. “Just because we don’t realize that they’re like...when people say like, ‘Yeah, I deserve this, I worked hard,’ but you’re born into it, almost. I didn’t work to get here.” For Jessie it was Charlie who actually worked harder under more difficult circumstances to experience the mobility that Jessie thought most white kids took for granted.

When I asked Jessie if he had seen anything that he would characterize as less overt racism than the behaviors of his “redneck” friends, he stopped and looked out the window in the small stuffy room that I used for interviews. His eyes coming back, he noted that sometimes he felt as though racism manifested in students’ hesitancy to talk with QRED students. Pausing again he looked directly at me and said, “I judged a little bit.” When I asked for clarification he said, “When I first came here. I judged a little bit, looked at them as they were kind of scary – big, new, different.” In other words, he realized that he had held racial stereotypes. Having experienced both the overt actions of his white peers and the subtle prejudice within himself, it was no surprise that he then

drew the following conclusion about the meaning of race. Using a hypothetical job interview scenario he said:

Jessie: When most people look at black people, they don't think of them as the same as they look at a white person. When a white guy goes for the same job as a Black guy; I feel like they probably favor the white person more than the black person, saying, maybe he's going to stereotype to see who works harder, will do more like more loyal, do better things so they don't really look at as the black person as much and push him to the side.

Getting him focus on school, I then asked Jessie if he thought that it was appropriate to treat all students at Belltown the same way and he answered that it was not. Clearly grappling to reconcile his commitment to colorblindness with his experiences he said,

Jessie: It is not appropriate to treat them the same; even though they need to be...this is the confusing part... they need to be; they want to be equal, that's the point. But they are also living completely different lives. So it is kind of hard to give them the same amount of equality when it's not as easy to do that.

Although his mother had encouraged him to be colorblind, Jessie's experiences had indicated to him that race mattered. As such, he endorsed differential treatment based on race.

Jessie's story introduces a number of themes. Through his connection with Charlie he was exposed to both overt racism and was forced to confront his own assumptions and fears about race, something that taught him that racism can operate on multiple levels. He employed southern shorthand to talk about race but applied the label to his peers at school. His exposure to Charlie's work ethic also insulated Jessie from making assumptions about Charlie's home culture, as Jessie tells it, it was Charlie who rescued him from the depravity of his white peers. Jessie's time in the city also made him realize that Charlie's life and concerns were considerably different than his own, a fact that made him reflective about the things he had been given but had not earned.

Finally, Jessie realized that being white was an advantage, that race mattered and that perhaps equality might not be a useful solution to an unequal situation.

As the rapper Tupac said, “It ain’t about black and white ‘cause we’re human,” race should not separate us in any way.

-Justin

Like Jessie, Justin had also developed a strong bond with a QRED student but although his experience also made him aware that race mattered he had considerably more trouble moving beyond his commitment to colorblindness. When I asked him what race he was he replied, “I’d probably say white, but usually like when we do tests like in the SAT they’re asking I say, ‘I prefer not to answer.’” When I asked him why he said:

Justin: Because I don’t really think race means anything and I think that you know asking is just, it’s a useless question so I don’t really think that I should have any obligation to answer because I really don’t think it should affect anything in any way.

As Justin tells it, his relationship with Julius, a QRED student, started the first day of high school during orientation. The first letters of their last names were close together and at some point during that first day Justin “just kinda walked up to Julius and said, ‘Hey, how’s it going?’” That first step turned into a strong relationship that found Justin and Julius spending much of their free time together—even forming a band in Justin’s basement.⁶⁹ As Justin points out, what he had learned about race in school had no meaning to him, “we did the whole Civil Rights movement fairly regularly and we did the whole Black History month thing, but it didn’t really mean anything to me because my whole town was all white people.” However when he met Julius things changed.

⁶⁹ As Justin said, “we play music together ‘cause he’s a guitar player and I’m a trumpeter—pretty good combination.”

“Even though I’m still an upper middle class white kid, I feel like it has a, it just means a lot more and it’s no longer this far away thing.”

Early in the interview, Justin took pains to describe how similar he felt he was to Julius. “We’re so similar down to like, the fact that we’re both left-handed and we both don’t like whipped cream on our ice cream sundaes. We can almost say that we’re two of the same person.” He also described Julius’s parents as being a lot like his and trying to raise him with similar values, although Justin had divined that Julius’s parents frequently experienced financial difficulty. Despite his claim that they were mostly similar, as the interview continued it became clear that he did recognize differences, even if he had trouble articulating them.

Although Justin described overhearing offensive and stereotypical comments about black people made by people in Belltown, he was far more sensitive to the ways that being different subtly impacted Julius. Looking at his own community, Justin pointed out that he had begun to feel uncomfortable with the lack of racial diversity in his town. He pointed to how he felt like “everybody has the same life story, they all like the same things, they all do the same things, they all feel the same way,” concluding that his town it might as well be thousands of clones of the same person.” Whereas many of his LSI peers were unable to particularize white culture Julius characterized it as conformist, something “formal” and “proper,” where everyone is “stuck up” and “affluent.” By contrast he noted that his experiences with Julius had taught him that, “the gangster black people stereotype I see every day had been taken out and knocked even further into just to being an outright lie.”

When I asked him if he thought that being white was an advantage at Belltown high he sighed and replied:

Justin: I feel like sadly I think it is an advantage. I wish, I actually wish it wasn't because you know, personally I think race doesn't mean anything whether you're white or black, whatever. They're all the same people to me, they're all people, they're all human beings and it shouldn't be race that makes one person different from the other...[But] I think you can call it an advantage or at the very least it's like the default.

Chris: Mm, what do you mean by "the default"?

Justin: Belltown is like 98 percent white. And I'll use an example here: first time Julius stayed out with me, we went to an ice cream stand. It's a mile from my house so we decided to walk, it was a nice day in April, why not walk? And you know; here's me and him walking down the street, just two teenage friends on a vacation week going to get ice cream. But at the same time I could still sense a lot of people like, "What?" Because in a town that's that white, honestly they never see black people...To me it doesn't mean anything; he's my friend, he's no different, but at the same time I could still feel, I could feel that some people were looking like, you know, and they were wondering what was going on, not to any extreme point, like nobody was like, obviously nobody was like telling him that he didn't belong there 'cause that would have been just way out of line. But I feel that just the fact that he was black a lot of people, you know; that got a lot of heads turning.

When I asked if he ever wondered how Julius experienced Belltown, Justin said he had never talked directly to him about this but that he had "thought about it a lot." Strangely, despite professing over and over that race does not matter Justin continually come back to the fact that Belltown is almost entirely white and the impact that this has. His description of the "war inside" picks up on many of the themes that emerged in the QRED focus group around feeling different and not fitting in.

Justin: Well you know, look around you, even though Belltown has a QRED program, it's still almost all white in terms of who actually lives here. So I can see a lot of QRED students feeling out of place here even though he's gone to school here since kindergarten, I could still see him feeling out of place out here because of that...he goes into this town that he doesn't really, there's not really a part for him in here 'cause at the end of the day he goes back to the inner city and there's just two different... it's like he's having a war inside him between who he really is, 'cause he's in two different places but which one is actually his home? Is it

here where he does all the stuff and he has all of his friends or is it back home where he actually lives?

I then asked him if he felt as though it might be easier for white students to develop a relationship with Belltown faculty and again he recognized the impact of race.

Justin: I'd have to say... yeah, I think so. I just think that yeah, the answer is yes. A teacher might/may black or white, we're all human beings, but a teacher might view that differently; a teacher might feel more comfortable in a room full of white students. I know a lot of teachers who've grown up in places like Belltown so when they're with other students who are from Belltown, yeah it's like similar background, just between us people, they're more relatable.

Trying to gauge how he thought about the impact of school culture I asked him to imagine a scenario in which he got on a bus and attended school in Julius's home community. I asked him if he thought that he would struggle as much as some QRED students struggle at Belltown?

Justin: Yeah I think I would. Because I'd run to the same problems as they do: I wouldn't fit in, I would stick out like a nail, stick out like a sore thumb. I think I'd have a lot of the same problems as them and I may go down the same road and I'd probably have more struggles in grades than them because I'm in a place I don't feel at home and you can't really do your best work somewhere you don't feel at home.

Through out the interview Justin continually came back to the importance of comfort within an environment and the impact of being different. Knowing that he and Julius were avid athletes I asked him the following question.

Chris: I'll put you guys on the starting line together and have you guys run, and that's the metaphor, are you gonna get further than Julius?

Justin: I mean I feel like, just not to bash him or anything, but, I feel like I will. I feel like it's also not gonna be because, it's not gonna be for racial reasons, I just feel like knowing him, he's not a top student, even though I talked about our confidence problems, we both have them, he has it worse than me and that's something that I really view as important. And I can see why he wouldn't because in white suburban area like this, he's not gonna fit in, and when you get the feeling that you don't fit in, it can hurt your confidence considerably. So I feel like, this could turn out completely different...

Throughout the interview Justin made reference to the fact that both he and Julius had “confidence problems,” something that they had tried to cope with together. Here however he acknowledges that Julius’s problems are compounded by race—confidence of course is enhanced when what you are is in close correspondence with the rules that prevail where you are—and that he might get farther than Julius as result. Although he struggled to explain exactly why it would be so hard to fit in, his answers consistently acknowledged the subtle privilege that flowed from being white in a white institution, a perspective most clearly enunciated in his last statement. One theme in the quotes presented above is the presence of colorblind qualifiers.⁷⁰ Here Justin is awkwardly trying to both describe how race matters without running afoul of his stated belief that it does not matter. What seemed to give him the most trouble is trying to make sure that I knew that he was talking about the social impacts of race not the innate differences that he rejects. For example, when he says that that he is going to get further than Julius, his statement that this will not “be for racial reasons” seems incongruous, but what he means is that whites are not predisposed to do better, and that Julius might not get as far due to a confidence problem related to race. In other word, race is not biologically real, but socially, race matters.⁷¹

Despite making the argument that race matters, Justin hesitated when I asked him about affirmative action. When confronted with the question of a loss of privilege Justin pointed out that he was against affirmative action. Instead of relying on the storyline about a friend who had lost an opportunity, Justin presented a story about a QRED

⁷⁰ For example: “I think race doesn’t mean anything whether you’re white or black, whatever;” “it’s not gonna be for racial reasons;” and, “we’re all human beings.”

⁷¹ As Frankenberg (2001) writes, “one challenge in the critical examination of whiteness is thus to hold onto the unreality of race while adhering tenaciously to the recognition of its all-too-real effects” (73).

student who he claimed earned his way into a top college without needing affirmative action ending his comment with yet another colorblind qualifier.

Justin: I thought about whether I think this is a good idea, it may also be because I'm white and that might not exactly favor me if they did affirmative action, but also I've another friend who's going to a good university on an academic scholarship and he's a QRED student as well. And he had to get in there on his academics and he's getting a full ride, he's doing, he's one of my sports buddies. And that's not affirmative action...I feel like there's nothing wrong trying to diversify schools, but I feel like you can't let race decide whether you're going to offer that university stamp or they're gonna let somebody in or not. If you have one person who's a better student, they should get in regardless whether they're white, black or Martian.

Although Justin's understanding of race at Belltown was different than his LSI peers and evidenced that he understood the impact of subtle exclusion, he was unwilling to take the next step, a fact that both speaks to privilege (he sees that affirmative action does not impact his mobility) and indicates that just acknowledging that race matters does not necessarily mean that white students will endorse addressing it. Employing a colorblind qualifier, Justin, who had made trenchant observations about the meaning of race, ends his comment by endorsing a vision of idealistic meritocracy, even for Martians. Justin's case illustrates both the overlap and difference between white students with close contact and those without. Unlike most of his peers who offered that race was not an issue at Belltown, Justin noticed and reflected on what it would be like to be different in a predominantly white institution. At the same time, like his peers, he was unwilling to endorse color conscious policies.

