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ABSTRACT
                Our schools are environments of race and class and
these school environments structure opportunity based on race and
class. This paper explores how students' lives and their access to
postsecondary education are framed and structured by the influences
of race and class. The college choice decision process of three
female Black students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds in
three distinct high school environments are examined. One of the most
important ways that schools foster the investment of various forms of
capital in the course of students' educational careers is in the
transition from high school to college. The data for this
ethnographic study was collected over a nine-month period at three
urban California high schools. At the private school, intensive
support was provided for college admissions and students applied to
selective colleges nationally. At the two public schools much less
support was provided and applications were generally limited to
within the state or to historically Black colleges. Analysis suggests
that Black students from private schools are accruing higher social
status and opportunities while the future status of Black public
school students is lowered by their more limited college choices,
regardless of their academic qualifications. (Contains 32
references.) (JLS)

Boundaries of Belonging and Postsecondary Access: African American Students and College Choice Decisionmaking in Social Context

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ASHE

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting
of the Association for the Study of Higher
Education held in Memphis, Tennessee,
October 31 - November 3, 1996. This paper was
reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high
quality and of interest to others concerned with
higher education. It has therefore been selected
to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE
conference papers.

ERIC

Introduction

Kim[1], Lashanda and Krystal are three African-American students completing their senior year of high school in a major metropolitan area of California. All three are hard-working high school students with above average grades. They all have roughly an A-average, and SAT scores above the national norm of African-American (740) that average 950. All have taken at least one honors or Advance Placement (AP) course in the last two years and are well liked by their teachers and classmates. They attend three very different California high schools and all also plan on attending college immediately after high school.

Kim attends the predominantly white Hadley School for girls, a private college preparatory day school. Lashanda attends Springfield Preparatory High School a comprehensive public high school that is 85% African-American and 15% Latino and is located in one of the poorest sections of the city. Krystal attends Wilson High School, also a public comprehensive high school. Wilson, however, is home to a mix of students from varying race and class backgrounds.

The road to college attendance has been very different for each of these prototypical young women. Kim, Lashanda and Krystal each attend a different high school, come from a different family background and have experienced the college choice process each in her own distinct manner. How their road to college has differed as a result of the differences in their family and high school experiences and the race and class differences which mark theses experiences will be explored in the course of this paper.

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[1] The names of all individuals and high schools are pseudonyms.

We know that both family background and school structure influence educational attainment and the college choice process specifically. This research asks: How do the raced and classed environments and structures of high schools affect the college choice processes of students? In order to explore how a combination of racial and social class differences influence college choice, I examine the way that female African-American students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds experience the college choice process differently in three distinct racial and social class environments.

It is clear that our lives are affected from the day we are born by the broad and deep divisions along the lines of race and class. To the extent that our educational system serves to systematically limit opportunity for particular segments of our population based on race and class it is seriously flawed. In this paper I reveal how students' lives and their access to postsecondary education are framed and structured by the influences of race and class in our schools and society. This work adds to our understanding of how the American meritocratic ideal is undermined in our schools and it contributes to our theoretical understanding of how race and class function in educational and societal interaction to place boundaries on the opportunities of students.

Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

It is clear that our schools are raced and classed environments. Moreover, these school environments structure opportunity based on race and class. In this section, I will introduce the theoretical lens through which I view the question of how race and class environments affect access to postsecondary education and then I will review the literature on schools and what we know about how they structure inequality.

Given the global and all-encompassing nature of educational aspiration formation and college choice, the work of Pierre Bourdieu emerges as a useful theoretical tool in understanding the many influences on students' lives and their relation to postsecondary choice. One of the fundamental concepts upon which this analysis rests is that of habitus, a set of constantly reformulated and modified dispositions and preferences rooted in social class and the power relations which define groups' and individuals' relationships to one another and to the structures of our society (Bourdieu 1977). The family is the primary generator and constructor of habitus and it is through this habitus that the practices of individuals in their interactions with structures are shaped. Family influences have emerged from the literature on college choice as the most influential and far reaching. Thus, the Bourdieuian theory chosen to explore the college choice process in this study provides a very sound matching theoretical orientation.

I also use and expand upon the new theoretical concept of organizational habitus (McDonough 1991) to describe the organizational dispositions, preferences, and influences of the schools to clarify their influence in the college choice process and to theoretically distinguish this organizational influence from the individual or family habitus. I use this theoretical orientation to gain more insight into the way school structure and individual students interact to shape experiences and opportunities. I use the notion of social capital and cultural capital, defined "as institutionalized i.e., widely shared, high status, cultural signals used for social exclusion" (Lamont and Lareau 1988 p. 155), as the primary mechanisms by which advantage is reproduced and access to power in society maintained.

Every aspect of schooling from scheduling and the organization of the curricula (Garet and DeLany 1988) to students placement within that curricula in the tracking process prevalent in most schools (Gamoran 1992; Kilgore 1991; Oakes 1985) to the type of counseling students receive and access to counseling that students have (Lee and Ekstrom 1987; McDonough 1991; Erikson 1975) structures what happens in schools. This structure is vitally important to understanding what goes on in schools regarding the preparation for college and the college choice process itself. This structure of schooling varies between high schools and varies for different students within the same school. More often than not these variations in the type of schooling organization and structure and the different ways that students experience this structure within the same school are divisions along the lines of race and class. Quite often these structures of schooling determine the way that capital which students bring with them to the school can be spent, invested or converted into other more valuable types of capital.

