Brotherhood, Social Justice, and Persistent Deficit Ideologies: Latino Students' Experiences in an All-male Catholic High School

Ursula S. Aldana
University of San Francisco, ualdana@usfca.edu

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Declining Catholic school enrollment rates coupled with increasing numbers of Latino Catholics (in the US) have prompted Catholic leaders to interrogate how they can best engage and meet the needs of the Latino community (Alliance for Catholic Education, 2009; Ospino, 2014). Much of this work focuses on how Catholic schools can attract Latino students and their families, but does not situate the Latino Catholic school student experience within the historical, economic and sociopolitical context. This paper interrogates the history and experiences of Latino students at Divinity High School, an all male Catholic high school that has historically served a working class Latino community. The project draws its data from a one-year ethnographic study that examined Divinity High School's[1] school culture. Findings demonstrate how the school's values of brotherhood and social justice facilitated Latino student engagement, while teacher deficit thinking contrasted with the mission and culture of the school. This research calls awareness to the need for critical analysis of Catholic schools focused on the education of working class Latinos.

Keywords

Latino students, single-sex schools, student achievement, social justice, ethnography

Recently, declining Catholic school enrollment rates coupled with increasing numbers of Latino Catholics (in the US) have prompted Catholic leaders to interrogate how they can best engage and meet the needs of the Latino community (Alliance for Catholic Education, 2009; Ospino, 2014). Much of this work focuses on the academic merits of Catholic schools and how Catholic schools can attract Latino students and their families. However, there is very little literature that critically examines how Catholic school institutional culture recognizes or responds to the unique social,

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1   All names are pseudonyms.

linguistic, political, economic and historical complexities that affect the Latino community—and might therefore require unique pedagogical considerations for Latino students (Darder, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Garcia, 2008). Catholic school leaders must better understand how school structures might replicate social hierarchies rather than disrupt social class structures, which are particularly important to Latino students.

Catholic High Schools and Minority Students

A litany of research posits the benefits of a Catholic high school education for African American and Latino students at the high school level (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Greeley, 1982; Polite, 2000). Generally the studies highlight the importance of a college preparatory curriculum for all students (Aldana, 2014) as well as positive and strong school community, critical for preparing Latino and African American students for post-secondary success. Yet there is a dearth of Catholic education research that reflects the actual experiences of minority populations attending Catholic institutions. In the 19th and early part of the 20th century, Catholic schools served the needs of multiple European immigrant groups, and in some cases provided bilingual and bicultural education for German and French Canadian students (Greene & O'Keefe, 2001). In contrast, the Catholic Church has historically marginalized the Latino community through local decision-making that negatively impacted or ignored the voices of Latino students and families (Garcia, 2008).

More recently, research reveals Latino students and their families participated less in parish life because of social class hierarchies resulting in a more powerful representation by wealthy families (Suhy, 2012). Research has examined the experiences of African-American students in Jesuit high schools (Simmons, 2012) but there has been little to highlight the experience of Latino students in Catholic secondary schools. This study serves to fill this gap in the literature and examines the school culture of a Catholic high school that provides a college preparatory program for their historically working class, majority Latino families. In particular, this research forefronts the voices of Latino students in an all-male Catholic high school and situates their perspectives on schooling within the sociopolitical and historical context.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers continue to interrogate the role of school culture on the effectiveness of schools. In her seminal work, *The Good High School*, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) examined six high schools ranging from elite boarding schools to urban high schools that have been deemed excellent. All of the schools in the study had established powerful school cultures that included a clear sense of authority, effective leadership, teachers who were valued and regarded as educational authorities, and caring and respect marked student-teacher rapport. She argued that these "good" schools could not be measured by one specific quality, but rather that "'good' is a much more complicated notion that refers to what some social scientists describe as the school's 'ethos'" (Lightfoot, 1983, p. 23). She maintained that each of the schools' administrators, teachers and students created a community at their school site complete with a solid authority and ideology that the students respected and participated in. Her work demonstrates the importance of a school culture, manifested in the context of a community, and points to the importance of student buy-in to the culture of a school.

Research on secondary Catholic schools highlights how these schools foster a sense of community (Bryk et al., 1993). Catholic high schools share organizational beliefs such as a promotion of a core academic curriculum and the development of personal character. In addition to the academic organization of Catholic institutions, the schools' culture–the "tradition and values; the nature of the social interactions among students, faculty, administrators, and, to a lesser degree, parents; and the ways in which such interactions draw individuals into a shared school life" contributed to their effectiveness (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 127). An emphasis on the communal aspect of these schools concludes that the values, social activities and formal organizations contributed to the effectiveness of these institutions.

For educational leaders interested in developing successful schools for historically underserved communities, studies of school climate have been useful to determine the factors, which contribute to minority student satisfaction and success (Brookover et al., 1978; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996). Within the school climate literature, researchers use school culture to define the norms, values and expectations of a school that promotes social and academic development. More specifically, school culture refers to the social dimension of a school concerned with belief

systems, values, cognitive structures, and meaning shared by the members of the school (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sadh, 1997). Therefore studies interested in measuring school culture focus on more than abstract sets of values and norms, but also on the sets of issues and relationships among students, teachers, staff, the rules, student autonomy, and decision making in and out of the classroom. In particular, school culture is a process—it is dynamic and continually negotiated. Thus the study of school culture will need to do more than just describe the norms and values of a group of people, but also the way in which the culture is established, challenged, negotiated and shifted. Analyses of school culture can also uncover negative practices that can lead to increased drop out rates for students in high schools (Lee & Burkam, 2003). To that end, the study of school culture can serve to reveal specific practices, interactions, or organizational structures that can facilitate positive student development.