I feel like my mom thinks it's a dangerous community...

-Eliza

Eliza could not remember a time that she was not close with Zaria and Bonnie, both QRED students that she had gone to school with since she was in first grade.

Through these two friends her QRED network expanded in high school, “Zaria and Bonnie introduced me to Tyshawn and Michael and they introduced me to all their friends.” Like Jessie and Justin, Eliza spent much of her time both in school and outside of school with her QRED friends. Often on the weekends both Zaria and Bonnie would stay at her house in Belltown, which was walking distance from the school. For Eliza, recognition about how race mattered came from both conversation and observation. For example, being close to a QRED student named Talia and having taken classes with her, Eliza recognized that teachers seemed to read and respond to her and other white students differently than they did to Talia.

Eliza: Here’s an example. I was in class with two white friends just like not paying attention and Talia (a QRED student) was there, and we were all just getting loud and talking, and we weren’t learning anything. And so there was this other teacher in the room conducting an observation, he as sitting in the back and so he came over and he like just completely disregarded me even though I was being just as bad. He like looked at one of my white friends, like kinda like just said quietly “Be quiet.” And then he gave Talia all the discipline just like yelling at her. And like I find that some teachers have a very like quick, low tolerance with Talia or something. Like my teacher would be like, “Everyone take out your calculators,” and then some kids won’t have his out and Talia won’t have hers out, and he’d be like, “Talia, take it out now!” and just like I’ve witnessed some of that kind of behavior.

Through conversation with Bonnie, Eliza had also been made aware of what it was like to cope with being stereotyped. Although Eliza was probably already aware that QRED students were stereotyped as thieves, Bonnie exposed her to the personal side of this, to how it actually impacted her life. For example, Eliza was deeply disturbed by one story Bonnie related in which a “white girl and a guy were walking in the hallway and then she dropped her bag and there’s a QRED student sitting there and the girl said to like the guy like, ‘Oh, watch your things, they steal.’” This story disturbed her, but what disturbed her more was how QRED students were treated by Belltown police officers. Because

QRED students had been harassed by the officers in investigations over thefts at school and pulled over when riding in their white friends' cars, Eliza and Zaria had come to an uncomfortable accommodation when they went out at night: Zaria rode in the back seat.

Eliza: I feel like I have a little more, a little more privilege, like I don't mean that with any disrespect or anything; but 'cause we'll be driving somewhere like in the car, like in my Subaru and so I'll be like driving, and sometimes we'll put another white friend in the front and Zaria in back if we're going to a party or something because just for the fact that we don't want to get pulled over. Like, because I don't know, sometimes Zaria is sitting there and the Belltown police are kind of, I don't know, they're racist. I would call them racist, and even some of the people here at school, they just don't, maybe because they don't hang around with people who are different from them a lot.

Being friends with Zaria had meant that on a small scale, Zaria's problems were her own. Reflecting on the fact that she has to think about how Zaria's race will impact how she is perceived together they make the humiliating decision to put her in the back seat. Having to make this accommodation leads her to conclude that she enjoys privilege and linking the attitudes of the police with the attitudes of other whites at Belltown high she notes that race is still a powerful social factor.

By her senior year in high school, Eliza had grown tired of only being with her QRED friends in Belltown. She wanted to visit them in the city, in the neighborhoods that they lived in. Despite her curiosity, her mother forbade this.

Eliza: Um, well I like all throughout my childhood, I invite Zaria and Bonnie to sleep over my house but I've always thrown tantrums, like "Okay, mom we're just gonna go over their houses." My mom's like, "No, I'm sorry you can't do that," and I would be like, "Why?" and then she'd get kinda awkward, um, "it's just not a place I want you to go." And I'm like, "But Zaria and Bonnie are there, like why not?" And like my mom knows their mothers and their fathers and like loves them; great people, but my mom just didn't want me in that area because she didn't feel that it was safe. My QRED friends are always having parties and are always like, "Eliza you have to come; you have to come!" And I always want to go with them but like my parents are like, "No." I just became used to getting shutdown.

Chris: What's she worried about?

Eliza: I feel like my mom thinks it's a dangerous community; it's not Belltown. From her perspective like there's definitely some potential violence going on and the people per se, could be a little more dangerous. I know she's just very like, "Oh, just watch out for those people, and the dark crowded streets and stuff."

Sick of being told no, Eliza, who was supposed to be on a college tour in the city, jumped on the subway with a white friend determined to see her friend's neighborhood. She reported being nervous, and mentioned the strange feeling that overtook her as the subway ridership, reflecting the spatial segregation of the communities above, turned from white to black: "it was a very different experience. Um, I didn't see one white person." When she finally arrived in Bonnie's neighborhood she found something that defied her mother's fears.

Eliza: But when I went to where Bonnie lives, it really was not dark and crowded, it was just a regular street and there were like people; like okay, there was a lot of traffic on the street and people rolling down the windows and yelling things out of the window and stuff [giggles]. But I never felt scared or like I was in danger, and Bonnie was just like walking by herself on the street. We like ran into her mom and her little sister, it was just very –she was saying "hi" to her neighbors and it just felt like in Belltown. We were a little scared, but it never felt like we were in danger there, it just felt very safe, just like walking outside like they knew where they could walk, what was safe, what was fine, like the signs to look for.

Despite the fact that Bonnie's neighborhood felt safe, it was still a depressed community that had had its share of gang violence. According to Eliza, Bonnie did not try to hide this. However, traveling into the city rendered the area more complex to Eliza. Instead of a totalizing vision of urban pathology, she found something different that caused her to reflect on racialized assumptions of race and space. While acknowledging that Bonnie's neighborhood could, in some cases be a barrier to mobility, Eliza also noted the problematic nature of whites' assumptions about black neighborhoods and what she seems to believe is the real culprit behind inequality—different resources that give her an edge.

Eliza: I feel like it depends on the opportunities that you're being given. In the city, like you could just get involved with the wrong group of people...but people have this like, perception of people coming out of the city and black people are like they're just gonna slack, or like blow it off, or they're not gonna take it seriously, or their GPA is lower. Like they have all these misperceptions already in their heads and as a result blacks might be immediately turned away without being given a chance. Like with Bonnie and Zaria like I know that they try really hard, and like maybe like they're not, they don't have as much money to push themselves and to get into all these different programs. Like I know my parents have money so they'll involve me in all these different programs like trying to get prepared for stuff. And some of them just don't have as much money. It's a lot of money actually to pay for SATs and retake them over and over again and take classes for them. So I know some of my friends are lacking in opportunity in that area. But I know they're also motivated, like someone like Bonnie, when I was at her house I went to her bedroom, like she had all these colleges posted on her walls, like, "I want to go there, like what do I need to do to go in there." So they are motivated, like I won't say they're less motivated than people here, they just haven't been given maybe all the equal opportunity.

Noting the incompatibility between her mother's vision of the city and the reality that lay somewhere in between, Eliza formulated a nuanced vision of what accounted for different racial outcomes. Instead of visions of students or parents who do not care, Eliza noted Zaria's aspirations stuck right on her wall and in thinking about who would get further, she took ambition and culture out of the equation entirely recognizing how having better resources would serve to enhance her score on a supposedly neutral standardized test.

Finally, like Justin, Eliza's experiences interacting with QRED students had led her to very different conclusions about the meaning of their public behavior. Eliza found herself not only interacting with QRED students, but also interacting with them on their terms. During the interview I asked her if she ever looked at Belltown through Zaria or Bonnie's eyes and her answer revealed not only sensitivity to cultural difference but she also seemed aware, through first hand experience, of how white students misperceived the behaviors of their QRED classmates.

Eliza: I feel like they've been growing up in the city their entire lives...and they come into Belltown and this is like probably weird for them, like because this is different and they have to adjust and like a lot of the times when I'm with Bonnie and Zaria they get really loud and so sometimes when we're interacting with other kids, those kids would be like, "Oh my god, like they're so loud."...There are those people who just are very intimidated by them and the loudness and don't understand why they're being so loud and talkative.

Chris: And do you have a sense of why they are a little louder?

Eliza: Um, I feel like it's just completely acceptable, like that's how they kind of communicate with each other. Like I've seen it, like I go to um, I've hung out with a bunch of them altogether and they're just yelling back and forth, and even I start yelling and it's totally fine. I feel like sometimes in the cafeteria all of a sudden some of my QRED friends will start roughhousing and I'm just like sitting there laughing. And then like to me I'm used to that, like I see it, but other kids I feel like they look at me just standing and say, "Oh my god aren't you gonna do something to break that up?" But I know they're just kind of playing and like that's how they behave with each other. I know that some of the behavior of QRED comes off as aggressive just because they go like running through the halls yelling like "Hey! What's up!?"...but I think it's just a different style 'cause I know like some kids here who are just white but their style like they're probably mean and aggressive and their style is more subtle like laidback like snide remarks and stuff. But um I know like Michael and Tyshawn, they're very loving and everything and I would not call them any more aggressive than the people here.

Like Jessie and Justin, Eliza's friendships had brought her face to face with her privilege, how race mattered and the distorted meanings attached to cultural and spatial difference.

At the end of the interview I asked Elisa about her opinion on affirmative action.

Strangely, even though she was actively applying to college at the time, she was not familiar with the word. After explaining it to her, she stated,

Eliza: I feel like it really should come down to what's on your resumé and how much you've applied yourself. But affirmative action could definitely work because like the black person hasn't done quite as well because of the opportunity they haven't been given...like I can see that being fair as the reason why you would pick them over the white person.

Like Justin, her answer acknowledges the tension that comes from the world was she wants it to be and the world as it is. Unlike Justin she recognizes that opportunity is not

fairly distributed and as a result is willing to entertain giving up some of the privilege that she acknowledged possessing.

Eliza, Justin and Jessie's stories are fair representations of the overall experiences of those white students who develop close relationships with QRED students. Jessie recognized overt racism in his peers and the stereotypes that had lain dormant despite being told that race did not matter. Justin clung fiercely to colorblindness and despite generating a series of trenchant insights about how race matters, was, in the end, unwilling to accept affirmative action on the grounds that it gave too much weight to race. Eliza's, whose relationships stretched back the farthest, had witnessed overt racism both in school and outside of it and had a refined sense of how she was privileged. Disobeying her mother had also shown her that notions of urban danger and cultural deficit were dangerous assumptions. When it came to affirmative action, although she believes that race should not matter, she recognized that it does and as a result viewed the initiative as "fair."

Part Two: Athletics

Sports emerged as another primary domain in which white students developed close contacts with QRED students. Six of my respondents reported that this was their primary link. What made athletic connections unique was the gender dimension that they introduced. Although I tried, I could not identify one white female who reported forging a close bond with a QRED student on an athletic field—my sample of six was comprised entirely of males. When I asked the QRED director and QRED females why this might be the case, they reported that very few QRED females played sports at Belltown High.

Although these relationships were similar to friendships, what made them different was that they were forged first and foremost in a team-competitive environment. Although playing on a team together often led to interactions off the field or court, these white students tended to talk about their QRED friends as teammates first. What was notable about teammates was while connections forged with QRED student on the field of play did yield insights about race, the nature of playing on a team found these students often trying to compartmentalize its importance—something that led them to enact whiteness in ways different than other white students with close contacts. As Gordon Allport (1954) observed in his classic study on prejudice, contact alone is not sufficient to lessen prejudice. According to him, contact must be accompanied by, among other things, shared goals. As he points out, this “principle is clearly illustrated in the multi-ethnic athletic team. Here the goal is all-important; the ethnic composition of the team is irrelevant. It is the cooperative striving for the goal that engenders solidarity” (276). Edward and Tim aptly summarize what my white athlete respondents told me about the impact of sports on cross-racial friendships.

Edward: Sports definitely forges a relationship, for sure. I think, sports was like, a big facilitator of meeting QRED kids and kind of getting close. Because you can meet the QRED kids and not really get close to them. You can talk with them sometimes. Like when you're with them every single day for three months, and like you get to know what their families are like 'coz they come to games sometimes. And like, that's a lot different than just seeing them in school, I think.