The notion of a kind of social capital as important to success in navigating schooling in America and which influences the life chances of the young is neither new nor novel. Several scholars have documented the ways that different kinds of schools prepare and channel students differently (Anyon 1980; Coleman 1987; Cookson and Persell 1985; Lareau 1989; McDonough 1991). Additionally, others have noted the great degree to which school success appears to be dependent on student characteristics which originate from outside the school setting; the school merely acts as a market within which this cultural and social capital can be invested (Lareau 1989; McDonough 1991; Mehan, Hertweck et al. 1986; Persell, Catsambis et al. 1992).

McDonough (1991, p.159) examined how social class and high school guidance operations combine to shape a high school student's perception of her opportunities for a college education finding that "the counselor is critical in constructing the broader school climate for college expectations and planning." She found that each of the four schools in her study "presented its students a different organizational habitus, a different view of the college opportunity structure" (p. 294). This notion of organizational habitus which McDonough illustrated in her examination of social class and college choice, proves useful in an examination of the way that race influences access to postsecondary education.

The notion of structure in schooling as a template which encourages certain patterns of interaction and investments appears to be a plausible one. School structure does not necessarily create opportunity or provide information or knowledge for high status families and children but by providing pathways for investment of societally legitimate and highly valued forms of cultural capital "our educational institutions are structured to favor those who already possess cultural capital, defined according to the criteria of the dominant hegemony" (Harker 1984 p. 118). Put another way, school structure can be seen as either an "enabling or constraining" force (Oakes 1989, p. 183). In other words, some schools enable students to learn in many different ways and other schools and/or schooling policies constrain learning, achievement and opportunity.

Certainly one of the most important ways that schools foster the investment of various forms of capital in the course of students' educational careers is in the transition from high school to college. Different kinds of schools view this mission of helping students prepare for and gain entrance to college to a greater and lesser extent as part of their overall purpose and mission. The degree to which schools foster investment in

higher education and in particular types of higher education can be seen in the structure of and extent of the college counseling provided in the school.

College counseling operations in different schools in many ways reinforce the development of particular tastes and preferences regarding educational attainment in general and college choice specifically. For some schools, preparation for higher education and entrance into a particular set of colleges or universities is their raison detre and this mission is reflected in the college counseling operation at the school. The whole school and the college counseling operation works to develop particular tastes, preferences and dispositions among their students for particular colleges by inviting certain college representatives to visit and allowing students to leave class to visit with them, by arranging the curriculum so that each student is prepared to continue on to some sort of college experience, and by reinforcing those abilities and characteristics that advantage students in the admissions process at certain colleges. Not surprisingly, these schools devote significant resources to the college counseling office maintaining a low counselor to students ratio in the neighborhood of 1 to 65 (Cookson and Persell 1985) and providing institutional supports to the college counseling office in the forms of technology (computers and software) and support staff.

Most notably, at some comprehensive public high schools the purpose of education itself and schooling has absolutely no connection to the goal of preparing students for higher education. High school is seen as an end unto itself and college counseling is virtually nonexistent. Counselor to student ratios are high, in the neighborhood of 1 to 800 in the state of California (McDonough 1991), there is little in the way of institutional support for the college counseling offices' efforts, and the office is frequently asked to

perform other duties not related to college counseling such as monitoring attendance records. A preference and taste for college attendance is not cultivated among the students.

These two examples represent the two ends of a whole spectrum of high schools, their commitment to preparing students for higher education and how this commitment is manifested in the college counseling operation at the school. Most schools fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes of a total commitment to college preparation and access and little to no attention focused on this outcome. This example does however help to illustrate the importance of the college counseling office in cultivating a taste for college among students and in ensuring access to knowledge about college attendance.

The structure of schooling has also been shown to have serious consequences for Black students both in terms of the differences between predominantly Black schools and the different treatment of Black students not in predominantly Black schools (Oakes 1985; Orfield 1988; The Council of Great City Schools 1990). Wells and Crain (1994) in their work on the long-term effects of desegregation in schools note the degree to which "the conduits of information" available to students which attend desegregated schools are different than those for students who attend largely segregated schools. They find that desegregated schools which are "filled with white and wealthy students provide greater access to information about college and careers than schools serving mostly low-income minority students." Portes and Wilson (1976) note that educational attainment for Blacks and whites is marked by "differential access of racial groupings to channels of educational attainment" (p. 430). They note that Black students move up through individual self-reliance while whites are ably assisted by the institutional machinery of the setting. The

findings of Thomas (1981) reinforce this notion that the racial context of the students' high school influences where they will attend college.

School Structure as a Template for Investment

It is clear that there is a connection between schooling experience and a student's educational aspiration and further educational attainment. It appears that in many ways our society is structured to confer on those already advantaged by virtue of social class and race further advantage. This further advantage is reinforced by the structure of our schooling process and the ability of individuals to acquire and convert knowledge and resources into educational advantage (Brint and Karabel 1989; Lareau 1989; Hearn 1991; Persell, Catsambis et al. 1992). Specifically how the structure of secondary schools influences the linkages between secondary schools and colleges for students from different racial backgrounds and in schools with different racial and socioeconomic make-ups remains an unanswered question.

Methodology

The data for this ethnographic study were collected over a period of eight months from November 1994 through June 1995 at three urban California high schools. The data are comprised of 53 interviews each approximately and hour-long with college-bound, female African-American students (14), their best friends (12), their parents (14), their college counselors (4) the high school principals (3) and other teachers and school staff members (6). Extensive ethnographic observational data and documents were also collected at the three different high school sites. The ethnographic data collected includes observations of all students who attend the school regardless of their race, gender or class. The school sites vary in terms of the race and class composition of their student bodies.

