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AUTHOR Horvat, Erin McNamara
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the role played by race in the college choice behavior of a group of minority females. It examines the college aspirations and decision making processes of Black female college-bound students and the influences of their parents, friends, college counselors, teachers, and school staff. Subjects were 50 students at 3 urban California high schools. Data collection included transcribed and coded interviews as well as extensive ethnographic observational data and review of documents. The schools were chosen for their ethnic and social differences and included: a predominantly African-American public school with predominantly lower class families; a racially mixed public school of diverse social class composition; and a predominantly white, private school with upper class families. It was found that the students chose colleges where they could see students like themselves who already attended the college. The high schools they attended had acted as templates that encouraged particular kinds of action with the role of Blackness having a different meaning at each of the three schools. The study supported the importance of race and class in defining students' choice behavior with race a clear marker of class membership and class distinction that greatly impacts decision making. Appended are a summary of the data and descriptions of the school settings. (Contains 15 references.) (JLS)

Structure, Standpoint and Practices: The Construction and Meaning of the Boundaries of Blackness for African-American Female High School Seniors in the College Choice Process

Erin McNamara Horvat
Temple University
emcnamar@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu

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A key interest of sociologists has been how race influences stratification and access to opportunity. Those writing in the field have been more successful in showing effects or outcomes of race in educational settings (Allen 1992; Deskins 1991; Oakes 1985) than in showing how race works in everyday life in the process of stratification and access to opportunity. In this paper, I explore how race functions for African-American female high school seniors within the settings of three high schools to give shape and meaning to their school experiences. I show how race, specifically the blackness of these students, contributes to the construction of the boundaries or borders of their lives within these high school settings. These boundaries are created by: the influence of race on their school experience, the different norms of appearance and speech that come with their Black identity and the different ways that they experience the college choice process. I explore the implications that these boundaries have on access to educational opportunity.

Frankenberg, (1993: 1) in her study of the social construction of whiteness outlines the "linked dimensions" which give shape and meaning to whiteness in this country. She sees whiteness first as a "location of structural advantage, of race privilege" secondly she sees it as a standpoint "from which white people look at ourselves, at others and at society" and lastly she sees it as "a set of cultural practices." In this paper, I will examine the construct of race, particularly that of blackness, using Frankenberg's notion of the "linked dimensions." I will show how I found blackness to function as a location of structural disadvantage, a standpoint or space from which the African-American students in this study of the college choice process for African-American high school seniors looked at themselves, others and society and lastly I will outline the set of cultural

practices and presentation of self, primarily manifest in appearance and speech, which mark blackness in these settings.

This work contributes to our understanding of how race influences daily life in American high schools for Black girls. Other scholars have drawn different portraits of how race functions in society. Fordham (1988) posits that academically successful students adopt a strategy of racelessnes. Wilson (1980) contends that class has become more salient than race in defining the experience of Black Americans. In this paper I argue that rather than adopting a strategy of racelessness students learn to manage dual racial standpoints in navigating their lives in these high schools. I also show that the racial boundaries which mark the students lives are often manifest in class terms yet are founded on racial differences.

Throughout this discussion, I acknowledge the pervasive and far reaching effects of class on the notion of blackness and its functioning in these settings for race and class are inextricably intertwined in American society. However, the focus of this paper will be an examination of the construction of blackness for these students in these schools and its meaning in their lives. The aim of this paper is to explore how race acts so powerfully to shape the educational experience of these students and their future access to the American opportunity structure.

Data and Methodology

The data for this 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 50 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 teachers (3). Extensive ethnographic data (100 hours at each school site) and documents were also collected at the three different high school sites. 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. In identifying the themes which emerged from the data I relied on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Please see appendix A for a more complete summary of the data collected. 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. Lincoln Preparatory High School[1] 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. Please refer to appendix B for more detailed information on the three schools.

As a qualitative researcher, my task has been to illuminate how the patterns and processes that I observed in given contexts were created and how they were imbued with meaning. Like many other qualitatively oriented researchers, I view the research act as one that is far from value-free (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Part of the research endeavor is the process of making meaning and not just observing but shaping, interpreting and

framing the research act. I view my own subjectivity as " a garment that cannot be removed" (Peshkin 1988:17); something that cannot be ignored and which fundamentally shapes the research act. Rather than make a futile attempt to eliminate this subjectivity I engaged in a "formal systematic monitoring of self" throughout the course of the data collection and analysis phases of the project which enabled me to manage my own subjectivity (Peshkin 1988:20). In order to monitor my own subjectivity, I engaged in: memoing, sharing back analyzed data with study participants, and discussions with colleagues familiar with the project. During the data analysis phase of the project I relied upon many of the data analysis techniques outlined in Miles and Huberman's 1984 book, particularly the use of matrices.