Tim: I guess it's really sports, I think sports really bring you together with different ethnicities or with the black kids definitely. It's just easier to kinda be around them more. If you're white and you're just kind of, you don't really do much after school, you just kinda go home, you're not gonna kind of make an effort to go sit with some black kids, you know? I can really make that effort. So I guess sports kinda brings you together in that way. Also I've been around them all my years of playing sports.

Intrigued by how athletic competition could serve to lessen the racial gulf I attended numerous varsity and junior varsity basketball practices in the winter of 2012. Watching from the corner of the brightly lit gym I observed exercises, drills, scrimmages and the painstaking review of video recordings of past games. Through the din of squeaking sneakers on polished wood, I watched as QRED students and white students interacted in a way that seemed entirely different from what I observed in the classroom. In one practice in particular toward the end of the season, the team was focused on an upcoming game against a neighboring town I will call Centerville. Every drill, every exercise, and every comment seemed oriented toward beating Centerville. Throughout the practice I noted the various combinations of players, how different drills placed QRED students and white students in different configurations of cooperation and competition and how the players celebrated the success of individual players as a success for the team, a team seemingly unified by the mutual desire to beat Centerville. The following excerpt from my ethnography notes (generated from memory after observing the JV team) speaks to these factors.

Excerpt: The coach blows the whistle and calls the players together. They hustle into the middle of the court and as he talks they mill around, catch their breath, stretch hamstrings and arms. Coach describes a fast break drill and sends the players down to the baseline to begin with the command, “run!” Players run to baseline high fiving as they arrive at the far end of the court and wait for the drill to begin. The coach meanders down to the baseline and sets the players. The drill involves four students. The coach throws a ball into the middle of the court and then blows a whistle. The students run to the ball and whoever gets it breaks to the opposite basket with his teammate. The other two players defend. The first few attempts seem sloppy and the coach appears displeased, yelling, “come-on!” “get it together!” “let’s go!” and asking “will we beat Centerville if we play like this!?” Players encourage each other and the drill continues but is stopped by the coach after about four waves have gone. The coach sends all the players back behind the baseline and calls out four players for a demonstration on fast-break passing, three white and one QRED. The QRED player is the point guard. He is handed the ball as the coach tells the other players where to stand. One confused

white player does not understand the coach's instructions, the coach's directions becoming louder, more insistent and less descriptive. Placing the ball on the floor, the QRED point guard runs down from the three point arc to below the hoop where the white student is milling around confused, and, placing his hands on both of the white player's hips, guides him to the appropriate spot. They give a low-five, the QRED player jogs back to the ball and the drill commences.

As this excerpt demonstrates, playing on a team tends to put students in positions that they might not otherwise occupy as a result of focusing on a shared goal. However, according to the white athletes that I interviewed, the "ethnic composition" of the team was not irrelevant simply because of the solidarity that resulted from competition, but instead, these athletes reported actively try to lessen its impact in order to not allow it to divide them in competition. In other words, competition did not negotiate the terrain of race for them—instead they had to actively work to put race aside in order to get to the business of team competition. I did not observe my athlete respondents off the court or field, but they universally reported dealing with race through jokes and teasing, often "acting racist" in order to get beyond race. Instead of thoughtful discussions about racial difference, these students reported negotiating what divided them by bluntly bringing it out into the open, a process that often found them trying to move beyond race by drawing on and enacting racial stereotypes. For the athletes that I spoke with, joking seemed to be the most expedient way to recognize race while putting it aside.

I just think I had some sort of like internal prejudice.... Without sports I probably won't have crossed the lines nearly so often.

-Martin

Martin's story best expresses the common features described by my athlete respondents. Martin grew up in Belltown, and despite attending kindergarten through third grade with QRED students he went to a private school with only one student of

color for fourth through eighth grades. Coming to Belltown High he had had virtually no interactions with students of color, “I don’t remember ever hanging out with a black kid um growing up, really, except for high school.” Martin describes how he felt walking into the first day of high school football practice.

Martin: Um I mean I don’t think I really thought about it until like I got here um at the first day and then I... Like I knew there were QRED kids but I don’t really think I put that much thought to it. And then I remember walking in on the first day and I remember seeing them and there were so many pretty big kids and like... I mean on my freshman year I was probably like 5’10” or so and De’Anthony was probably 6’3” or so, 6’4”. I just remember it like almost being intimidating. I think it probably, I was intimidated a little bit at first, just of all the black kids. Not that I was like scared of them. I just think I had some sort of like internal prejudice almost just was somewhat maybe uncomfortable. But I think that um, especially over the football season, just especially over a couple of years you just kinda grow past that. I think my view of them now is completely different than it was when I first walked in.

Martin acknowledges that at first he was scared and potentially intimidated by the QRED kids on the football team. Initially this prevented him from creating strong friendships with these students but eventually one QRED student, De’Anthony, asked if he could “say out” at Martin’s house, a common request made by QRED athletes for whom making Saturday practices and night games was a considerable challenge. Eventually, “staying out” became more regular and Martin found that he had forged a tight relationship with De’Anthony that included “hanging around,” “playing video games” and exploring Belltown. Martin reported that after developing his relationship with De’Anthony and his friends, he began to take umbrage with the racist comments that he reported occasionally hearing from students at Belltown that did not know QRED students. However like other athletes he reported joking incessantly about race with QRED students, something I had heard repeatedly from my QRED respondents. For example, the basement of basketball player Alex’s house was where his QRED friends

slept and as such was nicknamed “the underground railroad.” According to multiple sources on the football team, “race wars” were common in the locker room either before or after practice. As one respondent sheepishly described, either a white player or a black player would yell “race war” or “race riot” and on that signal the athletes would engage in mock fighting that broke along racial lines. With each successive interview I was astonished by the uniformity of the athletes’ interpretation: racist joking was not racist at all but instead served to bridge the racial divide; to put race aside so they could function as a team. Martin described being offended by the comments of whites at Belltown who did not know QRED students and when I asked him about the joking that went on in the locker room he too maintained that it was not what it appeared to be. Stammering, starting and stopping and qualifying his statements, he offered the most complete vision of how athletes thought about these negotiations. I have intentionally not cleaned up much of the text below to give a clear sense of how much he struggled to articulate his point.

Martin: Well I mean there’s like um...I mean they kinda, they joke with us about like how we’re like white and rich and like live in Belltown, if we come to the hood, we’re gonna get shot in two seconds. But then there’ll be definitely like, we make jokes with them about how...I don’t know...there’s just, there’s probably stuff...like we start with somewhat racist, but at the same time they know that we’re saying it as a joke and like if it was really meant to offend them then they would definitely speak up about that and they would let us know that it wasn’t okay. I mean I think like...like saying the ‘n’ word almost it’s not, we don’t really say it; we never would like say it like as to offend somebody. But like it’s definitely said as a joke in sometimes in football. They joke with us their fair share too, and they make fun of us all the time, but there’s definitely some joking like if you just heard it out of context you would think it’s like a really racist thing to say, but I think that at the same time at this point that we’re just saying it to mess with them. And like there’s definitely some...if it makes a kid uncomfortable, it’s definitely something we’re not gonna do. I think like there’s definitely some of that stuff that’s said would never be said like that in the first day of my freshman year ‘cause if it had it could be like the QRED students could be really angry and like thought of it like as a racist place and wouldn’t wanted to

have stayed, I guess. And I think that now um we're definitely a much tighter friend group and I think that, as like...I think we're just more comfortable with each other and I think that we...they know that it's not meant to hurt them in any way or like um to...or there's not much to me at all or... but I think that it's just comes with the comfort level of being like um good friends almost. Like I can make fun of even my white friends, I can make fun of them about stuff that would be like a mean thing to say to somebody, but it's okay now because we're good friends. But I think that just the fact that it's about race it would have been really uncomfortable to say before but now, I mean...

Chris: It almost brings you guys closer?

Martin: Yeah, definitely.

Michael Hartigan's (1999) work on class enactments of whiteness in Detroit is instructive when thinking about how words and enactments need to be considered *in situ*. Looking at poor whites in Briggs, Detroit whose class conditions brought them into close social contact with poor blacks, Hartigan observed that whites showed willingness to "manipulate seemingly inert racial categories" and "disregard... 'race' as equivalent with fixed identities or absolute social divides assumed to be an indissolubly significant matter" (111). He also points to the subjunctive use of the word "nigger" in Briggs. Appreciating the contested nature of symbols, he argues that the term is not an absolute indicator of racial privilege, but instead was sometimes deployed by whites as an intra-class signifier and at times was employed across racial lines to negate the divisiveness of race in a place where class conspired to make the idea of white privilege absurd. Although there are significant differences of class, geography and age (just to name a few) between what Hartigan observed in Briggs and what I heard from my athlete respondents, the core is basically the same. Hartigan heard poor whites employ the word "nigger" in ways that challenged standard narratives of race. By the same token, Martin describes that white athletes at Belltown deployed the term as a signifier of closeness. If my use of this word, with all of its damaging historical symbolism is accepted, endorsed

and laughed at by black athletes then we must be beyond what this word implies, he seemed to be saying. Stated another way, being allowed to enact overt racism was a privilege, a special status not afforded to other whites. To laugh at deployments of “nigger” or “honky” was to laugh at the separation implied by the terms, separation that they either did not believe characterized their experience or that they felt they had to move beyond in order to succeed on the field of play.

Through my interview Martin did make references to how he felt like there was no difference between him and De’Anthony. These statements seem to be designed to imply the personal closeness and authenticity that he believed marked their friendship. At the same time, starting with his own revelation that he was initially “internally prejudiced,” Martin observed that race mattered. Like many of his HSI peers, a trip to De’Anthony’s neighborhood caused Martin to think about his own community and privilege.

Martin: Um well he had missed the bus so I needed to just give him a ride in. I’m not sure about his dad, but um his mom is like she only speaks a little bit of English, she’s from the Dominican, so I could kind of communicate with her, but she really only speaks Creole; and like if you ever listen to De’Anthony talk on the phone with his mom he speaks in Creole. It was kinda like a somewhat uneasy drive in because there’s just like...De’Anthony knows a lot of the kids when we go in, but we don’t really, like um..I mean he’s told us stories about his neighborhood, it isn’t the most dangerous part of the city by any means, but there’s definitely still some bad parts of that. And De’Anthony kinda just um, he like knows a lot, he knew a lot of the people and we kinda parked and then walked out to his house and he knew a lot of people and when we went to his house it was kinda like...it was, it wasn’t big by any means; it wasn’t that small. I mean I think his mom was very welcoming of us which was um a little, not strange, but it was like not something you would see in Belltown, really. She like invited us in and made us food and um, immediately and she’s just really, really thankful...I just think the biggest part about going in was I mean when I was out there I was pretty quiet and didn’t really want to cause a big scene or like draw a lot of attention at all. It was interesting to think about De’Anthony’s comfort levels over the years. Because I mean now he seems comfortable, but like, when I was there we didn’t want to be like intrusive at all. And it’s just kinda like a

somewhat uncomfortable experience, but at the same time I think it was really interesting to go in there and just kinda see how it is on his end really compared to what we have out here.

Noting his own discomfort with being in De'Anthony's kitchen and neighborhood made Martin reflective on what it must be like for QRED students to come to Belltown. If he had felt uncomfortable then they must too, he reasoned. When I asked Martin if being white at Belltown was an advantage he said yes, noting that, "the majority of the school is white like by a large percentage" and that, "being white it just, again, gives you that level of comfort," adding "I haven't really had to deal with race issues or any prejudices here um, while they may have at the same time." Martin also observed that cultural differences and unfamiliarity conspired to make people in Belltown view QRED kids differently, a fact that he characterized as, "everyday prejudices." When I asked him about whether he thought race mattered outside of school he agreed that discomfort and racism could conspire to make it hard to get a job or move to a predominantly white suburb like Belltown. "I just think there's a lot more comfortability and it's easier. I think it would be a lot harder, very difficult for a black family to move to Belltown."