Springfield Preparatory High School is a predominantly African-American public school and its students are from lower class families. The student body at the second school, Wilson High School, also public, has a mixed racial composition with no racial group dominating the school and also a mixed social class composition. The third school, Hadley, is private, predominantly white, and draws from an upper class clientele. The interviews and field notes which make up the bulk of the data were transcribed and coded. The coding scheme relied on both the theoretical framework guiding the study and the themes which emerged from the data themselves and resulted in a set of 30 codes.

The Students and The Schools

Allow me to return to the three representative students from Hadley, Springfield and Wilson to provide a more detailed and thorough introduction of the schools. Kim is one of six African-American students in her class who has attended the Hadley school for the last six years, an elite independent girl's day school with a senior class of 85 students located in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods of a large metropolitan area. Nestled in the exclusive and monied residential neighborhood of Turmont Circle, the Hadley school is a training ground for the daughters of some of the most well-to-do and powerful families in the city. The grounds of the school are spotless and park-like with gurgling fountains and elaborate landscaping. The overwhelmingly white faculty of the school, which provide an educational program that has been described by members of this community as "second to none", are a body of 77 well educated professionals, 52 of whom hold a Masters degree and twelve of whom hold a Doctorate. Each student is individually assisted in the college application process by one of the two full-time college counselors, both of whom have previous extensive experience in college admissions

having worked "on the other side of the desk" for several years as admissions

representatives for selective private universities. All of Hadley's graduates go on to attend

college, many of them becoming students at some of the most selective colleges in the

nation

In contrast, for the last four years Lashanda has attended Springfield Prep, a

predominantly Black high school located only about twenty minutes by car from the

Hadley school in the same metropolitan area. Springfield Preparatory High School, a

public high school with an enrollment of 3500 students, 85% of whom are Black and 15%

of whom are Latino, is located in a low-income, predominantly Black neighborhood. The

school is situated three blocks off a main thoroughfare which is lined with strip malls, fast-

food stores and shopping centers. The school itself bears many of the markings of an

inner city high school: graffiti which custodians paint over as quickly as they can, windows

covered by a mesh metal grating and an extensive security force which is often called upon

to break-up fights and keep kids in class. However, many students here choose to attend

Springfield Prep instead of their neighborhood high school because of its stated emphasis

on college preparation and its reputation for superior academic preparation. The school

does indeed have a reputation for superior academics; it houses two magnet programs and

for an inner city high school has a better-than-average record of sending its students on to

college with 79% of the seniors reportedly college-bound. This reputation for academic

excellence is situated in an environment which celebrates the achievements of African-

Americans and racial pride goes hand-in-hand with superior academic achievement.

The students at Springfield can call on the resources of the college office and its

one full-time college counselor as they prepare for the college choice process and make

their way through the maze of forms that are required for admission and financial aid. Though a few exceptional students will attend elite nationally known universities and colleges such as Dartmouth or Georgetown, the majority of Springfield's students attend local community colleges, state colleges and universities and if they do leave the state, Springfield students are most likely to attend historically Black colleges and universities.

And, finally, there is the case of Krystal. Krystal has risen at 5:00 am for the last four years to catch the bus that takes her on an hour-long ride out of the city and into the suburb of Lower Ridgecrest to attend Wilson High School. This happily suburban community of Lower Ridgecrest is home to solidly middle class families and more affluent families who have torn down the original tract homes which dotted this area to build homes on a more palatial scale. Wilson, a comprehensive public high school which is in the same school district as Springfield, is home to 3000 students, 800 of whom are Black and Latino students who, like Krystal, are bused here from the city. White students comprise 43% of the student body of this high school with other non-white "minorities", Asian, Latino, Black and Other students, making up the remaining 57% of the school population. This school suffers from many of the same urban ills that Springfield experiences: truancy, vandalism and teen pregnancy. It is also a school that educates the children of affluent Lower Ridgecrest and has a "very vocal" local constituency. The students at Wilson rely on one full-time college counselor, her part-time assistant, and the eight students who are trained peer college counselors to provide information about the college application process. After graduation, the students from Wilson attend a wide variety of colleges and universities including two year community colleges, public state

colleges and universities and many different private colleges all over the country, some quite selective.

<u>School Structure, College Counseling and Course Selection: Templates in Action</u>

If we think of schools and their structures as templates which allow particular types of action and interaction we can see how the organizational habitus of the schooling experience shapes students aspirations and futures at Hadley, Springfield and Wilson. These schools act as templates presenting accepted patterns of interaction and planning as acceptable to students. These patterns or templates, which are not the same for every student nor firmly fixed without any degree of flexibility, serve as guides for students who act out their lives within their walls exercising agency and choice within their fluid boundaries. We will see how these templates are forged largely by the influences of race and class and how in turn students lives are bounded by these constructs.

Looking more closely at the schools which Kim, Lashanda and Krystal attend we begin to see how their opportunities are bounded by their raced and classed school environments. One of the most important ways that the patterns of interaction are governed in schools is by the stated mission of the school and the enactment of this mission in the ways that students select courses and are counseled about their future educational choices.

The college choice process at Hadley is a ritualized and shared rite of passage. This passage and the preparation for it begins either before or at the time that students are enrolled at Hadley. The parents of the students at this school expect that their daughters will attend college and for the girls themselves college attendance is, as they say, "a

given." For its part, the school backs up this expectation and anticipation of college attendance by not only offering but exclusively offering a college preparatory curriculum.

Even the least able Hadley students who have taken the easiest courses throughout their time there will be well prepared to enter college after graduation. Moreover, most of the students go far above and beyond the average college admission requirements. This emphasis on the college preparatory nature of the curriculum reflects the quite focused mission of the Hadley School as a college training ground. These students are prepared to not only be admitted into college but to do well there and most already have their sights set on a professional career and know what they will need to do to get there. They are also prepared to enter selective four-year schools rather than less selective colleges or two-year community colleges. What is notable about this is not just that Hadley has a college preparatory mission, part of the mission of the other two schools in the study is also college preparatory and all of the girls in the study want to be professionals. What makes the Hadley experience different is that college preparation is the exclusive or dominant mission of the school. Furthermore, this mission is supported by the entire school staff and is reflected in the organizational habitus of the school.