Schools however, do not exist in isolation. Students and families, particularly those from working class communities of color, must contend within an economic and political context that often subjects them to injustice and inequity. Research centered on school culture then must be concerned with the historical, sociopolitical and economic forces that impact how students and school staff engage within the school culture. Prior studies of working class students and communities, including those conducted by Paul Willis (1977), Jean Anyon (1980), Peter Mclaren (1986) and Lois Weis (1990), have used a Marxist analysis of schooling to examine the school practices that reproduce school inequality and shape the working class identities of students. In doing so, these critical ethnographic studies demonstrate how the culture of schooling further entrenches working class students in a cycle of social oppression and reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990). This work builds on these studies and demonstrates how a dynamic Catholic high school culture can perpetuate social and material conditions of inequality that Latino working class students are often subject to, despite its efforts to better prepare Latino high school students for a postsecondary education.

Methodology

I use critical ethnographic research methods to convey and better understand the institutional culture of Divinity High School (DHS), an all-boy Catholic high school that currently serves a student body with a Latino

majority. An ethnographic approach grounded in critical principles (Darder, 2011; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2008) makes it possible to not only detail the unequal distribution of resources for students often present within social structures, but also calls attention to the cultural ideologies and inequities that contribute to social reproduction (Carspecken, 2001). My research questions for this study focused on two significant aspects of the school, namely the culture and practices of the school. These included: (a) How does the school culture of DHS, a Catholic high school, serve its working class, Latino high school students? And, (b) How do school practices, rituals and teacher perception of students reflect the historical, political, and economic context of working class Latino students?

The history of DHS is an integral data point that I needed to understand before I started my data collection. Hence, I drew from school documents, websites, newspapers and stories from staff to understand the historical context of the school. I also collected classroom assignments, fliers, announcements, pamphlets and anything else that I thought added to my knowledge of the school's mission and culture. Over the course of one academic year, I conducted 37 field notes, which included full day observations of 9th and 11th grade, English and Religion classrooms and school activities, some of which occurred in the evening. Classroom observations allowed me to see students participate or disengage from the academic culture of the school. In an effort to best capture the overall institutional culture of the school, I attended a variety of extracurricular activities such as sporting events, club meetings, Mass and/or liturgies that offered me a glimpse of the school culture in more unstructured settings.

Additionally, I distributed a survey to 9th and 11th graders to better understand the demographic context of the student body. In particular the survey yielded mother's education level, language spoken at home and other pertinent information related to student diversity. I interviewed 16 students (12 students identified as Latino) from the 9th and 11th grade about how they perceived the culture of the school, their personal experience, and relationships, as well as how they would make the school better. All of the Latino students I interviewed came from working class homes whose parents did not complete college. I also interviewed 10 faculty and staff from Divinity High School. I digitally recorded the interviews with a Livescribe pen and simultaneously took notes with the Livescribe pen. I developed a database of interviewees and contracted a service to transcribe the interviews verbatim.

One by one, I reviewed the transcripts along with the audio as they were sent back to me and cleaned them to ensure their accuracy. I engaged in a grounded approach to coding, where I looked for themes related to school culture, cultural capital, but also allowed for codes such as student identity, and teacher pedagogy to emerge.

Divinity High School

Historical Context-A Struggle for Access & Equity

In 1925, Divinity High School began as one of the first Catholic Archdiocesan high school for all boys in a large metropolitan city in the southwest US. The school has been operated by the Christian Brothers since its origin whom are guided by the work of Patron Saint of Schools, St. John Baptist de La Salle.

In the mid-century, the Archdiocese began to build more high schools throughout the suburbs and like many other urban high schools, DHS experienced rapid segregation. By the 1950s, the student population was primarily Latino, which mirrored the demographics of the surrounding areas of the school. In the 1960s, the Divinity leadership decided to make a college preparatory curriculum mandatory for all its students, to ensure the success of the Latino students all the way into college. During this time, DHS took part in educating some of the most important Latino leaders in the Chicano movement and active members of student groups and community-based organizations. Less than 20 years later, in 1984, the Archdiocese announced it would close Divinity, which was fully enrolled! Alumni, the school leadership, the Christian Brothers as well as students and families voiced concern over the Archdiocesan decision, which was finally overturned in 1987.

By the mid 1990s however, the school had experienced a serious decline in enrollment and a great deal of teacher turnover. This time, the Christian Brothers were in a much stronger position to support the school financially and coupled with a much stronger alumni network, the Archdiocese arranged for Divinity to become a private school run by a Board of Trustees and the Christian Brothers. Today, DHS still prides itself as one of the oldest private Catholic schools that has continuously served working class, immigrant families. In the next section, I describe the application process, demographics and general school culture.