In addition to pondering the feeling of being out of place, Martin and De'Anthony had talked about the differences in the availability of resources in their respective communities. Having won a football championship and, as a team, given the privilege of picking out their team trophies, De'Anthony had jokingly said to the coach, "give us gold! Belltown's rich, it's not a problem!" Meant as a joke, this comment served to make Martin reflect on his travels in the city and what he knew about De'Anthony.

Martin: I mean I think he said that somewhat jokingly, but at the same time it's also true. Like it's nice not to have to really worry about um 50s, like extra 50 dollars so like it's really gonna make a difference or not. But I mean there would definitely would, when I was in the city there was definitely like some

ah...there're definite parts where you have to worry about that. And I think um for them, I think they're aware that we're a very, it's a very wealthy town...In terms of like material possession, I think it's not nearly as much as we have out here.

Given what he had seen in the city and what De'Anthony had told him about his family (De'Anthony's father was not at home and his older sister took much of the parenting role), I wondered how Martin would handle the question of why it is that QRED students struggle academically at Belltown. Leveraging De'Anthony's description of his former school (a place that he characterized was marked by apathetic teachers and where it was hard to learn), Martin said, "Well I'm not sure that what they've had in the city is really the same level of preparation that we've had" adding, " academically, Belltown challenges a lot of the QRED students, but they have the capabilities and they're definitely smart enough to handle the work out here, I mean they definitely work hard in this school." For Martin this was not something that he had been told or that he assumed, it was a something he had experienced, "they do their homework 'cause I know I've done homework with them when they stay at my house, and they definitely, they care about it and they're still working on it. It's not that that they don't care about school and they're not doing any of the work."

When I asked Martin what he had gotten out of the QRED program he started back where he began, noting the change within himself and the gulf that he felt as though he had spanned.

Martin: When I walked in my freshman year, I was almost a little scared. I don't know; there was just some kids I knew on the freshmen team who were just I'd like, didn't want to trust them at all and I was almost somewhat intimidated with them. And I think um, as the fall season went along, and just like as my high school career went on, I think um once I got to know them I'd realize they were all just a lot like us actually, there wasn't—I mean there were definitely some cultural differences, but I think that um just our basic like, as people, I think they,

I learned that they were just pretty much the same as us and...by now like I can hang out with them and it's just like I hang out with any other kid.

Despite emphasizing colorblindness in his response, Martin was willing to entertain the use of affirmative action. In a response similar to other HSI peers, Martin struggles to find the balance between what should be and the sense he has of how things are. In the end he endorses affirmative action for college in order to create a more diverse setting.

Martin: Um I mean I think it depends on the school or the job, I guess. I mean I think if it's for a job, personally I think it just should be whoever is the most qualified regardless of race...but at the same time there are plenty of instances in which a white person is chosen over a black person even if they have the same numbers and um really have the same kind of level of qualifications. Um, I mean I think it kinda works both ways, but at the same time I definitely think with the school, I think it's better to have a more diverse class because I think that um, it's better to be exposed to other races and you just become way more comfortable with um, like a diverse group of people.

Martin's take on affirmative action was strikingly similar to other athletes. Of the six that I interviewed, I asked five about affirmative action and all of them (including Martin) endorsed it with qualifications that spoke to the difficulty that these students had in balancing their view of how things should be with how they are. Although it was conceivable that athletes' propensity for joking about and minimizing race threatened to flatten what is unequal terrain the athletes that I spoke with did not seem to generalize from their relationships, assuming that race did not matter. Instead, the fact that they had to work so hard to bridge the social gulf seemed to suggest the potency of race.

Part Three: Romance

Five of my HSI respondents reported that their primary connection to QRED students was through a romantic relationship. In the course of my fieldwork I was only aware of two males who were engaged in interracial relationships, one of whom, Dalton,

I was able to interview. By and large interracial relationships seemed to occur with the greatest frequency between QRED males and white females. Although there were a number of openly gay couples at Belltown, I was not aware of any that were interracial. I imagine that there were or had been biracial, same-sex couples, but believe that the intersection of race and homosexuality may have created conditions in which these relationships were kept quiet.

High school relationships can be intense, with severe swings of joy and sadness. Because high school students are typically deprived of private space in which to conduct their relationships and intimate moments, often what adults might keep private spilled out into the public spaces of Belltown high. Walking through the halls it was not uncommon to witness physical affection, fights between couples and what was called “high school drama” among my colleagues. Given that students were seldom without their phones at school, in a few instances students would react strongly to text messages from boyfriends or girlfriends during class.

In interviewing my respondents who were in or had been in interracial relationships, it became very clear that having a relationship in high school is a challenge that is only compounded when race enters the equation. Given the volatility that seemed to mark all high school relationships, one theme that emerged in my interviews was defensiveness around the meaning of race. Cathy, for example, uneasily balanced her insistence on colorblindness, often expressed through colorblind qualifiers, with the recognition that race mattered. Looking at her interview it was very clear to me that she deeply loved and respected her boyfriend, Darron. Having been together for more than a year and having persisted even as he went off to college while she finished high school,

she took pains to describe the authenticity of her feelings for a young man she described as, “an amazing person.” Although she had recognized racial differences, had felt scrutinized by peers and had even been challenged by her mother about “why I date black boys,” what was most important to her was the feeling of closeness despite race—the fact that she had been able to put it aside enough to develop what she felt was an authentic relationship. In asking her questions about race, I made division salient. I kept on dragging race back into the spotlight as she was trying to impart her belief that she had moved beyond it. My insistence on asking about race and her insistence that she had moved beyond it at one point prompted her to say, “gosh, these questions are actually, like, very difficult.” Like the athletes that I interviewed, race had had to be negotiated. These negotiations had both given them the sense that race mattered while also leaving them feeling like they had personally transcended it. Due to the intense nature of high school relationships, this was a significant feat.

Four of my respondents were still in interracial relationships when I interviewed them while one, Faye, had recently, and painfully broken up with her boyfriend Raymond. Faye’s story (which is told in detail below) was similar to other respondents in interracial relationships in many respects. She had suffered slights from white friends, recognized difference in treatment while also forging a close bond. At the same time, while Susan tried to minimize the impact of race to emphasize the closeness that she felt, Faye, evidencing anger that bubbled over during the interview, employed race and notions of deficient culture to explain what had gone wrong in her relationship and why that closeness had not lasted. Unlike friendships or athletic relationships, which seemed to be far more stable, high school romantic relationships can be volatile and can lead to

deep hurt. Faye's anger at her former boyfriend and her attempt to understand what had gone wrong found her visiting his neighborhood, getting into his geographical space to try to understand what was going on in his head and heart. Angry with Raymond, and without him there to give the experience context, she trolled his neighborhood with a QRED friend seeing the only the difference and dysfunction that would serve to explain what had gone wrong. Through her relationship with Raymond, Faye reported recognizing prejudice in herself, something he had helped her confront, but given the intensity of their demise, race offered too tempting an explanation and she grabbed it with both hands. In this case, experiences that could have led to resistance seemed to lead to the opposite, leaving me wondering if her racialized understandings would be that much more durable given the credibility that she could claim from her firsthand experiences. Faye's example is instructive in that it speaks to the overlap between LSI and HSI students and the uneven nature of complicating racial notions. Although her overall understanding of race was different from her peers, she was aware of racialized notions of pathological culture and used them to make sense of something painful and confusing.

This section draws on both Faye and Dalton's story as a way of showing the two sides of what HSI students can extract from their experiences. Faye's story, partially divulged above, shows the complexity, contradiction, benefits and potential pitfalls that result as white students negotiate racial difference on their own. Dalton's story is notable because it represents a white student whose experiences move him furthest along the continuum toward resistance and awareness.

Raymond lives in a really bad place. And doesn't see like how men are supposed to treat women in the right way, like he doesn't have a father figure.

-Faye

Faye, like many respondents, reported that she only really developed close contacts with QRED students in high school. Having become close with Toni, she was introduced to Toni's extended QRED network, and as a result was introduced to Raymond, a high achieving QRED student who lived with his aunt because he had lost both his mother and father at a young age. Despite reporting that she, "thought he was gross at first" and that she did not like him, as she remembers it, he eventually reached out to her with a text message. Meeting up at a party at Faye's sisters house in a wealthy part of the city, Faye realized that maybe she liked Raymond. The details of the beginning of their relationship, and its ups and downs, were hard to follow and consumed almost two pages of the interview transcript. Below is an abridged excerpt that gets across the gist of the story, as I was able to understand it.

Faye: We all hung out at my sisters' and it was fun. Then we hung out another night and...I think we kissed but I still didn't like him. But then I started liking him when we hooked up at a dance and danced the whole night. The next morning we went out to brunch, and he asked me out and I was really excited. Then we dated and it was like a little puppy love relationship and not intense at all for the two months. And then he broke up with me. And I was pretty upset but I wasn't actually 'coz I didn't like him that much. But then we got back together 'coz like I don't even know why, but we did....But we got back together, and then like a week later we had like our first sleep over. And he told me that he loved me, and I loved him also. And he was my first boyfriend, so I didn't really know what I was doing. But after that things started getting bad. And since we actually felt something, he felt that he had to control me and like...both his parents killed themselves, and his aunt was really mean to him, and like he really doesn't have anyone, so he kind of pushed me away and like, was kind of a dick but he was also controlling. He didn't like me going to parties [and being around people using substances] and made that very clear and got mad and broke up with me but we kept like hooking up. And like he kept telling me he loved me, and it was really stupid, but around prom he got a new girlfriend and told me he didn't want to talk to me ever again and that's the worst I've probably ever felt. Um... and I

just didn't understand why at first. All I wanted was for him to tell me he loved me...

Leaving aside the volatility of their relationship, it was clear that Faye cared deeply about Raymond and that she had been hurt when he ended their relationship which had lasted for almost a year. From what I could surmise from the interview, what Faye resented was his insistence that she distance herself from substances, something she characterizes as "controlling" behavior. The link she draws between this behavior and his background would be further elaborated later in the interview.

Apart from the internal issues that marked her relationship, Faye noted that race intervened as well. Walking around school with Raymond hand-in-hand drew looks from her white peers. Eventually Faye felt as though her relationship had given her a reputation.

Faye: People would make jokes about it.

Chris: How so?

Faye: Oh, in school, people completely... I'd date Raymond one time and they say I love black guys. That's like the way that our school works. It means that I'm the white girl that dates black guys. It was like, I'm gonna date him because he's black. Like that's just the way it worked.

Before long Faye realized that being the "white girl that dates black guys" brought with it assumptions about their relationship that spoke to larger fears about black males. Noting both looks and comments, Faye related how a rumor spread about Raymond and the nature of their relationship.

Faye: (sighs) I don't know, with your big black boyfriend, people were scared of him if they messed with me. Or if... yeah, 'coz he'd mess with them. I feel like I've heard that people thought like I was getting hit 'coz it's like the huge angry black boyfriend. I don't know. Like...I don't know. Like people would like... I think Raymond's um... Raymond's really angry [but] he'd never hit me. Like once I broke some blood vessels on my face from my medicine that I was taking, and someone made a joke which isn't funny like if he hit me... and I feel like

maybe they wouldn't have said that if he was white. And they were just like making an assumption about black guys.

Despite coherently describing the injustice of these assumptions Faye qualified her statement by saying that perhaps these assumptions were grounded in reality because “maybe because they see more violent acts so they think it's alright, but I don't really think that makes a difference.” Later in the interview she would be less ambivalent.

Apart from noticing the reactions of other whites and their racial assumptions Faye, like Eliza, had noticed that the Belltown police treated her black friends differently. Riding in a car with Sam, a black friend, she was pulled over.

Faye: I got pulled over with Sam, and they handcuffed him. And put him in the car and didn't do anything to me. They said he smelt like alcohol. And I said, “Well, of course you're gonna handcuff the black kid.” But... like... I mean that was the wrong thing to say to a cop, but...