An example of the organizational support of the college preparatory mission of the school is the way that the college counselors are integrated into the course selection process. Mrs. Rice, the head college counselor, spends the first few days of every new semester reviewing the transcripts of the upper school students (students in grades nine through twelve) to ensure that each student is enrolled in a program that is most well suited to their needs and one that will be the most advantageous when the time to apply to college rolls around. Furthermore, Mrs. Rice is a member of the main administrative

committee which handles most of the curricular issues, academic concerns and planning at the school. Hers is a voice that is sought out as the school sets policy and plans for the future. The mission of the school and the mission of the college office are one in the same and support one another in the goal of ensuring that each student maximize her choices for a postsecondary education.

Certainly the goals of the staff and school as a whole at Springfield are far more diverse than that of the Hadley School. This school must meet the needs of a far more diverse population and answer to a far wider constituency. In addition to a college preparatory curriculum, the school also offers instruction in trades such as auto shop and has a whole line of coursework that will qualify students for graduation but will not prepare them for college such as cashier's math and home economics. Mrs. Forsythe, the college counselor, notes that:

> The District's requirements for graduation are different from the requirements that the colleges are asking for to get into college. So, rather than having two years of Algebra and a year of Geometry, some kids will get maybe two years of math -- Math 9 and high school math and whatever, or maybe Algebra 1 and that counts for three years and that's what they need to graduate from high school.

While students cannot graduate from Hadley without having all of the courses that they need to apply to a four year college, the students at Springfield can graduate without having had many college preparatory classes at all. And although she is well aware of the importance of students having the right course sequences when they apply for college, the college counselor, Mrs. Forsythe, has a more difficult time making her voice heard in relation to curricular matters at Springfield than does Mrs. Rice at Hadley.

Though she is at times involved in pre-programming when the new students arrive on campus and enroll in courses each fall, Mrs. Forsythe is often closed out of those types of activities as well. An example of the way that the needs and concerns of the college office do not appear to be integrated into the rest of the school is the scheduling of the College Night at Springfield. At most high schools, these college nights are generally held in the first months of the school year and certainly before the end of October to give parents and students ample time to make their college plans. At Springfield this year, the College Night was not held until March. Mrs. Forsythe originally had the College Night scheduled for October but it was pushed back on the school calendar by other concerns and was held well after the vast majority of college applications were due in March. The fact that this important access route for obtaining college information was postponed to the point that it was almost useless for that year's seniors unless they wanted to attend a college with open admission or a community college, is an indication of the lack of integration of the college preparatory mission of the school in the organizational habitus of the institution.

Moreover, Mrs. Forsythe notes that in this school, unlike at her last, her office is largely independent and removed, even physically by being on a different floor, from the main counseling office and the Principal's office. Although she speculates that part of the reason that she is often left out of curricular decisions and school-wide planning is that she is thought to be, and indeed is, very busy with a counselee load of 500 seniors, she notes the effect of this independent and removed status: "Even with the seniors -- I discovered they were having a meeting in the auditorium and I crashed it. I guess it's just -- they forget me."

At Springfield, there are several publications which outline the requirements of most colleges which are regularly distributed to students and Mrs. Forsythe has college representatives address classes of younger students as often as possible so that they will be well informed. As she notes: "I'm a strong believer that the younger we can get to them the longer we have to work with them and we could probably produce some better results." However this effort at spreading the word about college and what students need to do to get to college does not appear to be well integrated into the rest of the school. At Springfield there does not seem to be a great deal of emphasis placed on providing students who want to go to college with a curriculum that will enable them to do so. The example of Jose[2] from my ethnographic data collection at the school will serve to illustrate the point.

Jose is a senior who has come into the college office in mid-February to go over his application for financial aid with Mrs. Forsythe. After they have reviewed his financial aid form she asks if he has gotten his classes changed and the student says that he is "still working on it." Mrs. Forsythe calls down to the counseling office where class assignments are made to try to get Jose into the classes that he needs for college. Of the six periods in the school day Jose is currently enrolled in two periods of auto mechanics and one period of service (a course where a student acts as a teacher's aide or gofer) every day. Mrs. Forsythe is told that Jose's counselor is not in at the moment but that she "don't like anyone messin' with her seniors." Mrs. Forsythe later tells me in a tired and frustrated voice that "messin' with him is what she is doin'" and that this kid wants to go to college and should be able to get the courses that he needs.

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[2] This example is drawn from general observational data of the college office including both male and female students who used the office.

In addition to these structural impediments imposed by the school such as trouble enrolling in college preparatory classes, a high counselor to students ratio and the lack of focus on the college preparatory mission of the school, students Springfield are far less likely to come from a family that has knowledge about college. The counselor estimates that half of the students at Springfield come from families that are supported by Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Most of the parents in the study did not have the economic and cultural capital to assist their daughters in applying to college. Furthermore, these parents did not see it as their role to orchestrate their daughters' lives so that they would attend college. The combined differences in family background and school structure between Hadley students and Springfield students create a nested effect where the Hadley students get reinforcement for college attendance from all corners and the Springfield students are largely left to their own devices to navigate their futures.