This paper is a piece of a larger project (citation omitted for anonymity) using this same data which explores the role of race and class on the college choice process. The data were collected in an effort to understand how access to higher education is influenced by race and class. In the process of unraveling how race specifically influenced educational opportunity for these students at the postsecondary level, there emerged a pattern around how race shaped the experiences these same students in high school and the resulting effect on the college choice process. So while the larger study delves more deeply into the influence of race on educational opportunity and the college choice process specifically, this paper focuses on defining how race played a role in defining the daily lives of these high schools students.

Historical and Theoretical Framework

[1] All proper names are pseudonyms and some details of the study participants and schools have been altered to protect their anonymity.

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.

The nature of this examination of cultural practices and dispositions in a Bourdieuian framework necessitates the use of nested constructs which are of a reflexive nature. The habitus of an individual cannot possibly be examined without placing it in the larger field within which it exists and with which it interacts to create a web of meaning and significance (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The relationship between habitus and field is a reflexive and mutually influencing one. It is the interaction of these constructs which create webs of meaning and boundaries in society. So in a Bourdieuian analysis, practices and dispositions are embedded and embedded over and over again in the relationship between field and habitus creating a system whereby culture is always positioned in the larger social world.

Other studies have contributed much to our understanding of how culture and social class contribute to existing status arrangements in this country. DiMaggio (1982) and DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) examine the role of cultural capital in the process of status attainment while Lareau (1989: 177) has explored "why social class has such an important influence on family-school linkages." These studies have been limited, however, in the degree to which they have considered the role of habitus in determining an individual's life chances or shaping their school experiences. While these studies have contributed much to our understanding of the importance of cultural capital, the findings of these studies have been removed from the context of the field within which capital investments are made and the habitus from which and individual or family considers options for investment. In this paper, I contribute to our understanding of the Bourdieuian method by highlighting the dual influencing roles of habitus and field in shaping individuals' school experiences in a contextualized fashion. This Bourdieuian theoretical stance which places a high value on the contextual nature of the way race functions in society contributes, in a modest way, to our understanding of how race influences daily life and access to educational opportunity. I argue that the contextual nature of race influences how it operates in any setting. Habitus emerges as a useful tool in this more contextualized view of the status attainment process.

Findings

Blackness as a Structural Disadvantage: "It's Tougher for Us"

The schools in the study varied considerably. Nevertheless, race was mentioned time and again as a salient marker of the student experience. Moreover, when these women talked about race they cited the ways in which their blackness played a part in

creating the borders of their lives and the boundaries which shape their futures. I want to be clear that these women were not ashamed or anything less than proud of their racial heritage. On the contrary, many spoke with pride about the racial history and culture which they felt went unrecognized in their schools. However, they all also recognized the way that their race, functioning as a location of structural disadvantage[2], created boundaries in their lives.

I find that for these students in these three high schools blackness poses a structural disadvantage. This disadvantage marks their school experiences and their perceived potential for upward mobility in society. This disadvantage has its roots in the historical legacy of race in this country and the class differences which are racially related in the United States. In this section of the paper I show how students noted this historical nature of the way race influenced their lives and also how the structural disadvantage posed by their blackness is often manifest in class terms.

Here a student from the predominantly white and wealthy Hadley school talks about how the history around race in this nation influences daily life at her school when she is asked how does race influences life at this school?

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[2] I want to be clear here that when I refer to the structural disadvantage based on race which influences the Black experience in this country and the cultural practices which support it I am doing so in a Bourdieuian sense. The language I rely upon in referring to culture and race specifically has the propensity to recall the culture of poverty school of the 1960's. This school attributed the problems of the underclass and Blacks specifically to the cultural practices, values and morals of their communities. What this perspective lacked, however, was the recognition of the nested effect of the position of this culture of poverty in our larger society. I do argue that there are different sets of practices and values in each of the settings of this study. However, each of these schools is positioned within and is responding to the larger social world in which they exist. So while it is important to carefully examine and understand the cultural practices of any group within society, "it is myopic and futile to attempt cultural change without attacking the constellation of social and structural conditions in which this culture is embedded" (Steinberg 1981, p. 286).

> Basically it is tougher for us [Black students]. In the recent assembly last week we try and bring up issues and we try and talk about it and we see from a lot of the white groups at school that they just don't understand what we're trying to do and what we're trying to say and they think that we're blaming them for stuff that happened a long time ago. And it's not necessarily that were blaming them we're just trying to say that prejudices are still going on even though you don't realize you're doing it, you're doing it. It's sort of like you're taught to do it but you don't know that you're being taught to do certain things.