Chris: Did you say that to the cop?

Faye: Yeah. He was like, “That's not the reason.” And then Sam was... when he was in the car was like, “So how much do you make a year for arresting black kids?” And the cop was like “Seventy-five thousand.” And he was like, “Well, just for the black kids then.” And it's just like I feel like they did that 'coz he was black. If he looks like a rich white kid then they would have like treated him better.

As Faye tells it, the police handled Sam differently than they handled her or how she believed that they would handle one of her white friends, something that prompted her to speak out. Reflecting on the assumptions of white friends and disparate police treatment, Faye divulged in our interview that before she started dating Raymond she too held racialized assumptions about black people.

Faye: Yeah. Um, I don't know. Honestly I think I was kinda afraid of black people because I only saw them in the city. And to me when I was younger, I guess the city kind of reminded me of guns and such. But I also didn't think that um...black boys were cute, but I mean obviously no, I think they are. But I never really had an experience with them, so I guess I was just kinda... didn't know.

Chris: And then since you've been here?

Faye: Since I've been here, like... I know...I view them more as.... this sounds bad I guess, but I view them probably more as people than I did before I came... to school, and like it's more normal to see black people now. I mean I'm scared when I'm in the city, but I'd be scared if I saw like a white thug also, like if he had a gun...I [do] associate guns with black people because of like the rap music and... I don't as much anymore, but I did back then.

Like some of her HSI peers (e.g. Jessie and Martin), Faye admitted that she too held racial assumptions—"the city" is symbolically linked with both blackness and danger—that were complicated due to her experiences. Her admission that she "views them more as people" since developing connections, speaks to the insidious impact of social separation.

Throughout the interview, Faye modulated from being somewhat truculent when we spoke about Raymond to being more forthcoming when he was left out of the conversation. Her hostility did not seem to flow from the interview itself but the unpleasant memories of the demise of her relationship. Trying to move the questions away from Raymond, I asked Faye to consider what Belltown must be like for QRED student and if she felt as though she was privileged. Presenting questions in an abstract way lessened her defenses, something noticeable in her body language as she would uncross her arms or stop pulling her knees into her chest. Gathering her experiences together and speaking in general, Faye answered that being white did provide her privilege and noted that "QRED students are probably discouraged when they come here because it's like a school of like all these rich white kids, that they feel like have an advantage over them already...." She also argued that although she did not agree that Belltown kids lives were as easy as some of her QRED friends assumed she acknowledged that unlike them, she had put up with relatively little struggle and had gotten what she wanted from birth.

Although Faye seemed more comfortable when the conversation moved away from Raymond, before long she moved it back to him once again. Faye described that after her relationship with Raymond ended she was angry and depressed and sought to make sense of what had happened by visiting his home community. Commissioning a QRED friend, Toni, as a guide, she visited one of the more depressed neighborhoods of the city.⁷² Most of the HSI students that visited the city tended to walk away from the experience feeling as though the vision that they had of QRED students' neighborhoods was a distortion. They were made aware that there could be danger, but the kinds of assumptions that proliferate from a steady dose of popular culture, news media and social separation were largely rendered false or at least complicated. Students met families, saw active businesses, and for the most part felt safe while also noting the class disparities encoded in the physical landscape. Faye, however, took home a different message.

Faye: Basically, I went the city because I was kinda like depressed at that time and wanted to get away from Belltown. And I don't know if I thought this subconsciously or not, but since Raymond had lived there, I kind of wanted to see what he had lived like for most of his life and why he was the way that I saw him. Toni pointed out where someone was shot, "Yeah, someone got shot here." And she was like, "Oh it's sad but it was normal." If Raymond was a white kid from Belltown, he wouldn't be who he is because he is how he is, and controlling, and strange, and weird, and like mean because of where he grew up and the harsh environment he lived in his whole life, and because he's had to deal with, like the city life. And he lives in a really bad place. And doesn't see like how men are supposed to treat women in the right way, like he doesn't have a father figure.

Angry about how her relationship had ended Faye had engaged in a form of geographic psychoanalysis, a feat she accomplished through seeing in Raymond's community the problems she believed existed in Raymond. Although Faye's story clearly demonstrates that her romantic connection with a QRED student had given her insights about race and

⁷² I could not get clarity from Faye about whether the neighborhood that she visited was Raymond's neighborhood or if she asked Toni to take her to a dangerous part of the city.

whiteness, in the end those insights seemed neutralized given the inundation of racialized assumptions that characterized her vision of Raymond's neighborhood. Faye's story emphasizes the overlap between HSI and LSI students and the ease with which any student from Belltown could draw on racialized visions to make sense of their experiences. Faye's case suggests that close contact does not always complicate white students' visions and although she acknowledged that her relationship with Raymond did force her to recognize her latent prejudices, the painful nature of that relationship found her slipping right back to those prejudices.

People just assume that everyone has that same, equal opportunity therefore if other people couldn't do it then they just didn't try hard or something, so they don't see any reason to change the situation. They just think: 'Oh, I work hard and if I could do it, they could.'

-Dalton

Dalton's was the final interview that I conducted for this study and initially I was worried that our interview might not be transcribed given how soft spoken he was. Clad in black and with his hands folded in front of him on the table, I was eager to interview this young man, unique for being one of very few males who dates across racial lines at Belltown high. Dalton's girlfriend, Rose, the daughter of a white mother and a Mexican father was one of the only Latinas at Belltown, and as a QRED student who was not black, she was often mistaken for a resident student. Being both an outsider but also frequently mistaken for a resident student had given Rose a unique insider/outsider vantage point that allowed her unvarnished insights into how white students thought about race. In my discussions with Rose, she related how frequently white students would talk about QRED students in front of her, thinking that she was not a QRED

student. When she would be paired up with white students for class assignments, for example, or overhear conversations in the locker room she reported being deeply disturbed about white classmates' assumptions and how they seemed to revolve around the dangerousness of QRED students' neighborhoods, their speech and comportment, and their intelligence and motivation.

Dalton kept how he became close with Rose vague and I did not push him to elaborate—unlike Faye, Dalton was clearly more reserved. From what I could surmise Rose and Dalton had met in class. Working on a project together turned into a friendship that had lasted for a year or so and gradually turned into a serious romantic relationship. Like many of the HSI students that I spoke with, making a close contact with Rose resulted in Dalton developing friendships with other QRED students. Eating lunch with these students, seeing them on the weekends and afterschool had allowed for Dalton to talk with them about their experiences. When I asked him what they talked about, he mentioned that they did discuss the experience of being a black student in a predominantly white school.

Dalton: Um, it varies. I mean it's like I was talking with um, Aelicia and Tayshawn and we ended kind of talking to them about what like, what they liked and disliked most in coming here. I don't know, like other times like it would just be like a casual comment and it tends to get into a discussion or something. I'm trying to remember what they said to this: um, they were just telling, they said that like they said something about like it being like different here and then like how they like hated it when they first came here and stuff like that...They only knew one or two people and a lot of time the teachers like assumed that they all knew each other and they treat them somewhat differently. For example, they always assumed like in terms of the subject itself, they would always assume that the city schools covered the same curriculum that Belltown did and they just never even bothered to ask and they just assumed that they were at the same level and um, I don't know...they just said that people for the most part, just assumed too many things about them that weren't hardly ever you know, true, and....yeah, I don't know. This kind of adjustment then they just talked about how like the, it was hard to kind of be motivated to get up really early and go to some place

where you don't know anyone and where everyone kind of misjudges you. And you know you kind of – you have like – I don't know, that she was saying you know that that's the reason why we walk slowly to class you know, and stuff like that.

When I asked Dalton what other problems QRED students might face beyond the assumptions made about them, he described how it would be hard to fit into a place where everyone seems to see things the same way. Perhaps more than any other respondent Dalton seemed aware that subtle cultural differences could serve to form an implicit bond between white teachers and white students pointing out that “everyone's kind of coming from the same place and they have the same perspectives and so they understand each other” adding with a sly smile, “there's like a lot of teachers here, I think, who even like went to this school and everything.”

In talking with Rose, and the QRED students he met through her, he was struck by how different the narrative of race was when he listened to people of color. When I asked him if race came up in his classes he said, “Like in the history class, but not really. It doesn't really come up and when it does, it seems weird because it's largely white kids talking about it.” Noting that his peers' views on race seemed “forced” he pointed out that race had to do with perspective and that typically Belltown students were only given one view. “Like you know, it's not like we have a good mix of people, lots of different perspectives. It's like white kids trying to speak on behalf of like a QRED student, you know? Which is strange.” Sensitized to how his classmates spoke and acknowledging that they, “may not have really met you know, many black people or you know, other cultures or ever anything,” Dalton described how racial assumptions tended to proliferate as white students took “little bits of information that they do have from like culture and turn them into stereotypes,” noting that these assumptions were “very subtle stuff, but

definitely, definitely there.” When I asked him if he thought that dialogues between QRED students and Belltown residents would be productive he said:

Dalton: I think dialogues with QRED should be more a part of the curriculum and people should be more aware of it and um, like a lot of people think you know, kind of like, racism it doesn’t exist anymore but it’s definitely still there. And they are not aware of this still huge achievement gap and everything and like, um, I don’t know, people just don’t realize how like from Belltown, they don’t realize how privileged they are and how much – how you know, how they have so many more chances and opportunities, and they think it’s equal and what not. I [wouldn’t want to] make QRED uncomfortable and all, but at the same time I think a lot of them would want people to know because they are uncomfortable.

In many ways Dalton’s critical perspective came to him through what Rose learned from being at Belltown. Having attended a under-resourced school in the city and feeling deeply ambivalent about leaving her friends to come to Belltown, she had not only witnessed first hand some of the prejudices of her white classmates, but she had also developed a keen eye for the resource inequities that existed between Belltown and the city schools. According to Dalton, this inequity was the basis of many of their conversations (note how he references the “achievement gap” above) as Rose described her former school and articulated resentment about white Belltown students’ lack of unawareness of their privilege. On one date, Rose showed Dalton the movie *Waiting for Superman*, which spoke to the issues of educational inequality. Dalton described this as eye opening and summarizing his conversations with Rose, and his take on the movie she showed him, he said:

Dalton: And like, um, yeah they just – there’s like no opportunities. People just don’t expect kids from like, poor neighborhoods to do well so they just don’t give them the chances and its a prophecy in a way and meanwhile the other kids here they are given all the stuff...like you know, people just assume that everyone has that same, equal opportunity therefore if other people couldn’t do it then they just didn’t try hard or something, so they don’t see any reason to change the situation. They just think: ‘Oh, I work hard and if I could do it, they could.’ So you know,

people aren't aware like, especially you know, like white students aren't aware of how different and how much harder it is in different areas.

Eventually, Dalton, like the other students that I spoke with ventured into the city to meet Rose's parents. Like many of his peers, his trip was uneventful. When I asked him if he was nervous he reported that he was, but only because he wanted to make a good impression on Rose's mother and father. Having engaged Rose about inequality and the assumptions of his white classmates, he noted that he, "didn't want to seem too white or anything," and that he did not want to, "seem like I'm a Belltown kid or anything like that." When I asked him what this meant he said, "I didn't want to look like I was a nervous suburban kid coming to an urban center for you know, like um, I just didn't – also I didn't want to come across as ignorant." Worried about how to impart to Rose's parents that he was aware of his privilege⁷³ without seeming to take it for granted, Dalton resolved to stay quiet and observe. As he described it, "I've talked to Rose a lot like how she you know, ended up at Belltown, I just didn't want to seem like, I didn't want to be like complaining you know? I didn't want to be Belltown."

For Dalton, the trip to Rose's neighborhood was less enlightening than the negotiation that had taken place with his mother beforehand as he tried to gain her permission to go into the city. As with Eliza, Dalton's mother was nervous about

⁷³ Dalton's conversations with Rose had given him a sharp sense of educational inequities. The following quote shows that he has started to recognize, through Rose, and the privilege that Belltown students enjoy but do not see.