Like Springfield, Wilson is a public school with a wide constituency and a broad mission. As at Springfield, a student can graduate from Wilson having had very few college preparatory classes. However, one of the most striking differences between Wilson and Springfield is the degree to which the college preparatory mission of the school and the college counselor herself is integrated into the organizational habitus of the school. This integration of the college counseling operation into the rest of the school is far more similar to the organizational habitus of Hadley.

An example of this integration comes from the comments made by the principal when he talks about the duties of the college counselor, Jo Harrison, at Wilson:

> The college counselor is part of working with the counselors who are
> programming students and also guiding students to make sure that they are
> taking the kinds of courses that are challenging, that have standards and

taking the kinds of courses that are challenging, that have standards and have expectations to help these students -- say, "You can do it. You can achieve." In Jo's case, I try to give her duties that I feel relate to the total school program and how this incorporates with the instructional program and the teaching staff. The college person -- the college counselor -- can't be an island to themselves. They have to be incorporated in the total picture of the school.

Jo Harrison is an integral member of the main administrative team at Wilson as she herself notes:

I'm a big part of it [the overall mission of the school], and I try and network to the teachers to make that happen; because, if each teacher is looking at their own curriculum and their own little world and not realizing the effect it has on other curriculum or on the kids in their progress towards college, they're not in reality. And, that could be hurting the kids.

In addition to handling the duties of college counselor for a senior class of roughly 600 seniors, Mrs. Harrison is also the Gifted Coordinator, the AP Coordinator, The California Scholarship Federation advisor, helps out with the academic decathlon team and in past years has carried the duties of Career Advisor as well. Like Mrs. Forsythe at Springfield, Mrs. Harrison is also aware that students' decisions regarding the courses they take early in their high school careers can have important consequences for the college planning later. To combat the problem of students not knowing what resources are available in the college office and to get students thinking about college early, she has her peer college counselors call in groups of students to the college office, even ninth and tenth graders. In this way every student is at least brought into the college office and informed about its resources. Mrs. Harrison comments:

They're brought into the process at that time [in ninth grade]so they cannot say, "I didn't know." We also, this year, for the first time, got those college handbooks into every kids' hand at registration. We never did that before. They can't say, "I didn't know." I don't want to sit here with a kid in the

fall of their senior year seeing a hole -- seeing a math class missing or a science class missing, or a wasted summer when the information is here for them to have. Or have tears, "I wish somebody had told me. I wish I knew." I hate that. I feel guilty. I personally feel guilty when that happens. That it's my fault that kid didn't know.

Despite these efforts, Wilson is still a place where some students can and do slip through the cracks and are not prepared for the future in any way when they graduate. The college office is used more by some students than others and despite the efforts of the staff in the office some students do not use its resources. As this peer college counselor notes:

You see the same people coming in. It's not really like a lot of different faces. It's usually the same people come in with questions, just following up on what they did before. It's not really like new people unless we're calling in students ourselves and it's like their first time ever seeing it. But, we can't make it anymore homey. We call in every senior and junior in their second semester. Yeah, we deal with the same kids, but we start with the juniors and once you become a junior you know that you can come in. It's just that some people might be embarrassed or just don't want to go to college, or I don't know. We can't do anything more. Sometimes it's so hard. You have like practically drag some people in. Go and physically...I don't know. Some of the people already have their life set. Like, "Well my dad owns X, Y and Z Company and I don't need to go to college because I have this, that and the other and I'm set." Or the other kids are just like, "I have to work. I have a kid. I don't have time to go to college." And then you have to convince them, "Well, if you take like two classes... College is not like high school. You don't have to be there from 8:00 to 3:00 every day. You can work around your schedule." Try to sell college.

This need to "sell college" to some students is in stark contrast to the expectation of college attendance for all students by everyone, faculty, administration, parents and students at Hadley. At Wilson and Springfield college attendance is not "hard wired" into the habitus of the school or the individual habiti of all students. There are students at both Wilson and Springfield for whom, like Hadley students, college attendance is "a given."

However this notion is one that comes from the family and individual habitus rather than that of the school. For the traveling population at Wilson which is Black and Latino, whose parents are less likely to be college educated and to have instilled in the students the idea that a college is a must, this lack of a hard wired path to college at the school results in different course taking patterns. The college preparatory honors and AP classes are overwhelmingly populated by local white and Asian students with at most two to three Black or Latino students in each class. When I asked a teacher at Wilson about the course selection process for these students and why there is a much lower percentage of these traveling Black and Latino students in honors and AP classes she said:

> T   I think that parents make assumptions and they put kids on buses.
> They've traveled all the way to Lower Ridgecrest... and they
> assume that the kid is going to get a good education and that their
> child will go to college. Dangerous assumptions. At the same
> time, you have a student who's partly responsible because the
> student will say things like, "Oh, is that a hard class? I don't want
> to take a hard class. Give me an easy class." And, many people
> will just give them an easy class. An easy class will not be Algebra,
> an easy class would be Cashier's Math or High School Math or
> whatever is available.
>
> EH   The kid's saying that without understanding that by saying, "I want
> an easy class" what the consequences are four years later?
>
> T   Right. Kid has no idea of what the consequences will be.

This passage illustrates the nested and networked influences of the individual student, her family and the school which she attends. At Wilson, many of the Black and Latino parents assume that simply by attending this suburban high school their daughters will be prepared for college when in fact for some students the school does little to support this goal. In this environment, individual initiative in the college choice process is essential particularly for Black and Latino students who, for the most part, do not have the college going influences of parents and school to rely upon.