Like this student, many of the study participants saw how the structural disadvantage posed their race has its roots in the historical legacy of race in this nation. Indeed, two of the parents, one of the college counselors and one of the principals interviewed for this study went to segregated elementary schools in the south. For these individuals, the structural disadvantages of their racial background in this country are very present and real.

The historical roots of this disadvantage live on today most visibly in the economic inequalities between Blacks and whites and the class disparity this creates. Race and class are inextricably intertwined, especially in considering questions of educational opportunity. For one student from the predominantly Black high school, Lincoln, who like most other students at the school lives in the economically depressed inner city, this class difference is typified in the use of the term "inner city" to designate the area where a particular type of person comes from.

> If you really think about it, when you think of "inner city," who do you think of? Do you think of poor Black people? Poor Mexicans? I don't use the term "Mexican," but that's what they think of -- Mexicans and poor Black people, gangs and that kind of stuff. So, generally where you find the inner city you find low-class minorities. That's what I think of.

This same student sees the intergenerational quality of the way that race and class define and construct opportunities and advantage in our society.

> I feel like let's say your family that was raised in the projects or whatever, they're not knowing about college. They may know about it, but they're like, "Only white people do that." Then you have your middle working-class who are like my mom who just work hard and then the only thing they know how to tell their kids is, "Go to school. You have to at least get a high school education." Then you have like your professional family and they already know. They know that in order to get ahead in life - in order to be more or less successful in life, you have to go to college. You have to do this, you have to do that. To me, that makes a big difference.

So for this student, race is a location from which a person approaches life which is rooted in an individual's personal habitus and the class background that it encompasses. In responding to the question: "Why are there such large differences in the numbers of Black kids and white kids who go to college?", another student from Lincoln is well aware of the advantages that come with whiteness and the disadvantages with which her race is burdened:

> I think it's more a thing of circumstances. It seems like white people have more advantages. They have better schools. I'm not saying that our schools don't educate right. For us, having computers in the classroom is like the biggest thing in the world and like we have a CD ROM and I didn't even know -- that's like, "Wow! We have a CD ROM?" Then, we have some white kids who have CD ROM at their house. So, they're familiar with that stuff. Maybe their parents are already doctors or already lawyers, and teachers and professionals. Black people -- usually, you have the welfare and then you have the people like my mom who are kind of like middle class and who are just working paycheck to paycheck, struggling just to live. I think that in the white population you have more professionals than in the black population. That influences a child.

This student sees the circumstances which surround the students at her school and knows that the playing field is far from level. She notes that these differences which mark the experience of white students and Black students are rooted in their differential histories. White kids have parents "who are already doctors or already lawyers." She implies that these families have been around long enough to reach this level of education and the

accompanying class position. Furthermore, in noting the advantages from which these white children of white doctors and lawyers benefit such as the latest computer innovations, she recognizes the intergenerational quality of our society's status arrangements based on our racial history. Similarly, a teacher from Lincoln notes:

> I think most of our kids think college is a place for these kids who have a lot of money, different culture, etc. How many people have they seen in college? How many of their own? How many moms or dads do they have in college, or cousins or uncles? Anybody? Even, to this day, there are kids that are still -- I find it amazing that in 1995 -- that there are black kids who still are saying, "I'm the first one to even go to college." I find that absolutely amazing, still. I was the first to go to college in my generation -- it seems like we would have caught up by now.

This passage illustrates how these status arrangements are constructed around the economy of culture, knowledge and race. Whether at Hadley, Lincoln or Wilson the Black girls in this study noted the historical, intergenerational quality of the class differences which separated them from their white classmates. For these students, the construction of the racial borders which help to define their futures are often rooted in class inequalities. Race and class issues are both important in shaping these school environments which, in turn, influence the futures that students deem possible.

This mother of a student from Wilson, the school which has a mixed race and class composition, also sees race as placing her daughter in a particular location in society which is marked by disadvantage. The following quotation comes from an interview with the mother in which she related how she has pushed her daughter to go to college and hope for something more out of life than she has as a welfare mother of three children who had her first child at age 16.

> I told her MacDonalds isn't gonna get it. You used to be able to get a minimum wage job around here but now you can't even get that. I told her

> what you think you gonna do? Live on what you make at MacDonalds? The more you learn the more you earn. That's what I told her. She's black and so its gonna be hard."

