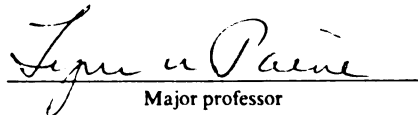This is to certify that the

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Jeremy N. Price

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**AGAINST THE ODDS: THE MEANING OF SCHOOL
AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LIVES
OF SIX YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN**

By

Jeremy Nicholas Price

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

1995

ABSTRACT

AGAINST THE ODDS: THE MEANING OF SCHOOL
AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LIVES
OF SIX YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

By

Jeremy N. Price

My study focuses on the social worlds of six young African-American men committed to acquiring the high school diploma and attempts to understand the experiences of and meanings they gave to schooling, relationships with family members, and peers in and out of school. Located within feminist and critical traditions, the study paints complex and multidimensional images of their experiences as they went to school.

Relatively little is known about the worldviews of young African-American men who make the decision to stay in school. The six young African-American men, aged from fifteen to seventeen years old, from different social class locations, attended either tenth or eleventh grade at different schools in a mid-sized city in Michigan. From August 1992 through April 1993 I conducted conversational and more formal, but relatively unstructured interviews outside of the context of schools in places selected by participants of the study.

While the young men all were committed to acquiring the high school diploma, they also critiqued aspects of their experiences in school. The critique included the disengaging pedagogy and curriculum they experienced in classrooms and their difficulty in forming connected relationships. Their critique of schooling differed, however, as did their experiences in and out of school. Most were committed to challenging dominant images about African-American men that tend to dominate research literature and the popular press.

The study attempts to connect the images and meanings they constructed of schooling, relationships with family and peers to issues of power arrangements and social inequalities. I argue that these young men had different kinds of choices, could imagine different kinds of futures for themselves, had different ideas about what was important to know, and had different meanings of success, in a large measure, because they had differential access to power and privilege and encountered inequality, and some institutions, in very different ways. I further argue that such power arrangements reflected patterns of privilege and penalty dynamically shaped through interlocking and interconnected systems of race, class, and gender that shaped and were shaped by their encounters in their daily lives.

to those that dream and dare to be something more

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the six young African-American men who agreed to participate in this study, there would be no study. They, perhaps are my most valuable resource. Not just for their participation in this study, but for the honesty and trust they placed in my hands. They are all truly remarkable young men who have affected not only my own lives, but my own. There is no doubt in my mind that they have enriched my life.

As a graduate student more curious with the pursuit of my people in the Africa than the complexities of a large research university in the United States, I have been fortunate *to those that dream and dare to be something more* Michigan State University community. There has been a very proud of faculty and graduate students, past and present, who have not only supported me intellectually and emotionally, but have helped sustain me. Those individuals have represented some of the people from whom I have receive significant support. In the dark and lonely moments of struggle, exhilaration and frustration, my colleagues, family and friends helped me craft this body of work and flourish in the process. Finding the words that capture my gratitude to these people is not easy.

I received wonderful support from my dissertation committee, Lynn Paine, Maxine Baca Zinn, Doug Campbell, David Labaree, and Nancy Hatch. Each committee member provided me with support that exceeded my expectations. I have been fortunate for the opportunities to interact with them and each my study.

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There is no doubt that my dissertation director, Lynn Paine, provided my with outstanding intellectual, moral, emotional support and guidance. Having worked with Lynn for over six years, there is no doubt in my mind that she is and will remain one of the most significant intellectual figures in my life. She is an incredibly insightful and caring person who provided important critiques of this work as it unfolded. Throughout this process, she has helped me wrestle with complex questions and issues as I unraveled the stories of these six young men, all the while moving me forward in my work. She always believed in me and wholeheartedly supported me in my political and moral convictions. It has been a tremendous privilege to have worked with Lynn.

David Labaree asked me tough questions, and read my work with a critical eye. Throughout my stay at Michigan State he has supported me in ways that have helped me develop my intellectual and political commitments. David always took my work and ideas seriously and challenged me to develop my ideas and analysis throughout this dissertation. Maxine Baca Zinn is a remarkable intellectual who inspired me intellectually and professionally. She introduced me to a new world of feminist scholarship and provided intellectual support and guidance as I struggled to make sense of these young men's lives. Doug Campbell and Sandy Wilcox each provided significant support in intellectual and emotional ways. They each offered unique insights and gently nudged me and helped me shape the work.