For every student in the study from Springfield and Wilson, individual initiative played an integral role in their college choice process. In this way, the traveling population at Wilson, who are Black and Latino, and the students at Springfield seem far more similar. For example, when I asked Jamila, from Wilson, why she was different from her friends who had missed out on getting college information she responded: "I checked into it personally. I know that if I don't do it myself, no one's going to do it for me. So, I'll take a trip to the college office when I have a question or whatever." This individual initiative is a hallmark of the successful college preparatory students that I interviewed at both Wilson and Springfield. At Springfield students and parents alike believe that "it's on you," meaning it is your responsibility, to do something about attending college. In the following passage, a Springfield student explains how this "it's on you" attitude functions when it comes to college and the choice process:

> Nobody can do it for you. Just like I have a friend that I been knowing [sic] since 7th grade -- and, he has a 3.0 something and he hasn't done anything about college. He hasn't applied, took SAT's, nothing. He's in my calculus class. He's pretty bright. He doesn't come in [to the college office]. It's on him to come in and to check out about things and to make that effort to find out or just to listen to the PA's. And see what they're going to say about college or read the announcements. It's on you to go in and find out about scholarships, to take the SAT. To go get the information. She [Mrs. Forsythe] can't bring it to you because there's 500 seniors, not to mention there's like 500 juniors, sophomores and 9th graders that she has to deal with.

This need for students from Springfield and Wilson to depend largely on their own individual initiative in finding their way to college lies in stark contrast to the experience of Hadley students. At Hadley students are also responsible for many of the details of the college application process, however it is a process that is supported by the structure of the school. For instance, students are reminded to make an appointment to see their

college counselor and it is the responsibility of the student to make that appointment to go over their list of colleges but if they fail to make the appointment, the counselor will notice that they have not spoken with this student and call her in. Counselors, on occasion, call students at home when they are waiting to receive letters of admission in April during the schools spring recess to offer support and guidance. The process is personalized, integrated into the school as a whole and students are certainly not left to their own devices to navigate their way.

For the girls in the study from Springfield and Wilson who have successfully completed some honors and AP classes and who are planning on attending college, this individual initiative which they have learned to take is almost always supported by someone in the background at home or at school pushing these girls to expect more from themselves and see college attendance as "a given." As this Wilson teacher notes, having a caring adult in their lives makes all the difference:

> I think it [motivation to go to college] comes from someone who cares. I think it comes from a family member, if you're lucky, and if not, then hopefully a teacher along the way or some other caring person who takes a little extra time to the student and says, "You can." I think that's the key issue. By taking the time and talking to them, saying, "I think you care. I think you can. I think you can," can make a big difference in a student's life.

When I asked students what made them different from their friends who were having babies or not planning on going to college their replies were consistently similar to this student who says:

> Like I said, I think it starts in the home. There should be people -- but you can't blame it all on school. There has to be people in schools that will push people because there are some people that may not have that push in the home, but if they come to school and someone pushes them, then they'll

pursue a further education. Just basic -- do something with your life.
Don't let your life go to waste hanging out on the streets and having babies
and whatever. It's not going to do you any good. Do something....

This passage illustrates one of the more important findings of this study. These students know that both individual effort and external organizational support are necessary components for school success and the desire and ability to continue on to postsecondary education. If we conceive of this finding in terms of the difference between agency, operationalized here as the individual initiative displayed by these students, and structure as the structure provided by families and schools, it is clear that neither agency or structure alone is a sufficient condition to ensure that these students continue on to college. For these students, both agency in the form of their individual initiative and a supportive family or school structure are integral components of their school success and future orientation towards college. In this way, schools and families act as templates encouraging particular types of action and allowing students to envision certain types of futures for themselves.

At Hadley, the super strong structure and a caring ethic which permeates the organizational habitus of the school which supports college means that in some ways students do not need very much initiative, but at Springfield individual initiative, that is to say agency, is all important. At Wilson, we can see more of the intersection of both. It is a school with a certain degree of structure supporting college aspirations but the students still must show individual initiative and what makes the difference for many of these students is the presence of a caring adult to make them believe in themselves. This notion that schools need to be places of care and support and not just learning and discipline is

one that has received much attention of late (Noddings 1992). One of the strongest and loudest advocates for caring institutions, Nel Noddings, notes that in addition to institutional manifestations of care, "Personal manifestations of care are probably more important in children's lives than any particular curriculum or pattern of pedagogy" (1995 p. 676). At Hadley, these personal manifestations of care are part of the organizational habitus of the school.

The Effects of School Habitus on Educational Aspirations and College Choice

At each school, the college choice of a student can be viewed as occurring under the competing influences of the habitus of the school, the student's family and personal experience. Each of these information sources provide students with notions of what a "good" school is and what are viable choices for them to explore and purrsue. Amidst this barrage of information, students weigh the authority of the different sources, eventually assigning degrees of legitimacy to each. In this process, a Bourdieuian "taste" for colleges is developed in each school environment that guides the students' final matriculation decision.

In this study, the taste for a particular set of colleges was shaped by the habitus of each student. This habitus in turn is largely influenced by the race and class-bound organizational habiti of the schools they attend. For example, at Springfield, where pride in African-American heritage is intertwined with the mission of academic excellence, students apply to historically Black colleges at a much higher rate than at the other two schools. Meanwhile, at Hadley, the combined influence of race and class works to define the college choices of the Black seniors by instilling them with the socially and academically elite Hadley sensibility which favors highly selective institutions while at the

same time each Hadley student sought out a college environment that laid claim to a greater degree of racial diversity and inclusiveness than Hadley possesses.

It is important to note that this taste is limited or bounded for each student by the realities surrounding their lives. In other words, no student considers the entire universe of colleges and universities within the United States as a viable choice set. Everyone both in this study and in the real world itself has their decisions filtered through their own habitus which defines what is for them a viable choice set of schools. How this process of defining and delimiting a choice set occurs and what the influences are on students and families as they proceed through this process is what I will now explore.