This mother knows that getting an education will make a difference in her daughter's life but she also knows that her progression through society will be more difficult because of her daughter's blackness. The following quotation from a Wilson student echoes this mother's sentiment that it is just plain harder for Black students to succeed because of the structural disadvantaged posed by their race. This student focuses on the class differences which mark racial boundaries for her. This student was asked if she thinks that the process of applying to college is different for her than for white students:

> To me, it is kind of hard, especially when you're trying to apply to colleges that are not black [predominantly white colleges]. It's kind of hard because you're like in a competition with all Oriental and white people. I don't want to say it's like really, really hard-hard, but it's like kind of a struggle. It's just very competitive out there. I mean, you have to work much harder, I believe. I mean, you have the same opportunities, I believe, but it's just a matter of you working harder because black people are known to not really have a lot of money. It's just like you have to struggle. Everyone has to struggle, but I just believe black people have to struggle a little harder. I mean, because you know there's a ladder in which we stand on, and we're not like the lowest, but we're like kind of down there because Asians they're going, they're getting their degrees; white people, they're all out there. It's just black people have to struggle harder.

Blackness as Standpoint: "Living in the White Man's World"

Another one of the elements of the linked dimensions which defined blackness in this study was standpoint. Each student in the study maintained personal differences around her racial standpoint which reflect the personal nature of the habitus, yet almost all of the students in some way managed dual racial standpoints. These students who managed two racial standpoints maintained one which linked them with their Black community as well as a racial standpoint which allowed them to interact in the white

world. From the struggle with the duality posed by their academic success and aspirations and their identity as African-American women to the maintenance of both Black and white friendship ties to the ability to learn and speak both a Black dialect and standard English, these students struggle to maintain dual standpoints or stances in their lives. They maintain their standpoint as Black women as well as their standpoint as Americans who fervently aspire to success in the white American mainstream and the economic and class benefits this success promises.

The following quote from one Black Hadley student typifies this identity conflict and her desire to live out her life in both the Black and American worlds as the whiteness of the American experience and the blackness of her persona come directly into conflict. This conflict between this student's black persona and her white or American mainstream persona is also wrapped up in the issues of class which define the American experience:

> My mom and I are the lightest people in our family. We kind of get picked on, actually. It's really interesting. I didn't really realize that we were the lightest. It's weird. I'm like fine with being -- I call myself honey colored. It's really interesting in just like terms of relationships, even with guys. Or like people calling me yellow -- high yellow. That means you must be light. It doesn't help that I go to Hadley, that I'm light, that my mom's a doctor, my mom drives a Mercedes, I drive a Jeep, I have a pager, I have a cellular phone-- so that just adds to the whole light ... thing.

There are two overriding constructs defining the dimensions of blackness for this student: phenotype and class. Because she is a light skinned Black person she is perceived by others in her extended family and peer group as being "less Black." Her peripheral position in her Black world is reinforced by her atypical upper class background within her Black community. This student is distanced from her blackness because she seems too white in terms of her phenotype and class. For her, the linked dimensions of blackness

center around these issues. For many of the students in the study, how their race defines their experience is connected to their class background and defined in opposition to the themes of whiteness in society.

In terms of a Bourdieuian analysis, race acts as another marker of the individual habiti of the students. Far from operating solely as a marker of culture or of ethnicity, race functions as a powerful marker of membership in or exclusion from a particular social world and class. College is a place for students who fit in there and for many study participants that means white students who have a certain amount of money and come from a particular cultural background. And most importantly in the minds of many of the Lincoln students, these boundaries which define who fits in college exclude African-Americans. Notions of fit in terms of college for these students mean white and wealthy. They see college as a place where they must change to fit in and they must change to be more American, more white.

This notion of college as a white environment in which they are fundamentally not welcome took different forms at the three different schools. For the students from Wilson and Lincoln, the two public schools with large black populations, the white world within which they had to fit and where they had to compete for resources in the college choice process in many ways existed outside of the walls of their schools. The significant Black communities present at each of these schools created a Black space within which they lived out their lives for the most part. However, in applying to college they found that they had to face the larger white world. As we will see later, this is in contrast to the pervasive way that the Hadley students, who are the distinct minority in a predominantly white school, had to manage in a white world on a daily basis.

This student from Wilson, the school with a mixed race and class student body, summed up the way that many of the girls felt race influenced the college choice process at this school when she was asked her opinion as to why more white kids go to college than Black:

> The black kids -- they don't want to go to college. They don't want to try to go. They don't even want to think about it. They know that they can do it, but then they'll sit back -- it'll be like, "Man, college is for white kids. College is for this and that. I don't need to go to college." Because they feel if you go to college you're living in the white man's world, and you can get the white man's job. But that's all bullshit because it's going to be your world once you get out. You have to make it what you want it to be.