Dalton: Just look at this school, like if you compare this to a school in the city like Rose would have had to go to and it's just like a wreck. You can see white kids complaining about Belltown, you know and was it like the third best in the state or whatever, you know? I mean just if you look at everything, it's you know, you can see the privilege you know, like the, some of the really, really good teachers; you have like all the like kind of supplies you need we, you know, and like it's very, it's kind of, you guys kind of make sure like 90 percent or something, get into a college you know?

allowing him to go to Rose's neighborhood. Arguing with his mother revealed her racial assumptions and prejudices, something that deeply disturbed Dalton.

Dalton: My mom, I don't know, like when I first mentioned like going out with Rose, and that I wanted to go see her, I didn't mention that she was in the city 'til like the very end and after she kind of agreed to everything else, and then she got very turned off to the idea and that's when it kind led to arguments...I like had to say where she lived last, you know. She then like, she just like assumed that, because it was part of the QRED program, it was probably like some dangerous area and...she was just saying, "Oh, you don't know the area," you know, but "I've seen it and I've had experience in like you know, bad neighborhoods and you don't know what it's like" or whatever. That's what basically she was saying. Um, but it's also funny when I showed her a picture of them it was fine – I think it made a difference that Rose wasn't black, actually. Like and that her mom's white; it was weird, she kind of reacted to it a little more calmly, which is kind of a disturbing thing, you know, like she's like not you know, openly racist personally; you know? It was just like she assumed because she's, they're a part of the QRED program where they're from, you know, poorer and therefore you know, it's a dangerous area therefore you know, it's gonna be you know, gang-prone or like you know, crime going on and like she's like jumped to all these conclusions you know, simply using Rose's neighborhood.

Having made connections with QRED students and wanting to go into the city, had created a unique situation with his parents, one that he had never had to face when asking permission to visit friends in Belltown. The quote above contains a profound (and profoundly sad) lesson. In trying to gain permission to visit his girlfriend he had to confront his mother's assumptions about space, race and danger. Having anticipated this, he mentioned where Rose lived last. This artful technique did not work. To Dalton's surprise, what finally did convince his mother to allow him to travel into the city was a photograph that revealed his mother's assumptions. As Dalton points out, he did not think about his mother as openly racist, but there was something unmistakably problematic about her assumptions—assumptions that until he started dating Rose had remained concealed.

Dalton's experiences were similar to those of many HSI students. He began to think about his own privilege and think about the subtle ways race divides and excludes. He notes that he always thought of himself as non-racist, but concedes that developing close contacts and really listening to Rose and her friends speak had made him apprehend race in a different way.

Dalton: I was aware before but not nearly to the same extent and like you know, I'd like to think that I was always fairly – I mean I'm sure everyone says so, but I hope I'm not racist but like no, definitely, dating Rose, I've at least understood their perspective much, much better....Just being with her and around you know, all the other QRED kids and like seeing the stuff that you know, they expose me to is – it's inspiring, actually. Like Rose wants to get into education and it's inspired me to do similar stuff.

Many of Dalton's HSI peers stated qualified support for affirmative action, but Dalton's perspective was unambiguous. When confronted with the prospect of taking race into account, Dalton agreed that this was appropriate. As he reasons below, a situation in which opportunity and privilege are not equally distributed calls for redistribution.

Dalton: I think [affirmative action] is good. I definitely don't want to get rid of it. Um, I don't know. I'm just kind of generally thinking it's good because it's you know, definitely it provides more opportunities, so....I do support it and I get very frustrated when white kids complain about it, you know. Because it's like you know, you have enough privilege already and you're not being disadvantaged by them doing affirmative action. So, yeah, I think it's good...just- I hate hearing white kids complaining, it's like: "Oh, because I'm not you know, of a certain ethnicity or race or whatever, like it lessens my chances." I say, "No, it doesn't, you have so many more opportunities as it is, you know, it's barely bringing them up just a little bit more." And like it's just very frustrating to hear.

What Dalton learned through his connection with Rose was enhanced by the fact that she was a politically active student who was aware of race and class inequities. Unlike his LSI peers who seemed largely unaware of the privilege that flowed to them, Dalton was made aware not only of the subtle nature of inequality but also the vast educational inequity that finds students in towns like Belltown better resourced than

students in the city. He mentions that he never thought of himself as a racist, but also acknowledges the awareness that he developed from his contact with QRED students, awareness that he seemed to convert into a willingness to support ameliorative action to address disparity.

Conclusion:

The six cases described above are representative of the twenty HSI respondents that I interviewed. In many ways their experiences did not represent a clear break from their LSI peers. Justin, for example, like many of these respondents, clung uncomfortably to the desire to be beyond race while at the same time recognizing that race mattered. Faye, who had experienced first hand the stereotypes and assumptions that can accompany an interracial relationship, heartily embraced notions of cultural deficit. Many of the respondents that I interviewed had viewed the racialized social structure in ways different than their LSI peers, but their perspectives were still inflected with the racial logic that results from their social position within a field structured in whiteness. Despite the overlap, four general themes emerged that served to set HSI students apart: (1) HSI students tended to have a nuanced view of the way culture and comfort mattered at Belltown high and understood that benefit accrued to them from being part of the majority; (2) HSI students tended to have had experiences in which they realize that racial stereotypes mattered. Some acknowledged assumptions within themselves or their family members; others observed differences in the way QRED students were treated by teachers or in the community; (3) HSI students tended to be aware of the resource (largely economic capital) differences that existed between the

Belltown community and the QRED sending communities; and (4) Many HSI students (but not all) who had made the trip into the city tended to find that notions of urban danger and cultural pathology were problematic.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In this report I have presented a microanalysis of one institution, a predominantly white high school, in order to investigate the ways in which whiteness is reproduced and resisted among adolescents. The data presented above specify our understanding of whiteness as a racial category by identifying both the institutional and interactional mechanisms that lead to certain enactments of whiteness. In doing so it enriches the sociological literature on whiteness while also suggesting ways in which educational institutions such as Belltown can be reimagined and pedagogical practice altered in order to make them more racially democratic spaces that can illuminate rather than conceal the ways in which race continues to structure social life. This section will consider both the sociological and educational implications of the research presented above.

Contributions to the Sociology of Whiteness:

Initially the literature on whiteness, such as McIntosh's (1989) seminal "Unpacking the Knapsack of Privilege," focused on defining whiteness and revealing it to be a salient identity largely invisible to whites. Enthusiasm for these early insights often led to the treatment of whiteness as a monolithic identity, something revealed to be problematic as researchers started to consider the ways in which whiteness is unstable, contingent and inflected by other identities (Twine and Gallagher 2008). Researchers like Hartigan (1999), questioned this monolithic view. His class comparative ethnography of whiteness in three neighborhoods in Detroit revealed variation in how

whites perceive of themselves as racial actors. Whereas Hartigan demonstrates variation within one city based on class differences, the data presented above demonstrates how whites' perception of their racial identity can differ within class, based on how white students are situated relative to classmates of color who enter their school and community from without. By showing that whites who share many of the same objective characteristics can develop very different perspectives on what it means to be white we further our understanding of whiteness as a contextual identity; far from monolithic, there was great variation among the white adolescents studied at Belltown when it came to their self-awareness and the ability to locate whiteness as a privileged identity within a larger racial hierarchy.

One of the major complaints within the sociological literature on whiteness is the relative lack of empirical data (McDermott and Sampson 2005). This study also contributes to the literature by offering empirical data about the mechanics of whiteness: how whites come to either recognize themselves as privileged racial actors within a larger racial hierarchy or not—as noted above there can be substantial variation even within relatively similar populations. The findings presented in this study are not generalizable, but, because they were generated through micro-analysis they are finely detailed and can elucidate the findings of larger scale studies. For example, Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll (2009) relied on survey data to develop an estimate of how extensive the three primary enactments of whiteness are within the white population. They estimate that only 15 percent of whites exhibit all three of the enactments they identified as primary: invisibility, lack of an understanding of privilege and colorblindness. Their study gives

us a bird's eye view of whiteness but can tell us little about how the identity is lived and negotiated on the ground.

Although Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll's study is intriguing because it suggests that there is more variation within the white population than most scholars previously allowed, it can only speculate about what the findings mean and the complexities of how variation occurs within the white population. When considered in tandem with the research presented in this dissertation we can better understand the results of this study. For example, in their study, whites attached far less importance to their racial identity than African Americans. Relatively speaking, whiteness was largely invisible to whites. Here the authors can observe a statistical trend but can only hypothesize the social reality behind the numbers. This study suggests that the nature and quality of interactions between white students and racial others impacted how these students see themselves as racial actors. Those who observed from afar tended to have a less nuanced understanding of whiteness than those who were made more aware of racial dynamics through their interactions with QRED students.

When Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll look at perceptions of advantage their data seem contradictory. When asked about white advantage and African American disadvantage the majority of whites claimed that this could be accounted for by both "prejudice and discrimination" and "differences in family upbringing" (414). The research presented here can offer one way to disentangle these puzzling results and make sense of what at first seems contradictory (simultaneously blaming African Americans for inequality and acknowledging discrimination). At Belltown the curriculum and institution promulgated a vision of whiteness as the self-interested and irrational pursuit

of racial privilege, something largely confined to the past and the south. LSI white students who learn about prejudice and discrimination in classes on civil rights and slavery might very well acknowledge the fact of prejudice while deflecting its relevance to them using a discourse of class and space. At the same time, their casual observations of QRED students' cultural enactments often led them to embrace cultural deficit as an explanation for the racial differences in academic outcomes that marked students' experiences at Belltown. When extracted from their study and considered in light of the specific institutional factors at Belltown, the seemingly contradictory dual recognition of discrimination and the embrace of differences in family upbringing ceases to be mystifying.

Hartmann, Gerteis and Croll's study finds high levels of support for the contention that whites profess colorblindness (this was true among African Americans as well). In this case, my findings can be used to point out the complexity of what is a relatively straightforward but superficial finding in their study. As my adolescent respondents demonstrate, colorblindness has to be understood as contextual and nuanced, for some it is a profession of fact, for others it is an complex aspiration. In all cases, the intoxicating power of this ideology served to structure their responses. Justin, for example, one of the HSI students described in Chapter Five, had noticed and clearly thought about how his life chances and community were structured by race. He even acknowledged that he would probably get further in life than his QRED friend Julius but was pained to disentangle his assessment of the world as it is and how he would like it to be. Despite noticing the power of race, his commitment to colorblindness undercut the development of a more critical response and attenuated his willingness to consider

racially based ameliorative action. I am certain that Justin would respond that he was colorblind if given a survey, but to assume then that he underestimated or overlooked the structural power of race—that he believed that race did not matter—would be to grossly misunderstand the complexity that characterizes Justin’s racial understanding. His awareness is best understood as existing within a liminal state. We do not know if this will change, if the critical view he has developed through interaction with Julius will render his commitment to colorblindness untenable or if he will submit to the intoxicating simplicity inherent in trying to ignore the ways in which social life is textured by race. What we do know is that he is not colorblind; he is instead stuck where perhaps many whites reside: grappling with the anxiety and tension of reality and ideology. By contributing empirical, micro level research on the social processes, struggles and contradictions that can mark the development of whiteness we can begin to map the architecture of whiteness—its texture, discontinuities and tensions—and appreciate its complexity and its contextual nature. This research not only helps to fill the empirical penumbra in the literature but it can also enrich other empirical studies—especially those that are generalizable but lack on-the-ground detail.