In addition to the support from my committee, I am deeply indebted to Deborah Ball for her consistent support throughout my stay at Michigan State. Deborah is a remarkable intellectual who has solidly supported my commitments. She has an incredible capacity to listen and support my ideas and simultaneously guide me into new arenas of thought. She has taught me much, profoundly influencing my development as a scholar and a teacher. I feel honored to have known Deborah and to have worked with her over the past six years.

I would also like to give special thanks to various faculty members who over the years have consistently supported me in my endeavors at Michigan State University. Thanks to David Cohen, Brian DeLany, Bill McDiarmid, Susan Melnick, and Lauren Young.

And my friends. They were *always* there for me. Writing a dissertation is not easy, and they understood and provided considerable intellectual and emotional support over time. There are many who supported me, but I would especially like to thank Pat Burdell, Nuran Erol, Jaime Grinberg, Katia Goldfarb, Deb Harris, Tim Lensmire, Shirley Miske, Margery Osborne, Michelle Parker, and Jimmy Spillane. They each have made their special contributions as I crafted this work. Thanks also to Jennifer Borman for her careful proof reading. A special thanks to Ashwin Desai and my remarkable South African friends who taught me much about the political orientations that shape this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Phyl Price and Roy Price, for they have taught me so much. They have been my anchor during this process. They have always believed in me, even when I have been unsure of myself. Their inspiration, love, and dedication, while writing the dissertation and across the years have been a central force that has sustained me. I don't think they realize how important they have been to me during this process. I am very privileged to have such parents.

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understanding and explanations of the actions and meanings of young African-American men in school and society writ large, we have only partial and incomplete glimpses of the lives of these young men in and out of school.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Attempting to expand our understanding of the complexities of the lives of African-American men and challenging conventional images of black men, this study focuses on the meanings and experiences of six young African-American men who stay in school. My study was shaped by an ongoing central research question.

Over the last ten years there has been a considerable growth in the writing and research about African-American men and their experiences in school and society. A somber and depressing picture has been painted about the plight of black men in the United States. Writers such as Gibbs (1988), Madhubuti (1990), and Staples (1987) have documented the complexity of their lives. Part of the story is commonly framed through the numerous statistics about African-American men. And these are significant statistics, for they reflect complex power arrangements in United States society. For example, Gibbs (1988) and Franklin (1991), among others, have noted that African-American men, although accounting for six percent of the population in the U.S., constitute almost fifty percent of the male prison population; between 1973 and 1987 the real earning of black men aged 20 to 29 declined by 27.7 percent; fifty-one percent of black men living in metropolitan areas have been arrested, compared to only fourteen percent of white men. Notwithstanding these haunting numbers about African-American men, Duneier (1992) noted that such statistics may tell us "most of what we know about what it means to be a black man in America, but they tell far too little about the black man's inner strength -- his resolve, his pride, and his sincerity" (p. 26).

By the same token there have been multiple statistics about African-Americans students' "performance" in school, works about the ways in which African-Americans drop out, accommodate and resist schooling. Although these works contribute to our

understanding and explanations of the actions and meanings of young African-American men in school and society writ large, we have only partial and incomplete glimpses of the lives of these young men in and out of school.

Attempting to expand our understanding of the complexities of the lives of African-American men and challenge seemingly unidimensional images of black men, this study focuses on the meanings and experiences[1] of six young African-American men who stay in school. My study was shaped by an emerging central research question: what meanings and experiences of schooling become significant to young African-American men in their lives in and out of school? This primary research question focuses on the meanings these young men make of their experiences of schooling.

Guided by this focus question, I examined the experiences of these six young men, who come from varying social class locations and attended four different schools, and explained and unraveled their meanings of the high school diploma, their experiences in classrooms, and their relationships with family members and peers. I came to see relationships with family members and relationships with peers inside and outside of school as significant to the meanings they constructed of schooling. These meanings were also integral to their emerging social identities -- their classed, racialized, and gendered identities.