Current School Context

Divinity High School recruited students to attend their school through a variety of methods. Most often they recruited students from Catholic elementary schools, but students shared with me that coaches often scouted students from public schools with great physical talents. Accordingly, survey data indicated that 23% of 9th and 11th grade students came from public school, while 77% had attended Catholic school prior to enrolling at Divinity. Admissions officers advertised the school in the magazine Private School High School Guide, coordinated open houses for prospective students, and encouraged student shadow days. Shadow Days allowed prospective 8th graders to attend the school for a day (with permission from their school and parents) and shadow a Divinity student. Most recently, the school established a math and science academy to recruit students who were interested in this kind of content area focused academic program. These newer innovations were aimed at attracting families that wanted a specialized learning experience for their son. Students interested in attending DHS had to apply to gain acceptance into the school. The application process included an assessment of students' application, transcripts, and scores from the High School Placement Test (HPST). Teachers shared with me that the school accepted students with a range of academic abilities, some as low as 6th grade reading abilities.

Once accepted, families were required to pay for the registration fee and the yearly $8,000 tuition. Although the tuition seemed high for most students with whom I spoke, it was much less than other Catholic high schools in the area (most likely maintained at cheaper rate because the Christian Brothers essentially work for free). Still in an effort to meet the needs of its working students and their families, the school provided every student with a partial tuition reduction, which left families responsible for more than half of the tuition. The school also awarded a variety of academic and sports scholarships for students including a prestigious math and science four-year scholarship. Financial aid made the school possible for many Latino families and the school's leadership worked diligently to provide more than 80 percent of students with financial aid. In fact, the school raised its financial aid budget from 1.6 million to 1.8 million for the 2011-2012 school year. Families of new students were asked to attend financial aid information sessions before the start of the school year and fill out a financial aid application if they felt they qualified for assistance. These financial aid forms were in Spanish and English, and staff at Divinity offered assistance to parents when they had questions about the forms.

Student enrollment was over 700 students and 98% identify as minority (close to 80% Latino). Census data reveals that close to 65% of households in the area around Divinity earn less than $24,000. Even though not all of the students live in the neighborhood, Divinity High School's mission has been to educate young men from economically disadvantaged families from the immediate area. As such, Divinity has longtime served a working class Latino population. My survey of 9th and 11th grade students revealed a majority of students who come from Spanish speaking homes (see Figure 1) and homes where they would be the first to attend college (see Figure 2). According to the school's website, 80% of students receive financial aid and the majority of its students come from poor and in some cases, violent neighborhoods. Interestingly, school administrators pointed to a new trend of alumni beginning to send their children to Divinity resulting in a student population that is more socioeconomically mixed.
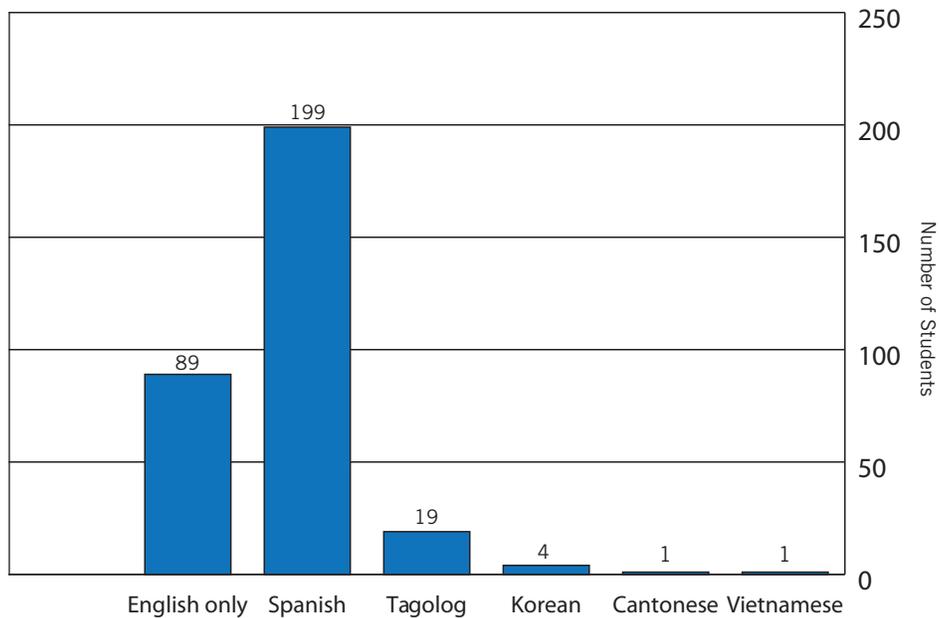

Figure 1. Divinity High School: Home language (9th and 11th graders) (N=313)
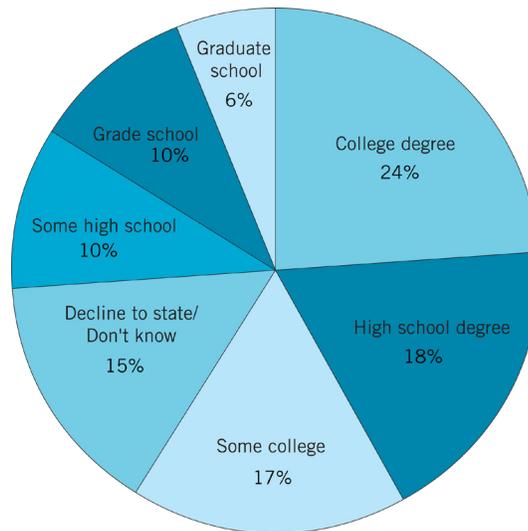
Figure 2. Divinity High School: Mother's education level (9th and 11th graders) (N=313)

Attrition was also an issue for Divinity in the early grades. In the fall of 2010, there were 223 freshmen enrolled; by sophomore year, only 193 students remained. These numbers indicated a 14% attrition rate, which staff often suggested had to do with students moving, low grades and, most often, parents struggling to pay the tuition. In fact, teachers pointed to students who had missed weeks or even a month of school because their parents could not make their tuition payments. Staff indicated that students were also asked to leave because of behavior or academic reasons, but these cases were rare and occurred once or twice a year. During the study year, only two students left after the 11th grade.