At each high school, there exists a relatively well established ordering of colleges to which students apply and opinions about these schools are shared by most of the members of the school. There are variations by race and social class within each school but by and large there can be said to exist an internalized sense of what the list of "good" colleges looks like for students from that high school. There is also a relatively widely shared sense about how one goes through this process or indeed whether there is a process at all. Additionally, there is a great deal of variation among the three schools and the way that students envision their futures based on race and class differences which permeate the habiti of these schools.

For instance, at Hadley each girl goes through a highly structured and formatted process that is guided by parents and college counselors and is supported by the school as a whole. At Springfield there is a wider variety of experiences but each girl's college choice process is characterized by individual initiative and persistence and there is less of a sense that this transition from high school to college and the selection of a college is in

fact a process that requires constant care and monitoring. At Springfield, one simply decides where to apply and does so whereas at Hadley the process of selecting schools to which to apply could be said to be a ritualized, shared rite of passage.

Wilson students span a wider spectrum of experiences around this process which is in large part due to the race and class variation found at the school. For some students at Wilson, predominantly the white and Asian local students who are upper middle class, the act of choosing a college is very similar to that of the Hadley students where parents and counselor assist the student through a ritualized and structured process. For the predominantly Black and Latino bused students, the process is more akin to the processes of Springfield students and is characterized by little parent or counselor involvement and significant individual initiative.

The results, if you will, of this process are as varied as the process itself at each school. Below are listed the schools to which the primary students in the study applied. Those schools which received multiple applications have the number of applications received in parentheses and the schools at which students are matriculating appear in bold. Summary statistics follow theses lists of schools.

Springfield (four students)

UCLA (3)	UC Riverside (2)	Lewis and Clark
Cal State San Diego (3)	UC Irvine (2)	**University of La Verne**
UC Berkeley (2)	Cal State Sonoma (2)	UC Santa Barbara
Loyola Marymount College (2)	UC Santa Cruz	Cal State Dominguez Hills
		U. of Southern Calif.

Wilson (four students)

Clark Atlanta (3)	**Cal State San Diego** (2)	**Santa Monica College**
Cal State Long Beach (3)	Howard University	Spelman College
UC Santa Cruz (2)	Prarie View	University of Arizona
UC Los Angeles (2)	UC Riverside	University of Miami

| Cal State Northridge (2) | U. of Southern Calif. | UC Santa Barbara |
| | Pepperdine University | Pitzer College |

Hadley (six students)

Cornell University (5)	UC Irvine (2)	Cal State San Francisco
UC Los Angeles (4)	Spelman College (2)	Cal State Long Beach
Barnard College (3)	Emory University (2)	Ithaca College
Syracuse University (3)	Stanford University (2)	University of Pittsburgh
Univ. of Pennsylvania (3)	Wheaton College	University of Michigan
UC San Diego(3)	Boston University	UC Santa Cruz
UC Berkeley (3)	Duke University	New York University
Georgetown Univ. (3)	UC Davis	University of Virginia
U. of Southern Calif. (3)	Boston College	Columbia University

Application Patterns Summary Statistics for Primary Study Participants

	Springfield (4 students)	Wilson (4 students)	Hadley (6 students)
Total number of applications filed	22	25	53
Total number of colleges applied to	13	17	27
Average number of colleges applied to	5.5	6.3	8.3
Percent of applications filed at *public* institutions	77%	60%	33%
Percent of applications filed at *private* institutions	22%	40%	66%
Percent of colleges applied to *inside* California	92%	64%	33%
Percent of colleges applied to *outside* California	8%	36%	66%
Percent of colleges applied to that are two-year schools	0%	8%	0%
Percent of colleges applied to that are four-year schools	100%	92%	100%

A cursory look at these lists of schools and the summary statistics indicates that there are patterned differences in application and attendance patterns at these high schools. Clearly, the students at Hadley applied to more schools and they applied to more private than public schools. The students at Wilson and Springfield tend to apply to schools closer to home and schools that are less competitive in terms of admission. One of the most striking differences at Springfield is the almost total concentration on schools within the state of California. And though the students in the study from Springfield only applied to one out-of-state school, the general Springfield population does apply to out-of-state schools at a higher rate. When they do go out-of-state, Springfield students more often than not apply to and attend historically Black universities. This finding is not surprising given the fact that these schools have been shown to have many perceived benefits for Black students such as a higher rate of graduation, and better social life. The principal of Springfield clearly states her preference for historically Black colleges as she feels the smaller historically Black schools do a better job with their students: "Quite frankly, I do a lot of promoting of historically Black colleges..."

Conclusion: The Meaning of College Choice Patterns and the Theory of Big Hair

It seems as though there are at least two ways of thinking about the differences among these students and what these differences might tell us about the way that they make choices about their futures. First, and perhaps most importantly if we are concerned with issues of equality of opportunity, the notion of choice and what that means for these students is very important. For Hadley students, choice in the college application process has more of a national character. Though there are no colleges from the mid-west on their list it is clear that these students see colleges from across the whole country within the

realm of possibility. In fact, for these girls going away from home for college means being far away from their parents and friends and starting out in a new environment. For these girls, choice also means applying to a greater number of schools than their counterparts at Wilson and Springfield. Moreover, to the Hadley girls, choice also means applying to a more prestigious set of schools if we take membership in the Ivy League and a higher degree of selectivity to be markers of prestige.

At Springfield, choice means applying to the University of California schools, the California State Colleges and perhaps one or two private California schools. And although these students did not consider historically Black colleges, those schools represent the bulk of applications made out of state by Springfield students in general. So choice for these students encompasses a smaller universe of schools, one that is closer to home and less prestigious. For the students from Wilson, choice includes some historically Black schools, the California State Colleges and UCs, and a slightly wider variety of private schools than Springfield students consider.