The study attempts to connect the images and meanings they construct to issues of power arrangements and social inequalities. I will argue that such power arrangements reflect patterns of privilege and penalty dynamically shaped through interlocking and interconnected systems of race, class, and gender (Collins, 1990) that shape and are shaped by their encounters in their daily lives. Located within critical and feminist traditions, this study draws from a number of debates around schooling (Apple, 1982, 1994; Weis, 1990; Connell et al., 1982; Fine, 1991), the

[1] My notion of experience here and through this work is intended to capture how these young men went about their daily life, and what and who they encountered in social institutions.

social construction of identity, and systems of race, class, and gender oppression and domination (Collins, 1990; Connell, 1987; Dill and Baca Zinn, 1990; Harding, 1987; Kimmel and Messner, 1992; Smith, 1987; Weis, 1988).

In this chapter, I want to introduce the reader to some of the central theoretical stances and issues that influenced and emerged from this study. Greatly influencing this study have been contributions from feminist and critical scholars. These works have forced me to challenge my conceptions of social identity and the pivotal role of schooling in the making of race, class, and gender relations of power and privilege.

First, I will briefly situate this study about young African-American men attending school within the currents of the national struggle over the education system. I will then turn to a discussion of my conception of race, class, and gender as a matrix of domination. This will be followed by a discussion of recent research about schooling and young African-American men.

SCHOOLING, POLITICS, AND CHANGE

As *all* young children go to school, we live with the hope that they can achieve their potential and successfully participate in the economic, political and social world on their own terms and serving their own interests. But such goals are not vividly represented in most educational systems throughout the world, and are the focus of many of the struggles. My own experiences alongside others in the struggle for liberation in South African taught me about the need for unity, strength, and action in challenging domination and oppression of subordinate groups in South Africa. As a white middle-class man, I was forced to challenge my own privilege and my experiences, and to challenge my conceptions of my role as an educator in a so-called "Colored" high school as I worked with others committed toward fundamental social change in South Africa. I learned about the racism, sexism, and exploitation that interwove the texture and structure of South African society. I learned about the

Sharpeville Massacre of 1960; the Soweto uprising of 1976; the banning, detention and imprisonment of many activists; and the death in detention of leaders such as Steve Biko and Neil Aggett. Leaders such as Biko inspired me. In his state trial he provided a framework for understanding racism in South Africa:

> The existence in our society of white racism . . . has been institutionalized, and also cushioned with the backing of the majority of whites. In other words, a white child does not have to choose whether or not he (sic) wants to live with the system. He is born into it. He is brought up within white schools and institutions, and the whole process of racism is somehow with him at all levels, privileges that they hold, and they monopolize these away from black society (Steve Biko, quoted in Woods, 1978, p. 184).

Through my readings and experiences I began to critique the forms of curriculum and pedagogy that pervaded many classrooms that saw students coming to know and understand in ways that neglected or invariably silenced were their biographies and histories, individually and collectively. United around a common thread of caring for human life and dignity, alongside students, colleagues, parents, and members of the larger community, I also learned about the importance of connecting action for change in classrooms to other struggles. But the struggle in South Africa for a more democratic and just society and education system is not idiosyncratic to the South African context. It is connected to other struggles for and about education around the world where education systems are often seen as representing the interests and experiences of dominant groups in society. But schooling is more complex than this in that schools also have the potential to be a site of emancipation for all students.

As in the context of South Africa, the history of the education system in the United States can be seen as a struggle to develop and promote a more just and democratic educational experience, particularly by subordinated and oppressed groups. Education is about politics and thus within this context of struggle, young African-American men attending school today continue to face incredible challenges. Over the past forty years, there have been numerous actions, programs, and

policies[2] that have attempted to address the needs of African-American men, with many reforms not being successful in meeting their needs or interests. Further, as many writers have noted, sadly missing from discussions about change in education are issues about power relations, about the overarching dominance of Eurocentric, capitalist, and masculinist ideologies. Key to any programs or policies focused on African-American men are questions such as: on whose terms? To whose benefit? At what cost? To continue to think and respond to these questions, through developing programs, policies, curriculum and pedagogy that aim at meeting the needs of African-Americans, in part requires a close scrutiny of the lives and daily experiences of African-Americans in and out of school. We need to understand what and how African-American men make sense of their schooling experiences in the 1990s.