Findings

As a Catholic school, Divinity focused on the social and academic development of its students, through the use of communal norms on campus. In this manner, the school's guiding principles served as a school ethos and held students accountable to the social and academic norms of the school. Divinity High School's school culture embodied the principles of brotherhood and

social justice, which reflected its guiding principles of Lasallian and Integrity. The school culture focused on the social and spiritual development by asking them to see God in others, respond to the needs of the poor and work well with others. In a prior article, I demonstrated how Divinity enacted a college going culture (Aldana, 2014) which served to promote academic development by asking students to set personal goals, practice mature decision making and develop critical thinking skills to prepare them for college and life. In this article, I provide a more nuanced perspective on the academic culture of the school, by focusing on the experiences of Latino working class students within the academic culture of the school. My analysis here shows that DHS's Catholic values of brotherhood and social justice had a positive impact on the schooling experience for a largely working class, Latino population; however, school tracking and teacher perceptions served to further alienate already struggling students. Social structures on campus provided students, and working class students in particular, support in the form of teachers and peers, while religion classes and activities pushed students to consider how social justice might impact their lives. In contrast, the academic program at Divinity offered an uneven experience for Latino students often influenced by teacher perception of students.

Brotherhood and Family

Various members of the school community often described Divinity High school as a family or brotherhood. According to the principal, the school adopted the core value of "brotherhood" that year (the year before had been "respect"). In doing so, the school would focus on one value a year (over the course of four years) to fully immerse the students and faculty in their quest to enact these four principles. During the year that I observed, the value was Brotherhood, and the school went to great lengths to demonstrate the value in their daily and major activities. Letters that spelled B-R-O-T-H-E-R-H-O-O-D could be seen on large white butcher paper in every classroom with student signatures sprawled all over the poster. A series of assemblies, celebrations, banners and signs around campus as well as gifts (e.g. wristbands with the word "brotherhood") served to remind the students about the importance of looking out for one's "brother."

At first glance, many of the social activities the school gave emphasis to appear to have little effect on students' academic trajectories; and the vast majority of students interviewed did not correlate the value of "brother-

hood" with having any influence on their academic performance. But findings reveal that students not only heard and preached "brotherhood," but became resources for each other in line with the manner in which brotherhood was defined by the school. School assemblies reminded the young men of the importance of their brothers and their responsibility to be good brothers to one another. Class prayers always included special intentions for fellow students and school athletic teams. The reiteration of the importance of brotherhood certainly facilitated a group identity amongst the school community. For example, Edward, a senior organizing the English National Honor Society assembly, shared with me what he thought made DHS different from other high schools: "Brotherhood. It's special. It sucks you in." Moreover, every young man I interviewed used the word "family" or "brotherhood" to describe the school's culture without any prompting from the researcher. Similarly, Sam, an 11th grader at the school, explained:

> Well, I think this school is good in the sense that everyone is kind of like brothers, like there is a sense of brotherhood. You could talk to anyone and you know that they're not going to disrespect you in a sense. That's kind of like the good thing about school.

Still, I did hear of students who experienced some peer alienation in contrast to the "brotherhood" the school emphasized. Daniel, a soft-spoken 9th grader, explained that at first he was marginalized because he did not fit into the sports culture of the school. But he added, over time he began to meet students that participated in other extra-curricular activities such as theatre and the Lasallian youth group where he made great friends who in turn "looked out for" him. By offering a range of extra-curricular activities, Divinity provided students various spaces where "brotherhood" could flourish. In turn, these working class Latino male youth adopted playful and nurturing roles with one another- a challenge to traditional narratives of masculinity.

The Divinity High School campus sat nestled in a working class community bordered by two ethnically distinct working class communities: Latino and Cantonese-speaking Chinese population. Despite the school's location (on the outskirts of a downtown metropolitan city), the school's campus was free from the issues that often plague other inner city schools. During the duration of my study, I never encountered violence on or around the campus, and the staff as well as students indicated that this was the norm. Students shared that the school enforced a strict zero tolerance policy for many delin-

quencies and generally described their peers as nice guys who didn't want to start problems. As a transfer student from a public school, Sam shared how easy it was to make friends at Divinity, which he attributed to the students taking the "brotherhood" seriously. In contrast to negative portrayal of Latino male youth, students at Divinity shared how their positive experience at Divinity was due in part to the kind reception and goodwill of their peers.

Students and staff used the word "family" to describe the school culture and often provided examples of when people helping others. Ms. Lopez, a religion and math teacher, explained,

> The parents and the students are like a large family. It is a community where people look after each other. I really like taking the kids to mass and kind of be a, not just a role model in academia but also as a role model in everyday life.