For the students from Wilson, most often colleges were viewed as white institutions within which they were not welcomed. At Lincoln, the predominantly black school located in the inner city, the blackness of the students played a role in their perception of their ability to go on to college as well. For these students their status as Black inner city youth at times served to open the door to college for them as this student notes when commenting on the role of race in the college choice process: "Like sometimes it may be good to be black and sometimes it's not because you're black, 'Oh, they letting me in because I was black,' or 'I didn't get in because I was black.' Its always a thing like that."

The racial boundaries within our society, in part, determine access to postsecondary education. As the teacher from Lincoln cited earlier asks, "How many of their own" have they see go to college? For these students, attending a college often means being the first in their family to cross a border constructed by race, class and culture. And despite the availability of historically Black colleges and universities, it means crossing that border into what they perceive as the white world of college and trying to fit in. Attending college for these students means a partial surrendering of their

Black identity. It means that they must find a way in which to live out a life which maintains both their black and their American identities; a demanding and psychologically tricky task at best.

At Hadley, the predominantly white college preparatory school with six Black girls in the senior class of 85, a student's blackness profoundly influenced her school experiences as well as her planning for college. Unlike the girls from Wilson and Lincoln, the Hadley girls felt the immediate effects of living in a white world every day in their schooling experience. Rather than only having to cope with the school itself existing in the larger white world, these girls had to cope with existing in the white upper class enclave of Hadley as well as confronting larger white society daily as well. For some girls, this meant the maintenance of two friendship networks: "I have to associate with everyone at school yet but still out of school I have to try and like do the things I didn't do at school like to be friends, you know like stay friends with my other black friends out of school." Acting out their school careers in a white environment also means that they must work to be accepted in this white world. In responding to a question about what it has been like for her to be Black at this school, this Hadley participant responded:

> In the first couple of years I don't think I was myself. I probably thought it would be best if I just acted like just one of the other white girls at school or something but now like I take so much more pride in myself. I guess you kind of have to just like learn how to associate with everyone and not associate with them knowing that you're different you know. You have to associate with them as if you're one of them, you know.

So for the Hadley girls, their blackness represented another thing that they had attend to while at school. In addition to learning French and calculus, these girls had to learn how to act white in order to make friends and find a place at the school. In addition to the

structural disadvantage and standpoint which marked the school experiences of these students, the linked dimensions of their blackness were also marked by a set of cultural practices.

The Practices of Blackness: "Talking More Black"

From a Bourdieuian point of view, it is the practices of everyday life which create the culture that provide the boundaries of our worlds. It is the interaction of the individual habitus with the surrounding field which creates meaning and positions of power from which we live out our lives. The habiti of the young women in the study are marked by their color and position as Black women in society. Here I detail some of the practices such as the manner of speech and dress which mark their blackness. As Omi and Winant (1986: 62) note:

> In US society, then, a kind of 'racial etiquette' exists, a set of interpretive codes and racial meanings which operate in the interactions of daily life. Rules shaped by our perception of race in a comprehensively racial society determine the 'presentation of self,' distinctions of status, and appropriate mode of conduct. ... Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of their own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Race becomes 'common sense' - a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world.

This "common sense" way of operating in the world is akin to Bourdieu's notion of the logic of practice. For Bourdieu, the habitus is the natural - i.e. common sense - way we understand the world and act in it. In the same way that a basketball player has an unconscious sense of her position on the court, and that of her teammates as well, which allows her to make a "no look" or "blind" pass accurately to another player, we all have an internalized, second-nature sense of the operation of place, position and relation in our social world. This innate, unconscious sense allows that same kind of instinctual "blind"

or "no look" interaction. In this study, one of the dimensions which is crucial to these girls' instinctual, unconscious, intuitive understanding of the practices and boundaries of their habiti is race.

Omi and Winant's "racial etiquette" encompassed in the Bourdieuian notion of habitus exists in the way that these young women operate in their school settings and the values that they gather together around. It is evident for some in patterns of speech and dress which serve as markers of inclusion and exclusion, outward symbols of an individual's racial stance in the world. One Hadley student talked about how the other Black girls at school alter their appearance by straightening their hair or wearing contact lenses to change the color of their eyes in order to fit in to the white Hadley environment. Below another Hadley student talks about the way that the more monied and seemingly carefree lifestyle of the white girls at the school is seen in the different kinds of clothes that they wear and the amount of money that they are able and willing to spend on their clothes.

