Despite the Best Intentions: How Race Still Matters for Educational Opportunities and Outcomes

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For Today

• What is race and how does it matter today?
• How does race shape everyday interactions and practices in schools
• How do school practices and policies either contribute to or mitigate racial inequalities
• What role do parents play in this process
• Focus on three processes: Tracking, Discipline, & Opportunity Hoarding
The Research Project

• The Suburban School Achievement Study
• Nearly 200 Interviews with a multi-racial sample students, teachers, administrators, staff, and parents in Riverview
• Community Social, Historical, and Economic Data
Race matters differently

- Racial dynamics today much more subtle and covert

- Mechanisms of racial hierarchy often appear to be “non-racial”

- Harder to see and thus, harder to challenge
## Shifts in Racial Dynamic in Education across Eras

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                     |                                                                      | • Threat of Violence                           | • Underground pursuit of literacy/education     |
| Jim Crow           | • Legalized segregation, separate but “equal”                          | • Legal segregation, suburbanization in south  
                     | • defacto segregation in North (inferior schooling)                  | • Housing segregation in north                | • Freedom schools  
                     |                                                                      |                                               | • Commitment to literacy                       |
| Post-Civil Rights  | • Defacto segregation, nominal “desegregation” w/o integration (2nd generation segregation in “integrated” schools)  
                     | • unequal school funding                                              | • Seemingly “race-neutral” rules and practices (e.g., Tracking/ability grouping)  
                     |                                                                      | • Defending existing advantages/boundaries (opportunity hoarding) | • School funding lawsuits  
                     |                                                                      |                                               | • Movements for educational adequacy           |

Adapted from Bonilla-Silva and Lewis, 1999
A Note on Race as a “Social Construct”

• Most scientists agree that race is a social construct (Blank et al 2004).*

• While race is a social construct, people attach meaning to racial categories that reinforce structural inequalities

Status Beliefs are “widely shared cultural beliefs that people who belong to one social group are more esteemed and competent than those who belong to another social group” (Ridgeway & Erikson 2000; p. 580).

Beliefs about race and intelligence have been intertwined since the concept of race emerge to justify slavery and colonialism (Zuberi 2003).
White Racial Attitudes about Blacks

Figure 11 Whites’ ratings of whites’ industriousness and intelligence in comparison to blacks

*The second set of characteristics asks if people in the group tend to be hard-working or if they tend to be lazy. Where would you rate whites in general on this scale? Blacks?*

*b Do people in these groups tend to be unintelligent or tend to be intelligent? Where would you rate whites in general on this scale? Blacks?*

*The figure plots percentages of whites who rated whites higher than blacks on a given trait (industriousness or intelligence). Seven percent of whites rated blacks as more hardworking than whites, and six percent rated blacks as more intelligent.*

Bobo et al. (2009) The Real Record on Racial Attitudes
Implicit Associations

• **Implicit biases are pervasive.** 75-80% of self-identified Whites and Asians show an implicit preference for racial White relative to Black.

• **People are often unaware of their implicit biases.** Ordinary people... are found to harbor negative associations in relation to various social groups (i.e., implicit biases).

• **Implicit biases predict behavior.** From simple acts of friendliness and inclusion to more consequential acts such as the evaluation of work quality, those who are higher in implicit bias have been shown to display greater discrimination.

• **People differ in levels of implicit bias.** Implicit biases vary from person to person ... This last observation makes clear that implicit attitudes are modified by experience.

The Project Implicit Website can be found at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/
Status Beliefs and Employment

- In field tests with Blacks, Latinos, and Whites with the same educational credentials and interpersonal skills, Blacks were least likely to get callbacks or job offers.

Status Beliefs and Employment

- Whites with criminal records were more likely to get callbacks and job offers than Blacks and Latinos with clean records.

Low Expectations of Black and Latino/a Students at Riverview High School

Well, if you are a student of color, could be an African-American student or Latino, There are assumptions that you don't care about school, that you...you don't have the capability of being successful in school. And so those are negative messages that they have to deal with, ah, every day.

Ms. Tyson, Riverview High School
Deficit Based Notions of What Accounts for these Gaps?

• Socio-economic differences across racial and ethnic groups
• Differences in parent engagement
• Differences in summer learning across race and social class
• Language barriers
• Racial differences in educational investment
• Oppositional culture within communities and among students ("acting white")
Very Limited Evidence to Support the Oppositional Culture Argument

- African American students are no less engaged in school than are their white peers (Harris 2011)
- Black students want to attend college at the same rate, spend about the same amount of time on homework, and have similar rates of absenteeism when compared to whites of the same social class (Cook and Ludwig 1998)
- High-achieving African American are among the most popular with peers (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; Downey et. Al. 2002)
## Comparison of Black and White Students’ School Orientations (NELS 1990-2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Blacks More Pro School Than Whites?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational expectations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment by teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline is Fair</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK to break rules</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ok to cheat</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good student (others think I am)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troublemaker (others think I am)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try hard</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenging Deficit Thinking

• Challenge thinking to change practices
  – Telling people they need to think differently

• Change policies, practices, and behaviors to influence outcomes (and ultimately thinking)
  – Establish equity oriented organizational routines and hold people accountable to them
Organizational Routines

• Organizational routines are the standard set of practices through which organizations function.