My findings indicate student-teacher relationships as well as student-student relationships were instrumental to students' sense of belonging. The school placed great value on structures that could facilitate student to teacher and peer-to-peer relationships and in turn supported various school programs to facilitate these relationships. All of the other teachers I interviewed and observed in their classrooms held two or more extracurricular positions on campus. Ms. Lopez illuminated how every member of the staff participated in the school community or "family."

> There are some who obviously more involved than others but I don't think there is anybody who's here just to like slum it or just to get their paycheck. Everybody bites into or for, you know, to some degree because they could, pretty much find a teaching job that will pay more elsewhere.

In fact, my interviews with teachers generated a great deal of talk about their dual roles as teachers and mentors outside the classroom. Every teacher explained how they fit within the school culture and which students gravitated towards them. For example, Ms. Robina, an English teacher described the faculty by saying,

> The faculty here, you've got such a range, if you can't find someone to relate to then you haven't looked much. We've got your kind of quirky-

all-sci-fi-all-the-time-teacher. We've got here, the Mexican mother, you know who makes you all this food and we were like; you got that going on here. We've got the brothers who, like Brother Mike, [and] you go up there after school and there are like 30 kids up there… you're expected to watch out for these kids.

The staff at Divinity clearly articulated this extra role they took on; which made sense given their annual review includes evaluations based on their role outside the classroom. While some staff suggested that all of these responsibilities could negatively affect their initial responsibility—teaching—they also understood the importance of their roles in these programs because it allowed them to develop a community that oftentimes *felt like family*.

In this manner, students at DHS also benefited from a caring community aware of the structural issues that students often experienced. Teachers and administrators told me about students who acted as extended family towards their peers. I heard stories of students being offered a place to live when their parents needed to move for work or out of the country. Students often acted as mentors to one another when students disengaged in school. Additionally, some faculty who shared traits (i.e., socioeconomic status, race, gender) with students and had knowledge of the lived experiences of students facilitated strong connections between student and adult/teacher/coach/mentor. These adults were conscious of the structural inequity that afflicted the young men of color and communicated about these injustices with the young men, in their classrooms. More importantly, they shared strategies and resources with the most marginalized students in an effort to combat these injustices.

On more than one occasion, I witnessed and heard from students how Brother Mike (an alumnus of Divinity) was a role model and mentor that many students identified with his work in the Lasallian youth group aimed to make students aware of their responsibility to work towards justice and students responded not only to his words, but more importantly to his actions. During an interview with Angel, an 11th grade student, he explained how Brother Mike lobbied for him to get financial aid when his single mother could no longer afford the school. Angel told me that his mom had enrolled him at DHS because he had been getting into too many fights on the streets and at school. She was worried that he would fall victim to the street life that all too often engulfs young men of color. Recognizing the importance of Divinity and what it had already done for Angel, Brother Mike reassured

Angel that he would do everything he could to ensure that he remained at the school. Brother Mike understood that DHS was more than simply a school for Angel. It could potentially serve as a catalyst for his social mobility in the future, as it had done for so many other students from working class and immigrant homes. Hence, Brother Mike made sure that the school supported Angel. Many of the faculty as agents of empowerment emerged that would purposefully assist students who needed the most help—the students who were most at risk of being marginalized.

Families were often invited to celebrate during religious services and special assemblies– particularly those in the evening. I witnessed many parents and extended family attend these prayer services and evening ceremonies, which created a sense of community amongst students and their families. Rites of passage, such as a Junior Ring Ceremony, merged the traditional practice of 11th graders receiving their high school class ring with a prayer service. At this service, in particular, multi-generations of families accompanied students and filled up the basketball gymnasium. Like most special occasions, parents were eager to take pictures and students beamed with pride as they received their rings.

These kinds of services served to lessen the space between the school and community or the intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988). Indicative of this, every student I interviewed said that their parents loved the school. When I probed why and how they knew this, various students explained that their parents had been invited to campus for multiple events/assemblies and on these occasions parents felt like they were treated with respect. Unlike the experience of working class Latino parents in public schools, who most often experience low levels of intergenerational closure and thus, treated with paternalism and disrespect, the parents of Divinity High School were encouraged to participate in the school community.

Social Justice

In my observations of school activities and classroom discussions, I repeatedly heard religious values and saw social justice principles enacted by teachers and students in and out of the classroom. According to the school website:

> Leadership requires students to be servants to their 'Phantom Brothers', teachers, staff, and the community. In Campus Ministry, leaders cultivate their God given talents by working in positions such as Peer Ministry, Liturgy, Music, Altar Servers, and Eucharistic Minister.

Aside from requiring students to participate in religion classes during their four years at Divinity, the school also requires students to participate in monthly religious activities, prayer services (Mass), assemblies or retreats. The Campus Ministry Director and the Assistant Director of Campus Ministry, who served as teachers in the religion department, coordinated the school's religious events alongside students. Student leaders in campus ministry prepare intensely before prayer services and assemblies. I would often run into students who were busy preparing for that day's assembly or Mass and was struck by their commitment to the prayer service. The prayer services allowed students to make the religious experience their own, either by the selection of readings, the music or even the style and theme of the prayer service.