> It's just like the way, their lifestyle, they take so much for granted. Like a couple of us in my group of friends, will be just sitting around and we'll listen to some of them talk and they'll be talking about how they just bought this sweater for sixty-five dollars and wasn't that so cheap and we'll be sitting there going you know they paid so much for that and they really do not know what cheap means.

Another student talks about the class differences at the school and how part of fitting in to the school has to do with wearing the right clothes: "Yeah, seventh grade I think I cried almost every single day. You're really impressionable and everyone's got their new styles of this and you can't go out and get it cause you don't have seventy bucks to pay."

These markers and practices combine with the previously noted racial standpoint and position of structural disadvantage to compose the social dimensions of blackness for these young women.

As these quotations illustrate there are practices and dispositions which contribute to their blackness. Often, these dispositions are rooted in social class differences and serve to distance the student from the educational opportunity structure of this country. Moreover, the cultural practices and beliefs of a person manifest their racial standpoint. This student from Lincoln, the predominantly Black inner city school, talks about how she had assumed that one of her teachers, who is far from the African-American phenotype with blonde hair and blue eyes, was black because of his beliefs about race and society:

> Like I have my AP History teacher, he's white, and I just found out. Like I didn't realize he was white until eleventh grade and we were talking about different things. We were like, "You have blue eyes?" And he was like, "Yeah. You know I'm white." I thought he was Latino. It was like we would talk about in class about racial issues and he pretty much has the same standards we did. So, it was like, "Huh! What? You feel the same way! What? You think like us." It was kind of like a shock that he wasn't maybe offended by some of the things because a lot of kids they're ignorant. They say things and they don't think about what they're saying. They don't know what they're saying and what it actually means to say, "Well, I think white people are this" or "white people are that." I thought that it was real interesting that he didn't get offended and that he understood what we were saying how we felt. So, that's what like tripped me out. I was sitting there for like ten minutes. "Wait a minute. You're white?!" He understood.

So for this student, race is also the way that this teacher interacted with the students in his class. He held the same beliefs and values around issues discussed in class as his Black students. Furthermore, this account seems to imply that he had an empathetic understanding of the racial standpoint of his students. For the student quoted here, the meaning of these beliefs and practices were more powerful in identifying this teacher as

Black than was his appearance. Despite the fact that he did not "look Black" this student assigned him that racial background based on his expressed beliefs.

In the same way as this student was blind to her teachers obvious phenotypic whiteness as a result of focusing on her perception of the blackness of his values and beliefs, other students stretched the racial borders of their peer groupings to include non-Black students who held similar beliefs. In the following passage, a Black Hadley student is describing the way that she and other students in her peer group, which is multi-racial, feel at their school.

> Ann was with us too, she's Asian. And we were talking about "Yeah just look at us, all us minorities, walking around this big Hadley School." We were just playing around and Susan [who is white] is like "Well wait, what about me?" and we're like "No you're off-white Susan."

The student relating this story has, by virtue of her membership in this group which holds paramount racial acceptance and understanding, vividly shown how race, for these students, is a social construction based on values and beliefs. She has mentally changed the color of her friend to be closer to that of her own in an expression of shared values and a sense of belongingness. These examples illustrate the importance of cultural practices and beliefs in the construction of the boundaries of blackness for these girls. Blackness has as much to do with their orientation to race and their school as it does with their color. For other students, blackness is marked by the speech and dress which members of a specific community use.

In this excerpt from a Lincoln student's personal essay for college applications she talks about how her family's move when she was thirteen from a middle class multiracial

neighborhood to a middle class predominantly black neighborhood made her aware of the cultural practices which marked blackness in these new surroundings:

> Suddenly [after the move] I was surrounded by people of my own racial background. Instead of gaining a sense of security, I became very uneasy and timid. Because I was unaware of the latest fads, idiom, and jargon perpetuated by my new peers I withdrew. I was labeled an "oreo," since I spoke standard English without an ounce of slang. I was an alien, alone in a totally different world. Constantly in the dark, I was an outcast never succeeding to be "in."

This student goes on to talk about how she managed over time to learn the language of her new school and then incorporate both of these ways of speaking into who she is and use each in the appropriate setting.

> Naturally after some time I developed the customs and language of my peers, which gives me the advantage of speaking two languages: standard English and "Black dialect." When being interviewed by a college recruiter, I am confident rather than intimidated and able to display proper mannerisms. Immediately upon arriving home; "whaz up" (what's happening), "let's kick it" (let's relax), "I'm chillin" (I'm relaxed), are conversational pieces used with my friends.