However, when we compare this list of schools to the total list of colleges that all Wilson students have been admitted to over the past three years printed in the school profile we can see that the addition of the following schools makes this list more similar to that from Hadley than Springfield.

Air Force Academy	Columbia University	Occidental College
American University	Cornell University	Rice University
Bard College	Dartmouth College	Stanford University
Bennington College	Duke University	University of Michigan
Boston University	Georgetown University	University of Pennsylvania
Brandeis University	Harvard University	University of Wisconsin
Brown University	Johns Hopkins University	Vassar College
California Inst. of Tech.	MIT	West Point
Carleton College	Northwestern University	Williams College

Colgate University   Oberlin College

This list includes a national representation of the most selective schools in the country.

The difference between this list of schools for the total Wilson population and the list of

schools applied to by our study participants highlights the distance these Black students

experienced from the more enfranchised members of the school community - the

predominantly white and Asian largely middle and upper-middle class local students. It is

clear that these differences have much to do with the combined effect of race and class.

The process structured by family and school is different for the Black and Latino students

than for the white and Asian local students. At Wilson, it is marked by a greater need for

individual initiative and less knowledge of the college choice process in general. At this

school, to be Black almost always means that the student is bused here from the inner city,

is from a low socioeconomic background and will be attending a far less selective college

than their white and Asian local college-bound classmates.

In addition to thinking about these lists of schools in terms of the number and type

of choices that students consider, we can also think about them in terms of notions of

capital and opportunity. The connection between attendance at different kinds of

institutions and status attainment is clear; those students that attend institutions of higher

status tend to come from families from a higher socioeconomic background who tend to

be white and they, by and large, go on to reproduce this status in their own lives (Berg

1971; Domhoff 1993; Mehan and Hertweck 1986; Useem and Karabel 1986; Horvat and

McDonough 1994). Thus the differences that we see here between those students from

Hadley who, by and large, come from a higher socioeconomic background and the less

well-off students from Springfield and Wilson reinforces these findings. The Hadley students choice sets, which are predominantly private and more selective, confer upon them further capital in the form of educational status which will help them to accrue greater status and, most likely, economic benefits upon graduation from college. They have converted the cultural and academic capital from their schooling experiences into higher status college choices attendance. Thus, if we see college attendance as means of accruing different types of capital, the Hadley students are accruing a different and more valuable, in status attainment terms, kind of capital with their college choice patterns. The Black students from Springfield and Wilson are also accruing a type of capital which is more local and less valuable.

Through their individual habitus rooted in family history and the influence of the school habitus, these students have developed a taste for particular types of colleges which bounds their vision for postsecondary opportunity. This taste for specific colleges and groups of colleges is illustrated in the following story. A white Hadley student, Anna, was trying to decide between attending the University of Rochester and Bates College. She was discussing this decision with her best friend, a girl a year ahead of her in school who was attending Princeton. During the phone conversation the friend asked her two roommates from Princeton which school Anna should attend and in unison the three roommates shouted "Oh no, don't go to Rochester, there are big hairs there."

These three girls all had a shared perception of the kinds of girls that attend the University of Rochester and they were able to identify this type of girl by referring to them as "big hairs." Big hair, as you might guess, refers to a hairstyle that is full, or poufy and sort of stands off the top of the girl's head. However this designation of big hair also

referred to a person from a particular social class and positionality. All of the girls, Anna included, understood what was meant by big hair and furthermore what this implied. They all knew that they were not big hairs, in either the figurative or literal sense and that being a big hair or being around big hairs was undesirable. All three girls knew that they did not "fit in" in an environment where big hairs prevailed. In Bourdieuian terms, they all had a shared habitus which excluded schools with these types of students and also knew that they would be excluded by big hairs.

This experience led me to develop what I jokingly refer to as the theory of big hair. This theory holds that students who attend that same or similar colleges will all look very similar in appearance and, to a certain extent, have a degree of shared experiences and values. In Bourdieuian terms, they have a partially shared habitus that allows them to feel as though they "fit in." Essentially, students want to go to schools where they see other students like themselves. They make these decisions within the context of their own habitus which is influenced by race, class and the school organizational habitus.

The results of this study indicate that students choose places where they can see themselves in the form of other students that are like them who already attend the college and they therefore see attendance as a possibility. The interaction of individual habiti, organizational habiti and school structure define what choices "fit" for a particular student. These habiti are in turn influenced by race and class norms.

The high schools in this study act as templates which encourage particular types of action. The organizational habitus of each school encourages a particular type of educational experience as well as particular expectations that students may have about their futures and what futures might fit. Fundamentally, these expectations of students,

which are rooted in race and class differences, create different worlds of opportunity and create different patterns of access to higher education.

That fact that race and class influence the American experience should certainly not come as surprising news to anyone. As noted earlier in this paper, racial differences continue to play a pivotal role in higher education in this country. We are, in many ways, not doing much better in terms of participation rates in higher education for African American students that we did in the mid-1970's. I show how school structures create templates for interaction and opportunity. These school templates bound opportunity for students in schools when they envision what futures might be possible for them. These boundaries of belonging created in high schools contribute to the race and class inequities which continue to plague higher education.

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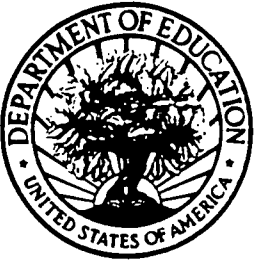Noddings, N. (1995). Teaching Themes of Care. Phi Delta Kappan 76(May): 675-679.

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