My data also paints a story of young Latino males whose religious values compel them to serve their fellow "brother" and community. Interestingly, the school did not mandate service hours. Rather the volunteerism was self-motivated by students' to enact service to others and reflective of their religious values. In order "for service learning to be effective and developmental, reflection activities should include challenging discussion examples such as issues of power, privilege, and oppression, and hidden biases and assumptions of race, class, and gender" (Cipolle, 2010, p. 5). For Latino students, these kinds of learning environments allow them to name the oppressive structures often afflicting their communities. There is a critical need for Latino students to not only serve those marginalized in society, but understand the economic and racist policies often aimed at Latino communities if they are to develop the skills necessary to resolve issues that plague their community.

At Divinity High School, the students moved from engaging in acts of service to participating in conversations that focused on inequity and injustice. For example, I attended a Social Justice Assembly sponsored by the Lasallian Youth Group, student club on campus. When I entered the gymnasium, I could hear a pin drop it was so quiet. The entire school was present in the gymnasium and students were sitting everywhere from the floors to the risers. An 11th grade student, Oscar, was in the front of the podium leading the school in a reflection. He read the following questions from his PowerPoint:

1. How have I experienced brotherhood this year?
2. What have I done to create a Brotherhood environment?
3. What more can we as a school community to create a brotherhood among us?

Afterward, students were asked to reflect, two students shared their experience when they visited a Juvenile Detention Center. They spoke about the male, mostly Latino and African American youth they met and how these youth were facing life without parole. Later, the students welcomed Father Robert and Carlos, a youth that had been recently facing a sentence of life without parole. Both discussed the huge injustice of our present juvenile detention system, where young men of color are punished so harshly for making mistakes—the same mistakes that are often forgiven when one is white.

There are no words to describe the spirit in the gym that day. Seven hundred students were eerily silent. I could almost feel the collective sense of sorrow surround us as we heard the harsh reality for a child who is sentenced to life without parole. I imagine every person must have felt deep sympathy if not empathy for Kevin and the other "brothers" who were facing similar sentences of life without parole as youth. The service ended with prayers for these young men, and in a moment of true spirit, all of the Cathedral students (seniors and juniors) sitting on the floor of the gymnasium extended their arms and held each other's hands as they prayed for a more just world—a world where no child would be sentenced to life without parole.

In my interviews with the DHS staff, teachers easily shared the ways in which the school provided students opportunities to not only develop their leadership talents but also use God gifts to serve their fellow brothers and larger society. In the following text from my fieldnotes, I describe how Ms. Lopez, a religion teacher, used societal issues as part of the curriculum to better engage students.

> The lecture portion of the class begins with a PowerPoint slide entitled "A Poverty of Riches". Ms. Lopez begins the lecture by asking students if there is a wealth gap in the United States. The students all say yes aloud and individual students share aloud opposite ends of the income spectrum. One student calls out "houses like Beverly Hills and south Central." Another student yells out "doctors and people who sell hot dogs on the street."

> Ms. Lopez regains control of the class and begins the lecture by outlining how it is difficult to maintain a middle class not only in the US but also in Mexico and Pakistan. She presents a series of facts about the

wealth gap such as "20% of the population control 86% of goods and services while poorest 20% use less than 1% of resources." Before the students can copy down the rest of the slide, Ms. Lopez asks the class to count themselves, so they apply the wealth gap percentages to their class of 29 students. Ms. Lopez explains that 6 students will be in the 20% of the richest people and identifies these students by picking their names from the class set of Popsicle sticks. Daniel, Jonathan, Terrell, George, Michael and Isaac are named the rich and stand up. The remaining students can be heard saying things like "Oh, you're rich."

Students determine that 23 snacks account for 86% of the 27 snacks (2 students did not bring in a snack) and these Ms. Lopez announces will go to the six rich students. As the six take their choice of snacks, the rest of the students are talking at them to "Leave the Hot Cheetos!" The students start to laugh and become unruly, but Ms. Lopez regains their focus when she asks if this is fair. Santiago, who is sitting next to me, says under his breath, "this is not fair". Ms. Lopez tells the class that this is an exercise in how the world operates wastefully. A precocious student asks, "Are we criticizing us or the system" and Ms. Lopez challenges the class to think about how they contribute to the system as individuals, but underscores that this is a systemic problem. While Ms. Lopez returns to the PowerPoint lecture and relates this as a distribution problem, students engage in a lively discussion about how they as Christians may unknowingly partake in this trend. While Ms. Lopez explains how "American voters are pretty convinced with democracy" and are afraid to disrupt the present social order, Santiago quietly suggests, "we need a new LA riot."

Not only did Ms. Lopez engage her students in a critique of the current economic system, she provided students with the opportunity to critically examine the present system. Similar to the principles of critical pedagogy, in which youth are encouraged to raise their consciousness about the world in which they function (Freire, 1973), as well as in many studies where the school and community becomes the research laboratory. According to Ms. Lopez, her religion course was designed to help youth think about their lived experience in relation to God and through meaningful questions and dialogue.

Teacher Perception and Tracking

As with most large high schools, Divinity offers two types of classes: honors/AP classes and regular education courses for students in 9th to 12th grade. My observation in the honors/AP classes English classrooms pointed to an over representation of Asian students while Latinos made up roughly half of those classes in comparison to being the demographic majority of the school. I contend that despite Divinity's characterization as providing a universal college preparatory curriculum, the tracking in upper level coursework provided an elite group of students with rigorous instruction and an inherent support system from faculty that expected more from these students. In effect, the students in regular classes had a difficult time accessing rigorous instruction because teacher expectations were low, negatively impacting the academic rigor of the classroom experience.