This study also suggests that Bourdieu’s field analysis can be a fruitful way to approach investigations of whiteness. In the case of Belltown, when the students enter the building they do not enter neutral ground. The development of racial awareness among white students in this institution takes place in a space in which the particular array of capital valued in the field conspired to render whiteness invisible. Not only were certain ways of talking about race dominant (e.g. colorblindness, and southerization), but the factors and attributes that the faculty acknowledged to be desirable—the factors that

would earn a student the “good kid” label—were often the cultural characteristics of white students (or were more easily executed by them). Here capital inhered in particular ways of comporting the body and modulating the voice, styles of dress and the ability to anticipate or even joke with teachers. White students tended to behold these expectations as doxa; they did not see them as reflections of white culture as much as common sense school behavior despite the fact that none of them indicated anything about intelligence, analytical ability or investment in school. In other words, these students failed to see how their school was structured in ways that benefitted them.

As this study suggests, failing to apprehend the cultural polarity of the field has consequences. Being white in an institution saturated in white culture renders whiteness invisible as there is little cultural tension in the field for white students and therefore they are not made to reflect on the particularity of their practices. Furthermore, because colorblindness saturated faculty practice and the curriculum, the existence, operation and advantages of whiteness at Belltown High and in the larger predominantly white Belltown community were obscured. If the distribution of cultural capital at Belltown served to conceal whiteness it also served to create contrasts among those students less equipped to transact it. From the perspective of white students, QRED students’ inability to conform to expectations was a choice that indicated anti-school sentiment and cultural deficit, after all if certain behaviors are simply commonsense school based behaviors—as opposed to a reflection of one groups’ ability to impose their culture on the field—then the students who do not transact them do not care about school. The fact that the field was structured in whiteness speaks to white privilege and power, but, as demonstrated above, the congruence and contrasts that result as different students participate in the

field only further serve to obscure white privilege and reanimate notions of difference. Whites who perceive that they are competing on equal ground perceive their success as a result of their personal endeavor, while the struggles of QRED students are framed as resulting from race-based pathology. The fact that both LSI and HSI white students exist in this field makes HSI white students' ability to generate critical insights that much more impressive—unlike their LSI peers, these students found ways, even if partial or contradictory, to begin to question and critique something the field conspires to hide.

Using field analysis allowed me to move beyond seeing enactments like white normativity, post-cultural individualism and colorblindness as methods of consciously defending white privilege, but instead as dispositions generated almost imperceptibly as agents confront structures. Every white student that I interviewed professed a sincere belief in the value of meritocracy and colorblindness. Despite these pronouncements, the array of capital in the field reinforced the racial hierarchy. Field analysis, then, has the advantage of making sense of race in ways that speak to the contemporary colorblind racial formation—it charts a middle way between credulousness and cynicism by taking seriously both the damage that colorblindness does and the genuine moral thrust behind it. By being attentive to the dynamics of the field we can move beyond simplistic pronouncements that seek to explain white enactments as self-conscious methods of preventing the erosion of privilege and instead appreciate how racial logic is made and remade even among populations that earnestly profess a desire to move beyond it. Race adheres as much in objective structures as it does in agents, and therefore Bourdieu's field analysis proves to be a useful tool in that it allows research to focus on the interplay of both.

As described in Chapter One, although Bourdieu is often understood to be a theorist of reproduction, he was just as preoccupied with the question of how social actors generate critical responses to the social structures that they confront. Following Bourdieu, this dissertation has isolated distance and interaction as dominant factors that serve to refract the experience of white students who all exist within the same objective structures. As described in Chapter Four, those students that simply observe QRED students from afar tended to develop little awareness of the racial hierarchy and how it privileged them while also tending toward cultural explanations for QRED students' struggles. Chapter Five presented the stories of students who engage in far more meaningful interactions in three different domains. Although their experiences and the understandings that resulted were mixed, these students evidenced far more critical understandings of race, inequality and white privilege.

Multiple scholars have investigated the impact of social isolation in the lives of people of color (Liebow 1967; Massey and Denton 1993; Stack 1974; Wilson 1987, Kenny 2000). Alford A. Young Jr. (2004), for example, interviewed poor black men on the Near West Side of Chicago and concluded that their worldviews were textured by their relative levels of social isolation. The most socially isolated men were unable to elaborate a critical vision of the ways in which their life chances were circumscribed by their social position, instead favoring individual explanations for their inability to realize social mobility. Those men who had contact with people and circumstances outside their neighborhood generated more nuanced visions of the operation of the social system. As Young states, "the key factor in providing the men with the capacity to express complex

views on matters of stratification and inequality was the depth and length of their encounters with the world outside the neighborhood” (2004:136).

It is important to investigate the impacts of social isolation on people of color, but the research presented above has tried to consider the converse, to, as Amanda Lewis (2001) encourages, “[give]...attention to the flip side of the problem—the persistent racial isolation of suburban whites” (795). Whites, especially those who live in the suburbs that ring the center city, live in profound racial isolation (Logan and Stultz 2011). Susan Eaton (2001) has interviewed students of color who were participants in a program similar to QRED that buses students of color from the city to predominantly white suburban schools. One respondent recalled that, “[Suburban whites] were so isolated, we were strange to them. I didn’t understand at the time how really isolated they were” (Eaton 2001:49). Unlike the circumstances for many people of color, whites’ advantaged position often allows them to choose to inhabit racially homogeneous spaces (Krysan and Bader 2007). In addition, most whites are also afforded the privilege of moderating how much contact they will have with people of color: what neighborhoods will be traversed; what cultural experiences will be consumed; and who will be associated with and under what circumstances (Sullivan 2006). Just as Young finds that poor black men’s worldviews of the social structure are differently produced by their contact with people and experiences outside their neighborhood, this study concludes that the same set of processes may operate among whites. Those that have meaningful contacts with people and circumstances outside of their racially homogeneous social milieus may develop more nuanced racial worldviews than whites who do not have these contacts and simply observe from afar. The respondents who did develop close contacts were not always able

to articulate their views coherently, but despite their struggles they managed to say uncommon things, things their peers without close contacts did not say. For example, when I asked Lance, an athlete who spent most of his time with QRED students, about white culture he simply replied, “white culture is power.” Later in the interview when I asked him if being white is an advantage he said, “yeah. I see how for them it feels like we own the school.” Lance does not use the word “culture” or “capital” and certainly does not need to know anything about Bourdieu’s field analysis to speak what he has learned from his close connections—the school is not neutral ground; some feel a greater sense of comfort, correspondence and ownership than others and this works to their advantage.

This study also suggests the danger inherent in bringing students together in ways that encourage casual observation as opposed to meaningful interaction. As the responses of the students in Chapter Four suggest, detached observation decontextualized QRED students and encouraged white students to theorize about their lives, values and plight—observations that often reconfirmed stereotypes about the racial other while further concealing whiteness. Sacks and Lindholm’s (2002) qualitative research on straight, white, college-age males suggests that social distance is a key factor in shaping whites’ understanding of social inequality. Their respondents’ social status at the zenith of the social structure allowed them to “ignore or simply not see the experience of non-dominants” (Sacks and Lindholm 2002:139). In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, they also tended to universalize their experiences by assuming that everyone has the access to the same resources and opportunities. The authors name this tendency “cultural imperialism” and recognize it as a byproduct of a series of social processes that

essentially preclude their respondents from having to reflect on their racial/social identity and the privilege that flows from it. This study takes this insight further by pointing to how bringing students together can arguably make the byproducts of cultural imperialism worse. At Belltown, instead of evidence to the contrary, casual contact with QRED students seemed to exacerbate notions of racial difference and conceal the structural power of whiteness.

Asians at Belltown: A Shadow Comparison

Throughout this study the quality and depth of connections between students has played a critical role as I have made the case that there is a difference between observation and close interaction. I cannot estimate how robust the effects of contact are, but Asian students, who to this point have not entered into the analysis, provide a useful shadow comparison that can shed light on the limitations of the interaction approach to understanding white students' perceptions of race. Clearly there are limitations to comparing black and Asian students. While they share a non-dominant racial identity at Belltown, these two groups differ greatly across a series of indexes (e.g. class, history and geographical location). Unlike QRED/white relationships at Belltown, almost all white student respondents reported having a close Asian friend or contact. By briefly looking at these relationships we can see both confirmation of the notion that interaction matters and we can begin to get a sense of the limitations of this approach.

Many of the white students interviewed for this study bestowed "honorary white" status on their Asian classmates, and in interviews with both white and Asian students, it became clear that the latter are still marked by their race albeit in different ways than

black students (Tuan 1998). At Belltown High, white students' contention that Asian students were simply another shade of white was most likely facilitated by the fact that Asian students live in the community, share class status and have parents with similar levels of educational attainment—these factors made Asians seem more similar when contrasted to QRED students who are predominantly black. As Alyssia, a quiet senior, observed, “I feel like we’ve kind of accepted them, maybe at least in Belltown, more as Americans than we have with black people.” Ashlee’s description of Asians characterizes the sentiment of most of her peers. Asians were more like white students because they were “just chilling,” they were “normal.”

Ashlee: Well a lot of the Asians I know just have really stressful parents. But those are a couple of girls that I’m friends with. Asians just generally are just chilling, normal, I guess, they are the closest...to white.

White students may have felt as though Asian students were just another shade of white, but the members of the Asian focus group, while they tended to report feeling far more integrated than my QRED respondents, still felt marginalized at times by stereotypes that framed them as having overbearing parents and hailing from hyper-success driven cultures that obsessively demand high performance in math and science. There was no Asian achievement gap, but these students noted how their racial status was often made salient in class. Although they agreed that the stereotype that they were culturally predisposed to do well in school could work to their benefit most reported that these cultural expectations created significant stress. One Asian student named Min noted how one teacher pitted two Asian students in different classes against each other, something he did not do to white students, assuming that the competition for academic excellence would inspire them. Bill reported that despite struggling academically he

always got the feeling that teachers held him to higher expectations than other students because he is Asian. “I’ve always had that feeling [that] as hard as a teacher may try, they’re gonna hold me to a different standard and that’s mostly because of my ethnicity.”

White students also tended to view Asian students as culturally predestined for success. Alison’s comment best characterizes this view, “Chinese parents in the past did push really hard and in China, I think they still do push really hard to be the best at everything and the best you can. If they get like a 99 percent, they’re like ‘No! My life is over!’ you know?” Although this stereotypical striving took on almost mythical dimensions in the minds of many white students, these views were tempered and complicated through close interaction with Asian students. Overall, they were suspicious of these stereotypes and more cautious about generalizing about Asian students (especially when compared to QRED students). As Grace, whose best friend was Chinese-American, noted: “I feel there’s a certain stereotypical smartness [to being Asian], but I also know a bunch of Asians who aren’t.” Amanda, a high performing student on the math team who had multiple Asian friends, simply waved off the notion that all Asians were predisposed to do well, saying simply, “and it’s not really true, for most of them.” Noel⁷⁴ and Hans also had first hand experiences that moderated Asian stereotypes.

Noel: You have those stereotypes, but like you grew up with these people. I mean it’s been sort of deconstructed in my mind ‘cause I’ve seen Asians do bad in school, I’ve also seen Asians do really well in school, so the two counterbalance and it shows you the duality of that, but like when you have, you have to think about it, you have to consciously realize that like, or consciously believe that Asians are smarter somehow as indicated by test results or something. But if no one had said that, they would just be white.

⁷⁴ Noel had dated an Asian classmate.

Hans: I actually do have a lot of Asian friends that do have really intense parents. Um, and I think they do feel more pressure because I think that people sort of hold a perception that Asian kids are supposed to be really smart, um, and also specifically in math and science and not necessarily in the social sciences. Like, a lot of them really sort of feel like they need to be high-achieving and it's hard to know... a lot of them will joke about that but it's hard to know if they're just joking like "ha-ha" and not... because I have a lot of Asian friends that aren't super high achieving and it's hard to know if they're like just joking about it or they're actually like underneath feel sort of self-conscious about it.