• In schools, they include things like grade level and professional development meetings. They also include processes like discipline procedures.

Organizational Routines

- Organizational routines have two basic aspects
  - The ideal of the routine (the ostensive aspect)
  - The routine as practiced (the performative aspect)

  [http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform](http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform)
Organizational Routines that Reinforce Educational Inequality
Tracking
Tracking: The Ostensive Aspect

- Student Placed in Appropriate Track Based on Academic Performance
- Student Receives Appropriate Instruction Based on Academic Needs
- Students Outcomes Enhanced by Appropriate Instructional Experiences
The Tracking Routine: The Performative Aspect

- Students’ Social Status, Staff Expectations, and Parental Intervention
- Unequal Resources and Educational Opportunities in Classrooms
- Differential Selection & Processing Lead to Distinct Outcomes
# Riverview High School Demographics 2003-2004

## Riverview, 2003 – 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td>1,497</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black/ African American</strong></td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic</strong></td>
<td>265</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian / Pacific Islander</strong></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Native American</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>3,118</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Limited English Proficient (of any race)** | 50 | 1.6% | n/a | n/a |
| **Low-income (of any race)**                 | 976| 31.3%| n/a | n/a |
Teacher Tracking

Matching most experienced and well trained teachers with the highest performing students through course assignment procedures

When I moved down from my honors to my regular, I didn’t know how far back I was actually going. I just kind of got frustrated. ‘Cause it was so easy. Like you find yourself doing bad because it’s so easy, you just don’t try. … And it’s boring and it’s frustrating. And in this school it’s kind of backwards because the really good teachers are the honors and AP teachers and the bad teachers are the regulars. And it seems like it should be opposite.
Conflating Class Level and Race*

“The fact is that Riverview is two schools in one. There is the honors white school, and then there’s the other school.”

Julius, high achieving Black junior

I mean if you look at the numbers, I’m betting there are more white kids that are in the **honors classes**, and more black kids that are in **minority classes**.

Richard, high achieving White sophomore


*Less likely in racially homogenous schools*
Institutionalizing Advantage: Tracking and Weighted Grades

I remember talking with Mr. Webber when minority student achievement first became a real focus in the 90s, he was showing the distribution grades based on race and the thing that shocked me ... was the grades of the white students. There were a number of kids that were getting A’s and B’s that I really don’t think are operating at what I consider an A or a B level. ... part of the achievement gap ... is gonna be exacerbated by ... the weighted grade system (District Administrator)
Institutionalizing Advantage: Tracking and Weighted Grades

Some changes [would be] just too much for the district to take, ... [I would] love to do away with the weighted grades...but I think people would just die. (Riverview Teacher)
Discipline
Discipline Routine: The Ostensive Aspect

- Student Breaks a School Rule
- Student Goes Though Discipline Process
- Student Receives Punishment, Suspension, or Expulsion
The [discipline handbook]... This is our guide. It tells us the discipline rules. It tells us the consequences ... We don’t care if you’re white, black, Hispanic, Russian, Asian, Hebrew, Chinese. We’re going to follow that book. And that’s just where we are. I come into this building. When I come into this building, I don’t see colors, I see people. ... There are no favors.

(Mr. James, African American Riverview Security Guard)
Discipline: The Ostensive Aspect as Legitimating

“Conformity to rules is treated by school adults as the essential prior condition for any classroom learning to take place. ...rules bear the weight of moral authority... [and] are spoken about as inherently neutral, impartially exercised, and impervious to individual feelings and personal responses” (Ferguson, 2001).
I don’t think the have-nots are always treated the same. I think if your parents can afford lawyers and can talk very loudly, and are very educated ... you might stand a great chance of getting away with something ... The have-nots, they’re generally ... seen as rude, disrespectful, impolite....And they don’t generally get away with it because for the most part, the have-nots’ parents are not going to come over here and deal with it.

(Mr. James, African American Riverview Security Guard)
The Discipline Routine: The Performative Aspect

- Students’ Social Status and Staff Responses Shape Selection
- Family Resources & Institutional Responses Shape Processing
- Differential Selection & Processing Lead to Biased Outcomes
The Hallway Pass

“Students who … leave the room during the period must get a valid pass from the teacher or supervisor…. Students without a valid pass … face school consequences.”
The Hallway Pass

I think security guards point out African Americans a lot more than like White. ... Like I’ll walk down the hall without a pass, and they’ll just let you go. But then they’ll find someone else and say, ‘You have to have a Saturday detention.’ I think it’s really uncalled for that they don’t stop everyone.”

Maria (Riverview White sophomore)
Appropriate Dress

Brief and revealing clothing are not appropriate in school. Examples include tank or halter tops, garments with spaghetti straps or strapless garments; clothing that is “see-through,” cut low, or exposes one’s midriff; or skirts that are shorter than 3-inches above the knee

(Riverview Discipline Code)
Appropriate Dress

We had a policy that the girls couldn’t have their belly showing. All you saw walking in the hall [was] girls with their white bellies out. Black girls sent home. They [Black girls] were pissed off. [One black student] said, ‘well, why are you saying something to me. I’m sitting up in a room with 6 white girls with their stomach out and you pick me out of the group.’