Indeed, the practice of managing these dual identities each of which comes with its own norms of speech and personal appearance was seen in all three schools. This student from predominantly white Hadley talks about the way her speech changes when she goes home: "When I'm at home I talk with my accent [Jamaican] and stuff but when I go to school.... It's just like I feel like if I went to a Black school, a public school I could talk with my accent and people wouldn't feel like 'What's wrong with her?', you know." Another Hadley student talks about how she uses different patterns of speech at different times and with different people.

> It's really funny whenever I'm with my [Black] friends, like outside of school -- OK, this summer, in fact -- this is a really good story. There's this guy -- he was really cute. So, I'm talking to him and this was like during the

> summer when I've been away from Hadley all these months. I was talking more "black," I don't know, whatever. So, then he called me around November-ish, and he was like, "Hi." I'm like, "Hi." "Oh, I ... when I talked to you before you sounded different." "Well, I guess I ain't different -- like how?" I knew what he was going to say before he said it. "Like, I don't know -- you sounded more..." and he said "hip-hoppish." And I'm like, "And now I sound more...? Like white? Is that what you're trying to say?" "Yeah, kind of." I'm like, "Well, yeah." He was like, "What happened?" I'm like, "Well, I'm in school."

For some students the markers of blackness were comforting signals of shared values and they looked for these values in their college environment. In addition to the warm embrace of being around people that are like herself, this next student from Wilson, the mixed race and class public school, talks about the values and comfort in the familiarity of these values that she thinks she will find at a historically black college:

> The reason why I want to go to an historical black college is because it seems like people always feel good when you're embraced when you see someone like you and you're embraced by someone like yourself. I just think I would feel more comfortable. It's in the South and a lot of them, because we were looking around -- they have a church on campus and a lot of them go to church. That's like how I grew up and I kind of want to get back towards that. I stay towards that when I go to college.

And here another Wilson student talks about the importance of her place in society as a Black woman and the special sense that she will have from getting her education in a Black environment.

> I think basically the culture thing. I guess back to that. Going there -- I mean, I'm not only going to get a good education, but I'm going to be educated as far as me as a black woman. I just think I'm going to learn, just being in that environment. I don't know how to put it -- just being in an environment -- the environment of an all-black college. Its just gonna be...I think it's a special experience.

Race and class function powerfully to construct webs of meaning and borders of belonging for these students. The way that these borders are constructed also provide insight into the functioning of these social worlds.

Conclusion: Meanings, Implications and Caveats

In this paper I have shown how for the African-American students in this study blackness contributed to the standpoint from which they interacted with their social world and how the practices which mark this blackness help to distinguish them within this social world. The habiti of these women, the dispositions and practices which make up their interaction with the social worlds of their schools, are influenced by their blackness. The students all, to some degree, maintain a dual identity: a white identity which allows them to achieve academic success and a black identity which enables them to retain their friendship and kinship ties with like others.

This finding is in contrast to the work of Signithia Fordham (1988) who documents a strategy of racelessness among the academically successful African-American students at Capital High School. The students in this study do not adopt a strategy of racelessness but rather I find that in many ways they do try to straddle the two cultures which mark their racial identity and their lived experience in a white world. One explanation for these findings which appear to contradict those of Fordham might be the contextual nature of race. The Bourdieuian perspective which guided this research allows for the revelation of these nuances and might give us a better understanding of how race functions in school settings to create boundaries of belonging and exclusion.

All of the students in the study have an internalized or innate sense embodied in their habitus of the role race plays in their lives. The habitus of each student bears the

mark of this racial influence in the practices and dispositions which make up the daily enactment of their lives. This is seen in the shared norms around beliefs, values, speech, and dress held by the students. These practices embodied in the habitus of each student contribute to the standpoint that she has in society and how she views and approaches her world.

Other scholars of race in America, including and most notably William Julius Wilson in his book entitled The Declining Significance of Race (1980), contend that the significance of race in determining an individual's or group's position in society has declined and class has taken center stage in American society in determining Blacks access to privilege and power. The story that these data are telling us is, however, slightly different in terms of the way that race functions. I have shown how in these schools, race alone influences the experiences of students in schools. Often, this racial influence functions most effectively as a marker of class membership and position but it is important to note that race in and of itself is a powerful influence in shaping the school experiences of these students. This influence is one that is contextual and based on the interaction of each student's habitus with the field of interaction in the school.

While I have presented the overall picture of the role of blackness at the three schools in this paper, it is important to note that blackness has a different meaning in each of the three school settings. It also has a different meaning for each student in different times and places. The importance of the findings presented in this study cannot be divorced from their context. In the same way, any insight that we might gain from this study on the way that race functions to construct opportunity, must be understood in context.