Weekly observations in English classes for 11th graders revealed a clear difference in rigor between regular and AP English classes. These differences ranged in teaching pedagogy, student behavior and engagement as well as the way a teacher perceived the types of students in these two distinct classes. Visits to English III classrooms illuminated teacher's reliance on direct instruction and a lack of group work. Teacher led literature discussions that engaged a limited number of students and provided students little opportunity to engage meaningfully with the literature itself. In some cases, students were seen with their heads on desk without receiving any reprisal from the teacher. Vocabulary instruction in English III classes consisted of teachers identifying words for students and reviewing their meaning. In contrast, visits to the AP English class revealed a student-centered approach to instruction that required students to be prepared for class, by engaging with the literature in meaningful ways, as illustrated in the following fieldnote excerpt.

> Three Latino students are presenting the poem, The Tide Rises by Henry Longfellow. One student is reading from a PowerPoint quietly, while the others in the class ask the group for a handout. The other group members announce that the handouts are coming and Mr. Encino is outside the room making copies. The class asks the students to speak louder. The group finishes reading their interpretation of the poem and click to a picture of a sun setting or rising. Their teacher interjects and asks the students to explain the meaning of "ethos" and students respond. The group asks students to relate the picture to the

word ethos and student share it makes them feel tranquil. The group continues to ask students to explain terms from the poem and relate them to images on the PowerPoint such as pathos, curlew, hasten, efface and hostler.

The differences observed in the study reflected the teacher perceptions with respect to the kinds of students and classes they taught. Moreover, in my interviews, teachers acknowledged that students were separated into different types of classes and that students performed according to the typical characteristics associated with the "regular" or "AP/Honors" class distinction. Ms. Garner an English teacher, for example, described one of her "regular" classes in the following fieldnote.

> She welcomed me to observe the class but tells me immediately that this is an "unruly" class and that this class will be loud. She describes to me how this class is seriously a talking class and that they can get very loud. She tells me that there are four students who "live to get on my nerves" and that she has resorted to send them out "to the plant worker because that means less paperwork for me." She offers that they "work miracles here" because they get students two years below grade level in reading and "these are the students who don't have reading role models at home or people who have gone to college" but we get them into a Cal State [University]. For the kids who want to do something, they make it happen. We get kids into Yale and Stanford, but those are the exception.

When I asked Ms. Garner if classes were *tracked,* she responded that they don't like to use that word, but that it happens over time as the students *who need* honors and AP are segmented into the same classes.

In general, students in non-AP and non-Honors courses at the school experienced a less rigorous environment. In line with the tracking literature (Oakes, 1985), Divinity High School teachers held a great deal of power in classrooms, as they establish low or high expectations for students. My interviews and observations of teachers revealed that low expectations were reflected in the negative impact this had on students who were labeled as low achieving students. During my observations, I got to know Gerardo, a quiet but quick-witted 11th grader, who was often chided in class for making off topic comments or rapping in class. When I asked him if he felt like he be-

longed at the school, he immediately answered that it depended on the class he was in. He explained, "If you're not doing good in the classes, you don't really feel wanted by the teachers." In his interview, he shared how his English teacher would not let him make-up work or even ask questions. Gerardo further explained how he felt in the class:

Interviewer:	What is it sometimes that teachers do to make kids feel?
Gerardo:	[Interrupting] Unwanted?
Interviewer:	Yeah, like "You don't belong here." So what is it?
Gerardo:	Just probably the things she says sometimes.
Interviewer:	Like?
Gerardo:	Like she'd rather have me asleep than talking in class sometimes.
Interviewer:	And you know this because?
Gerardo:	Cause I'm a distraction. I don't think I would do great, so she probably says that to me.

  While Gerardo might have misbehaved from time to time in class, his interview made obvious how teacher perceptions certainly impacted his sense of belonging in the school and his sense of efficacy in the English classroom. Gerardo shared how he tried to ask for help or assistance with some teachers, but over time he came to realize that some teachers would always see him as a distraction. Unfortunately, Gerardo was not a unique case. I came to know various students in the school with outside challenges, numerous responsibilities at home, and classroom behaviors that seemed to mark them for academic and disciplinary action.

     Even though students in the honors and AP track benefitted from high teacher expectations and student-centered instruction, extra resources were also allocated towards students who were struggling and earning a low GPA. A morning tutoring program before school aimed to support the school's

most vulnerable students- those with a 2.0 GPA or below. Peer tutors provided support to their fellow classmates, in order to ensure that they improve their grades and to "give them a push on the back that they need in order for them to get on track, in order to get into college," as described by Luis, an 11th grade student. However the kind of resources that were aimed at these students came in the form of remediation and a focus on their deficit and need for discipline. Peer tutors could certainly enrich the experiences of students and fortify the bonds between "brothers," but they cannot take the place of student-centered instruction and high teacher expectations that were often reserved for higher track students. As a student in both AP and regular classes, Luis's reflections about his classes and teachers helped me understand the kind of attention and resources students in regular or "normal" classes were exposed to.

> Sometimes they put too much emphasis on the lower half. And also classes are too slow sometimes. They take too much emphasis to correct people. Not in an academic way but in a, more in a behavioral way. I'm not saying that, like it's only, I don't know how to say this, only like emphasize on discipline but there's also an emphasis on academics, however, in normal classes, it's more an emphasis on discipline because there are discipline issues in the class.