When compared to white/QRED connections, meaningful white/Asian connections were far more frequent. As Jenny noted: "I myself think of race in the context of black kids very differently than Asians. Like, I have a lot more exposure to and contact with and experience with and I'm friends with a lot of them... I mean I think I did really think of Asians as white." We must be careful when reading too much into comparisons between Asians and black students,⁷⁵ but given these limitations, we again see the power of the depth of interaction. White students had seen for themselves that Asian stereotypes were flawed, and, as Hans notes, potentially damaging. Social interaction cannot eradicate stereotypes—these students were aware of them and they were propagated in some classes—but it can cast doubt on them.

Asian/white contacts also suggest the limitations of viewing interaction as a panacea. White students' contacts with Asians and the closeness that they felt prompted them to make larger claims that minimized the power of race—Asians were by and large defined as simply "white." While these students were skeptical of stereotypes, they still used whiteness as the benchmark for normalcy, something that clearly reinforces white normativity. These white students also reported feeling at ease making racial jokes about Asians that relied on stereotypes. Unlike the athletes in Chapter Five who hurled racial

⁷⁵ Comparisons will easily flounder on differences such as the nature of the stereotypes that are applied to each group. Notions of the model minority, while still potentially harmful, are clearly different than notions of cultural deficit.

jokes back and forth as a way to recognize and therefore attempt to minimize differences, Asian students often felt like jokes were a betrayal of the acceptance they were offered from their white peers. For white students, closeness seemed to minimize race to the point where they thought that jokes were harmless. This discontinuity, which was different than the informality that marked white/QRED joking, speaks to the potential downside to close interaction: thinking that you have transcended race may promote its reproduction. Although I was not aware of any examples of white students whose close contacts with QRED led them to minimize and importance of race, that potential outcome is always there. Just as close contacts can help students to see the way race matters, there is always the possibility that white students will mistake transcending a racial gulf in their personal life with the belief that race has become a less potent force in society at large.

Gender and Social Interaction:

This study does not explore the intersection of gender, interactions and notions of whiteness, but, as Chapter Five suggests, gender should be made a more meaningful part of future research on race and interaction. As I detail in Chapter Five, the very nature of close contacts between white and QRED students was structured by gender: white males, with the exception of Dalton, tended not to forge relationships with QRED students in romantic contexts and white females tended not to forge them in athletic environments. As Chapter Five indicates, how these students come together greatly structures their interactions and the knowledge they glean. For example, white females had to contend with the meaning of being romantically close to QRED males, as a result they reported admonishments, and, as Faye reported, not so subtle insinuations that their relationships

were marked by violence. At the same time, high school relationships are characterized by emotional volatility, a factor that, at least in the case of Faye, undid much of what she learned through close contact and inspired her to embrace racially regressive thinking. Further research should seek to understand how students negotiate these relationships with their parents, teachers, and in other non-school venues and how this moderates, enhances or inflects their views of whiteness and the racial hierarchy.

As a primary site where males developed their contacts, the athletic domain was a mirror reflection of the romantic domain. Although male athletes reported some of the most trenchant observations about race, my data hinted that this might have been at a social cost, seeing as overcoming a racial gulf may have been achieved by through enactments of masculinity. In the course of my fieldwork I witnessed white and QRED athletes teasing QRED females together. When I asked QRED females about this they reported significant anger about how QRED athletes used stereotypical notions of black femininity (e.g. poverty, sexually overactive, irrational) in order to draw closer to white athletes. In other words, they were trying to offset an element of their social identity that perceived to be a liability, their race, by drawing on their dominance in another social domain, their masculinity. The intersection of race and gender and subsequent trading and offsetting of identities that can occur among non-white males has been described by Chen (1999) as “bargaining with hegemony.” Although I was not able to investigate in detail how this functions within the context of the interactions that I chronicled, future research should be attuned to the ways in which interaction may deconstruct or reveal one hierarchy while reinforcing another.

Recommendations for Pedagogical Practice and Institutional Change:

The data presented above strongly suggest that not teaching about race is simply another way to teach about race. In a predominantly white institution that tends to relegate lessons about race to the past and the south, what students know about themselves as racial actors was largely taught through the “corridor curriculum” as opposed to the formal curriculum (Hemmings 1999). Every school is structured by race, and although whites tend not to see how a predominantly white school is a racial space, race is suffused in these institutions. In a school like Belltown, as demonstrated above, not teaching about race is to leave the students on their own to make what they will of the differences that they apprehend. In some cases these understandings can be liberating but in many more they are regressive, as the LSI respondents demonstrated. The research and conclusions presented in this study suggest at least three recommendations for how schools can be recalibrated and pedagogy transformed in order to facilitate the kinds of interactions that HSI students experienced and mitigate against the effects of allowing white students to observe not interact. The first is to audit and alter the curriculum and promote diversity in hiring; the second is to make the culture of the field evident and raise awareness of the potentially reproductive impacts of doxa; and the third is to encourage close interaction between QRED and white students.

The first recommendation is common sense. The way the curriculum covers the topic of race and the demographic composition of the faculty needs to be altered. By relegating discussions of race to the past and the south, white normativity—white

students' notions that they are not racial actors—is reinforced, and a historically specious narrative is promulgated. Despite having QRED students at Belltown whose very existence at the school is attributable to the civil rights movement in the north, this history is not covered. By not teaching this history, the school obscures the very real patterns of segregation and discrimination that marked post-war development nationwide (Jackson 1985). It also ignores the lively history of activism in the north (Sugrue 2008), while perpetuating a false *de jure/de facto* myth about segregation (Lassiter 2010). Worst of all, by not providing a comprehensive curriculum on race, teachers give up the chance to have QRED students speak about their own reality and experiences. By ignoring these stories, QRED students' existence in the school is unexplained and dislodged from history, and as a result white students tend to make sense of the QRED program through explanations that revolve around *noblesse oblige*: the benevolent suburbs counteracting urban dysfunction and cultural pathology. To engage students in an authentic conversation about the history of race in the north is to connect the past and the present and show them how they are meaningfully located in the larger American narrative of race relations and inequality. Ultimately it is to begin to unravel a series of questions and realities: Why is Belltown predominantly white? Why there is a need for a QRED program? How did federal policies that facilitated the growth of the suburbs through racially discriminatory lending practices forge a rigid geographical divide and harden a black/white binary that persists to this day (Freund 2006; Brodtkin 1998)? Belltown students' school and town are all structured in racial domination, asking these students to live within these structures but giving them virtually no tools with which to analyze or understand their reality is to encourage the reproduction of inequitable social structures.

Having teachers that represent a diverse set of backgrounds is also part of diversifying the curriculum. Belltown administrators must consider the message implicitly sent to all students due to the paltry representation of non-white faculty and staff. Having a predominantly white faculty and staff also contributes to the overall racial logic of the field. As demonstrated above, the lack of diversity leads to implicit understandings between white teachers and students that benefit white students in ways that are imperceptible to them. Along with a push to promote curricular changes, there needs to be a push to hire more faculty of color.

The second recommendation is that faculty and staff must be made to understand that the school is not a neutral space but has its own cultural polarity. Belltown, and schools like it must become culturally self-reflexive spaces. Some progress on this front can be made in how teachers are trained. As it stands now, most of the in-service education that teachers are given regarding race focuses on white privilege. Although well intentioned, these classes tend to define discrimination as personal prejudices and acts of exclusion. Furthermore, according to some of my faculty respondents, multicultural education tends to be predicated on the notion that promoting guilt among white faculty will somehow enliven whites' willingness to confront racial difference as opposed to suppress their interest in the topic. The data presented above suggest that the reproduction of racial difference is a process in which racial structures are transmitted at the micro-cultural level. The correspondence of whiteness and the structure of the field makes white practices appear as common sense, therefore simultaneously advantaging whites while manufacturing racial difference as QRED students often transgress these arbitrary cultural boundaries. Field analysis revealed Belltown to be culturally structured

in ways that benefitted white students and it is here that race was reproduced. Teachers must be trained to be aware of how schools are structured in race. Getting them to talk about their perceptions of what makes for a “good kid” for example and then deconstructing how non-academic cultural attributes serve to benefit some at the expense of others would be a good start. This of course would require seeing race and therefore begs the question of how this can be achieved in a school that evidences strong colorblind currents.

The third recommendation is that the school follows the lead of the HSI students described above. Despite existing within a field that has the potential to obscure whiteness and reproduce racial difference, these students were finding different ways to apprehend their social reality. What was remarkable about them was that they were doing it on their own, entirely outside the scope of formal policy and curriculum. These pioneering students should be held up as a model that can both enrich the practice of teachers and the experiences of students. For teachers, there should be space for them to engage QRED students in honest dialogue about their experience at Belltown—what it is like and how the structure of the school often leads to exclusion. In my QRED focus group, observations of QRED students and informal conversations with QRED students, I was struck by just how much sociological insight I gained by speaking to people repelled by the cultural polarity of the institution. All I had to do was ask, and do so in a non-judgmental way and there was great willingness on the part of QRED students to say to a institution authority figure what up until that point they had only thought to themselves or spoken to each other. In my dual role as teacher and researcher I was immediately able to see the applicability of what I was told to my pedagogical practice. For example, upon

recognizing that QRED students often felt as though they had a hard time forging relationships with white teachers I made a special effort to overcome this asymmetry by meeting with my QRED students and engaging them in honest dialogue about their struggles as black students in a predominantly white institution. I did not try to relate by falsely coopting styles that were not my own, but I did not try to defend the cultural standards of the institution either. These same students have reported that it was the simple act of recognizing race—letting these students know that I realized that it was a struggle to be a student of color in a predominantly white institution—that went a long way in facilitating meaningful and honest relationships. These relationships have proven to be durable as I now mentor a sizeable number of QRED students who seem to gravitate to me for the sole reason that I acknowledge that I am white, that the institution we exist in is culturally white and that this presents a struggle for them. Beyond working with QRED students, by developing a cultural blueprint of the field I have been able to engage my white students in discussions about how some of the behaviors that they perceive to be “normal” or “common sense” pro-school behaviors are simply cultural enactments. Where my white students often prefer colorblindness I have tried to encourage them to see how race appears in ways that often seem non-racial. On multiple occasions I have encouraged my QRED students to assist me in these lessons by describing to their white classmates the cultural tensions that exist and the difficulties of existing in a predominantly white school.

Finally, ways must be sought to build high levels of social interaction into the formal curriculum. Anything that brings QRED and white students together in ways that engender meaningful and democratic interactions as opposed to detached observation

would be beneficial. For example, I can imagine a class on inter-race dialogue that would put students in conversation with each other about their experiences, challenges and aspirations. As it stands now, for most white students at Belltown, QRED students are decontextualized human beings. Because they lack an understanding of these students' homes, neighborhoods, lives, struggles, plans and values, it is all too easy to fill in the blanks with the stereotypes that continue to be all too widely available within the contemporary discursive environment (Picca 2007). Providing structure within which students can negotiate and explore their differences could give them insight instead of reinforce ideology. In addition to dialogues, students should be given the opportunity to cross implicitly proscribed spatial boundaries. QRED students tend to know a lot about Belltown, but white students know very little about the neighborhoods from which QRED students hail. Field trips into the city with QRED student guides and interactions with family members could not only complicate white students notions of urban pathology but could also serve as a geographic counterpoint to a revised curriculum that appreciates the northern legacy of segregation.

These three recommendations may seem idealistic. Meaningful cultural change is hard, as the administrators found out when they tried to challenge the dominant colorblind discourse at Belltown. Regardless of whether it is hard or not, a status quo that reinforces racial difference while obscuring white privilege is unacceptable. Belltown, and schools like it, are racialized spaces whether all of their inhabitants believe this to be the case or not. To ignore this reality is to ratify the racialized structure of the institution and the inequitable outcomes that it produces. As demonstrated above, the ingredients for both reproduction and resistance already exist in the institution, but as it

currently stands the reproductive factors exert powerful influence. Can they be curtailed? Can a more racially democratic school emerge? Perhaps the best chance for changing the order of things is for faculty and administrators to take a lesson from some of their students, especially those who have begun to see how they are implicated in the racial landscape despite existing in an institution that does all too good a job preventing this revelation.

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