This central role played by the context within which these racial influences function highlights the role of habitus in the insight we can gain from a Bourdieuian analysis of educational settings. As I noted earlier, much has been written on the important role of cultural capital in the process of status attainment particularly in educational settings. In this paper I show that in addition to considering how capital is acquired and invested in the educational marketplace, we must also consider the role of habitus in understanding how students lives are constructed in schools.

In a discussion of the contribution that using the notion of cultural capital makes to understanding the linkages between social structure and individual biography, Lareau (1989: 177) notes that while individuals possess cultural capital "they must 'invest' these class resources to yield social profits." However, how students invest these social profits depends largely on their habitus. To use the analogy of a card game often used by Bourdieu in explaining his method, cultural capital represents the set of cards that an individual has in their hand but the habitus of the individual determines how she will play these cards. Using the notion of habitus to better understand students' schooling experiences, I have shown that a student's habitus can be influenced by the linked dimensions of their blackness embodied in their social and historical standpoint and the cultural practices which mark their social presentation of self.

Appendix A

Data Collection Summary

Three types of data were collected for the study: observational, interview and document-based. Below I summarize the data collected in each area.

Observations

Each school in the study, Lincoln, Wilson and Hadley, was visited for data collection roughly thirty times throughout the school year from November until graduation in May or June. Each individual observation lasted from a minimum of one hour to a maximum of six hours. Field notes were written at the time of the observation and then, with only two or three exceptions, written up no more than three days following the observation. A total of approximately 100 hours of observation were conducted at each school. The majority of the observations were conducted in the college counseling office or common student area at the three schools, however special events such as the ones listed below were also observed.

- Back to School Night
- College Information Nights/Events
- College Representative Visits
- College Fair(s)
- School Plays and Musical Events
- School Assemblies
- Graduation Ceremonies

Document Analysis

Documents were collected at each school and analyzed. I was particularly interested in any information regarding college and course planning for students. However, the documents were also analyzed in order to gain a better and more complete understanding of the school in general. The documents collected and analyzed included:

- College counseling information given to students including any handbooks or bulletins
- College counseling information given to parents
- Sample college recommendations written for students
- Lists of schools suggested for students in the study
- General information generated by the college counseling office such as the school profile and other brochures
- The school's total curriculum plan
- School Calendars

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the 50 study participants. Originally, I had planned to interview four primary study participants, one of their parents and one of their best friends at each school. However, after entering the field, I found that at Hadley there were only six African-American girls in the senior class so instead of selecting four of the six to interview, I interviewed all six plus one of their parents and one of their best friends.

The primary study participants at all three schools were all African-American, female, college bound, high school seniors. Their best friends were selected by the study participants and were of various racial backgrounds, though they were overwhelmingly female and Black. I also interviewed the principal or head of school, the college counselor(s) and one teacher at each school. Each interview lasted between 50 minutes and three hours and was tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The interviews, with gender and race information in parentheses following each group, from each school were as follows:

Wilson

Four primary study participants (all female, Black, college-bound high school seniors)
Four parents (all mothers, all Black)
Four best friends (all female, all Black)
One college counselor (female, white)
One teacher (female, Black)
Principal (male, white)

Total Wilson Interviews: 15

Lincoln

Four primary study participants (all female, Black, college bound high school seniors)
Four parents (all mothers, all Black)
Three* best friends (all female, all Black)
One college counselor (female, Black)
One teacher (male, Black)
Principal (female, Black)

Total Lincoln Interviews: 14
*One of the best friends failed to appear for two interview appointments.

Hadley

Six primary study participants (all female, Black, college bound high school seniors)
Six parents (five mothers, one father, all Black)
Five* best friends (three female Asians, one male Black, one female Black)
Two college counselors (one female white, one male white)
One teacher (female, white)
Head of School (female, white)

Total Hadley Interviews: 21
*One of the best friends failed to appear for two interview appointments.

Appendix B

Schools Summary Chart

	Lincoln	Wilson	Hadley
Type of School	Public comprehensive high school	Public comprehensive high school	Independent girls' college prep. school
Number of Students	3500 (grades 9-12)	3000 (grades 9-12)	500 (grades 7-12)
General Socioeconomic Composition	Low	Mixed	High
Racial Composition	Predominantly Black	Mixed	Predominantly white
Counselor to Student Ratio	1 to 514	1 to 600	1 to 42
Percent College Bound	79%* (2- and 4-year)	86% (2- and 4-year)	100% (all 4-year)

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