(Riverview Teacher)
The Implications of Family Resources
Drug Possession

White kids get caught with pot all the time ... The school can’t be dealing with these folks’ parents, because their parents are going to start suing the school .... When you get a black kid, and you suspend them for having pot, or you kick them out, what are the parents going to do? They don’t have the money, or they don’t know the resources. ... That’s why I think it continuously happens.

Julius (Black Riverview Junior)
Drug Possession and Family Resources

I have had parents come in to appeal white students’ disciplinary actions. And rarely will they say, ‘my son didn’t do that or would not do that or my daughter would not.’ Their issue is ‘how do we get it out of the record? Can we not call it that because we don’t want it to impact college admissions.’ … I’d say I hear it twenty times a year. A student got caught in possession of some marijuana. The parent never said to me, ‘he didn’t have it, he didn’t do it.’ The parent argued that we call it possession and possession means you have it and you are…it’s yours to manipulate and to sell… ‘It was never his. He was just looking at it. It was in his hands. So that possession is not real possession.’ (Riverview Administrator)
Opportunity Hoarding
Opportunity Hoarding

• Opportunity Hoarding - the process through which dominant groups who have control over some good (e.g., education) regulate its circulation thus preventing out-groups from having full access to it (Tilly, 2003; Massey, 2007)

• “U.S. whites have long hoarded opportunities by establishing school systems that provide no, or an inferior, education to blacks, Latinos and Native Americans” (Anderson, 2010 p. 8).*

• Interviews with Riverview teachers and administrators demonstrate that middle class (mostly white) parents seek to monopolize educational opportunity

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                       |Movements for educational adequacy |

Adapted from Bonilla-Silva and Lewis, 1999
White Parents’ Perceptions of Riverview’s Course Levels

You know, I think it’s an excellent high school... especially for kids who are in ... the honors program... and AP classes...With our daughter who’s now entering in the fall ... [after a debate about whether to send her to Riverview or private school] we told her that, ‘if you... can’t get into [honors]...can’t attain the grades, you’re out of [Riverview].’

(white middle class mother)
White Parents’ Perceptions of Riverview’s Course Levels

The system works...right. The system works good if...you’re on top of things...this is what I’ve always heard about Riverview is that if you’re on the honor’s track it’s an excellent school.

(Deborah, white middle class mother)
White Parents’ Intervention in Course Placement

I truly think that they [school policy makers] have created a monster and a monster which supports the academic achievement gap by allowing the parents to have the final say.

(District Administrator)
White Parents’ Intervention in Course Placement

I counted them at one point. [I attended] over 200 meetings of – with parents of kids ... to talk about the standards and the fact that we needed common standards for all kids, not different standards for different kids; and to reassure people that our high end kids were not gonna – we’re not – this was not about dummying down the curriculum.

(District Administrator)
Opportunity Hoarding

P: What would I change? There are people who would change the leveling system. I would not. I would not. I would not attempt to figure out a way to make the boundaries, I don’t know what I’m trying to say there.

I: What do you do?

P: I know there are parents who are great proponents of just “no leveling,” but sorry, I don’t want my kid to sit in a class of 30 and have it be a waste of their time. I just don’t, you know. I’ve been there...I don’t know what I would change to be honest ...it’s a pretty good institution. But...my children are all at the honors level.
Internal White Flight

The whole idea of having classes across the board reflecting the mix of the school – one issue which I don’t think gets talked much about is white flight, for lack of a better term. When the U.S. History team classes were created, I think there was a movement of some white kids into American Studies because that was perceived as a safe place to be for whatever reason, and in some cases I’m not sure they’re even conscious of it.

History Teacher
Internal White Flight

Many of my honors kids that I had as freshmen had parents who strong-armed them, white kids, into studying like Russian history. And they said ‘well, Mommy I have no interest in Russian history, I wanna study Africa.’ They say, ‘you’re taking Russian.’ Or, ‘Mommy I have no interest in Middle East... ‘you’re taking Middle East.’ And those classes have become largely white honors, Russian and Middle East.

Honors History Teacher
Legitimizing Advantage: Colorblindness and Culture Racism

I think it would be nice if that was maybe...If race was deemphasized and the emphasis was on parental involvement, coming to school, um...those are the problems. It’s not because somebody’s Black, White, Hispanic. It’s more of a cultural attitude towards education and school. ...We hear there’s a racial gap but I... I think in some respects the emphasis on race does a disservice to everybody cause it’s not talking about what’s really important.

Lisa (white middle class parent)
Conclusions

• Race shapes students’ experiences in organizational routines through differences in resources and race-based status beliefs

• Schools must recognize these micro-level process and identify policies/practices that reinforce inequality
  – Alert people to the ways that unconscious processes, informed by status beliefs, reproduce racial inequality
  – Examine and change policies and practices that contribute to racial inequality (clearly distinguish between ostensive and peformative aspects of routines)
  – Challenge opportunity hoarding – the process of parents maintaining racial advantages