At the time these six young men in this study went to school, there were numerous attacks and assaults against the education system from both the left and the right. Demands for an education system that was more inclusive, that suggested alternative pedagogy or curriculum, were often met with school reforms that had been diluted into strategies that "add on" multicultural literature and textbooks[3]. In the end, many of these approaches have failed to challenge the fundamental structures of the education system. Few approaches fundamentally challenge the definitions of school knowledge from the multiple perspectives and identities of racial, gendered, and economically oppressed and exploited groups. As Grant (1988) argued, "The relationship of race (with the exception of the white race) to power, economics and *culture* has never been a part of the core curriculum in schools, and schools are slow to accept multicultural education or make needed changes" (p. 567). Approaches

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[2] For example, Compensatory Education in the form of Head Start and Chapter 1. Other attempts include the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA), and the subsequent Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA). And although some of these programs may have been positive in some respects, such policies are based on the premise that individuals are the heart of the problem, not structural factors. (Mickelson and Smith, 1992). At the same time there have been numerous curricular reforms, such as the *California Frameworks*, that attempt to meet the needs of "all students." Many of these reforms are based on "the problem" as being one of disadvantage and not oppression (Brittain and Maynard, 1984).

[3] See Sleeter and Grant (1987) and Sleeter (1991) for an excellent discussion of the various strands of multiculturalism that have taken root in the United States.

influenced by critical theory have also been criticized by for their inadequate analysis of race in the United States. Currents of critical theory (see Giroux, 1983 ; McLaren, 1989) may view schools as a site for the struggle for power and authority, yet as Ladson-Billings (1994) noted, "The failure of these theorists to examine adequately the special historical, social, economic, and political role that race plays in the United States makes their arguments less than complete for improving the educational lives of African-Americans" (p. 16). At the same time, writers such as Bloom (1987) and Hirsh (1986) have contributed to the reaffirmation of a Eurocentricism in debates over the school curriculum and educational reform. In addition, while debates about representation in schooling abound, there are few approaches that consider the interlocking systems of race, class and gender in critical analyses of schooling.

Further, Apple (1994) suggested that the current wave of "conservative restoration" in the United States is hallmarked by its "unremitting attack on education." He argued that

> National curricula and assessment, greater opportunities for 'parental choice,' tighter accountability and control, the marketization and privatization of education -- all of these proposals may be internally contradictory as a set of 'reforms,' but all are part of a conservative package that have been formed by the neo-liberal and neo-conservative wings of this movement. Some of (the) criticisms leveled by conservatives are partly correct. But, the political and educational response of the Right leads in exactly the wrong direction . . . for the majority of people in this society (p. 3).

And the litany of the attacks on education continue. The most recent attack includes the passing of Proposition 187 in California and the exclusion of "illegal immigrants" from social services, including schooling, a trend that could spread to others states. The implications are frightening. Proposition 187 cannot be disentangled from the tide of attacks on, for example, welfare and health care, that dominated the conservative agenda in the 1994 elections. The currents attacks must be seen as attacks on the rights and interests of subordinate groups in the United States.

Amidst the often turbulent currents of various political agendas, however, many students continue to attend school. And those students who are "allowed" or who manage to sustain themselves to complete and succeed in schools do so in contexts where curriculum, pedagogy, and social relationships, in the main, serve to foster privilege for some and penalty for others through a structure and culture of class, gender, and race domination. For African-American students, absent from many of their educational experiences are the voices and images of African-Americans past and present who are integral to any story about the U.S., its culture and its people. Also absent are opportunities to know and understand the world on their own terms.

Building an educational system that meets the demands, interests, and potentials of subordinate groups is one of the enduring struggles that has faced teachers, students, and parents for the past hundred years. The reality facing most students of color in the United States is that they will attend a school where their interests are not represented, where their voices are not heard, and where the likelihood of them fulfilling their potential is slim. However, despite the attacks on the educational system, the struggles for emancipatory curriculum and pedagogy (Freire, 1994; hooks, 1994; Shor, 1992; Weiler, 1988) continue. And amidst these debates and struggles many students continue to go to school. Why is it that students who are excluded and marginalized, in the face of so much adversity, continue to go to school? Do they wholeheartedly embrace meritocratic ideology? Do they hanker after material wealth and prosperity, or is it more complex than that? What meanings do they develop of their schooling experiences? What barriers or penalties may they encounter as they pursue the high school diploma? This study is about the various perspectives of young men who have decided to stay in school. It is about six young African-American men who in the face of many obstacles get up each day and go to school, attend classes and attempt to acquire a high school diploma.