Luis also argued that the school should place focus more on the students who were doing well, such as offering more AP classes and that classes should challenge all students more. He shared with me that he often felt that some (one-third) of his teachers did not take his questions seriously, which caused him to back away from expressing his intellectual curiosity. Interestingly, Luis seems acutely aware and appreciative of student-centered inquiry approaches to teaching and wanted his teachers to do this in all of his classes, even the "regular" classes.

Discussion

At Divinity High School, Latino students generally have access to college preparatory classes as well as a number of honors and AP classes, as well as academic and college advisement. Upon closer examination, there were divisions between which students deserved a rigorous classroom experience and those who required more discipline. Interview data from students and teachers demonstrated that teachers felt there were two kinds of students- the

high achievers who were college-bound and those who would be lucky to get accepted into college. The underrepresentation of Latino students in honors classes coupled with the unequal rigor of the "regular" courses undermined the college preparatory mission of the school. Some teachers, who often focused more on these students' behaviors instead of their learning, reified cultural deficit ideologies of Latino students (Valencia & Black, 2002).

In effect, the school fell into pattern of tracking students, which negatively impacts working class Latinos (Oakes, 1985). For students like Gerardo, the impact of low expectations mainly served to erode his academic identity, which led to his academic disengagement from school. In contrast, Luis benefitted from his designation as an honors student and rigorous classes and yet he was aware of the social inequity occurring in his school. This social inequity manifested in practices of tracking and rooted in deficit frameworks of Latinos is harmful to both the culture and mission of a Catholic college preparatory school. For students like Gerardo, who fell into the "regular classes" the consequences of low expectations resulted in a marginalized student experience in that they did not have access teachers who believed in his potential. Instead, these students internalized their failure (e.g. Gerardo: I'm a distraction. I don't think I would do great.) and attributed their behavior to be the central cause of their poor academic experience. Even the additional tutoring and resources aimed at these students, suggested they alone are the problem rather than engage in a critical evaluation of teacher ideologies, practices and pedagogy.

Conclusion

Over the course of a year, I observed how Divinity High School's institutional culture emphasized brotherhood and social justice, but also failed to develop structures to combat deficit ideologies or systematic approaches for listening to the most marginalized students. Latino students, however, did seem to benefit from a school culture that emphasized brotherhood and family. More notably, the variety of extracurricular activities (often absent in urban schools) allowed these Latino male youth to develop bonds with peers on campus. In doing so, the school positively impacted students' sense of belonging, which extended to their families. For working class students, a sense of belonging in a college preparatory high school is critical and an urgent need given dismal rates of Latino male youth's educational attainment (Gandara & Contreras, 2010).

Similarly, the school's focus on social justice allowed working class Latino students to draw from their religious values and apply these values to their lived experience. In doing so, the school fostered student leaders to explore how values of social justice related to their experiences with inequity and oppression. The social and material realities of Latino working class students are often challenging and rather than ignore those realities, many of Divinity's teachers and students infused it into the curriculum and activities of the school.

Despite the institutional culture's focus on brotherhood and social justice, staff at DHS developed an uneven experience for students, especially those that were not labeled as high achieving. Various teachers engaged in negative stereotyping of students, which inadvertently had an impact on the schooling experience for students in "regular" classes. While some teachers worked to understand how to best serve students who might be struggling, others continued to marginalize them, whether willingly or unwillingly. The act of marginalizing students is of special concern on a Catholic school campus where the culture is defined as a family and a brotherhood. While students worked to develop a brotherhood in which they served one another and helped each other on their collective path to college, how could students buy into the notion of the school-as-family, when one (or many) were excluded from that path?

The outcome of this study clearly signals the need to take Shane Martin's words to heart with respect to the role of teachers in their interaction with their students.

> Teachers play the major role in shaping the culture of the classroom. … teachers need to be aware of how cultural identity influences the entire educational process and that their teaching practices, their interaction with students, and their own beliefs about identity influence the academic success and social development of their students. (2009, p. 35)

This also points to the critical importance of teacher self-examination and classroom study. For school leaders interested in the educational project of Latino students, there must be work done to recognize teachers' biases related to class, race, gender that negatively impacts student trajectories (Howard, 2010). By highlighting the voices of working class Latino males, this study concludes the need for educators to identify their own deficit ideologies and oppressive classroom conditions that run counter to the academic (college

preparatory) and social (brotherhood/family/social justice) mission of the school.

As one of the oldest all-male, Catholic high schools serving a majority Latino student population, the teachers and administration have a long time history working to serve and advocate for their students. Historically, Divinity High school has advocated for a college preparatory curriculum for its working class Latino students. During the Civil Rights Movement, Latino students and parents were supported in challenging Catholic Church hierarchies to make the school more responsive to their needs. Today, however, the challenges that afflict the Catholic school environment and its service to Latino communities are both more nuanced than ever. Catholic school leaders and faculty must work with students and parents to better understand the new realities of a burgeoning and diversifying Latino community. Only in this way can the knowledge of Latino students and their community be genuinely honored in the everyday context of Catholic education.

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Ursula Aldana is an Assistant Professor in the Catholic Educational Leadership (CEL) Program at the University of San Francisco.