YOUNG AFRICAN MEN, SCHOOLING, AND SOCIETY

Young African-American men attending school today face incredible challenges. It has been well documented how schools have historically ill-served African-Americans (Lomotey, 1990; Patton, 1981). From the desegregation era of the 1960s to the present day, schools remain and are seen as Eurocentric institutions that require people of color to engage in the process of schooling on white terms (Ogbu, 1988). Though there have been dramatic changes in the access and opportunities afforded African-Americans attending school, little in reality seems to have changed (Grant, 1988). While there has been a steady decline over the past thirty years in the number of African-American youth dropping out of school, more than one out of five black youth in the 18-21 age group do not have the necessary skills for entry-level jobs, apprenticeship programs or post-secondary education (Gibbs, 1988, p. 6). At the same time, as Mickelson and Smith (1992) noted, while difference in educational attainment may have narrowed somewhat among racial groups, people of color earn on average "significantly less than their white males with comparable educational credentials" (p. 367). Such comparative outcomes tell us about African-American youth and the racial inequities that seem persistent in the labor market. However, what these statistics do not tell us about are the textured experiences of African-Americans in school. These statistics do not tell us the stories of the young men of color who possess the "comparable education credentials," nor do they unravel the complicated picture of their acquisition of such credentials. But it is not just their individual stories that I am interested in. I am also interested in understanding larger questions about access to power and privilege, and the penalties and barriers that may lay in the paths of young African-American men in pursuit of the high school credential.

In thinking about these young men, and their experiences in school, I began this study steeped in much of the literature about race, class, and gender systems. As I

began to talk with the young men and develop analyses, I began to recognize the complexity not only of the interconnections of race, class and gender, but of each dimension of the dynamic. As Ng (1994) argued, race, class, and gender are not simply categories reflecting different and separate spheres of social life, rather they are "*relations* that organize our productive and reproductive activities, located in time and space . . . they are concrete social relations that are discoverable in the everyday world of experiences" (p. 50). Although an elaborated discussion of what is meant by race, class, and gender is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will provide a sketch of the ways in which I have come to conceptualize relations of race, class, and gender in this study.

INTERSECTING SYSTEMS OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER

Much of the focus of this study is situated at the level of individual biography. At the same time, I try to position these biographies within the context of groups and the institutions the six young men inhabit in their daily lives. Their narratives illustrate the complexity of class, race, and gender relations, and the ways in which these social processes are interwoven through the experiences of the young men. Understanding the interconnection between systems of race, class, and gender domination is central to my analysis about these six young African-American men. This framework has been influenced by debates and explanations for the subordination of people of color and women (Anderson and Collins, 1992; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Collins, 1990; Baca Zinn and Dill, 1994), where conceptions of gender and race, and the ways they interconnect with each other and class relations, have been challenged.

Within education discourse, Sleeter and Grant (1988), among others, have argued for the "need to build a theory that integrates racism and sexism with class relations, and that does not treat two of these as subsidiary to the third" (p. 149).

Similarly, McCarthy and Apple (1988) and McCarthy (1994) draw our attention to "contradiction" and "nonsyncrony" among the dynamics of race, class, and gender. At issue here is that race, class, and gender are not viewed as parallel dynamics, but in fact may interact in ways that they may contradict each other. In the social sciences more broadly, there have been tremendous advances and contributions, particularly from critical and feminist scholars, to the debates about our understanding of our social world and the identities we construct and live out. Some of the most challenging contributions have been advanced by feminist scholars of color who have questioned the orientations and theories of many feminists' works and who have further questioned explanations for the continued domination and oppression of people of color. In particular, they have challenged the domination of Eurocentric constructs about gendered experiences that have infiltrated many of the images, concepts, and ideas that inform the meanings many of us construct in our daily lives.

Axes of domination and oppression

Through these various contributions, I have come to see systems of gender, race, and class oppression and domination as interconnecting and overlapping. Connell et al. (1982) suggest that class and gender, and I would add here race (see Omi and Winant, 1986), are "structures of power":

> They involve control by some over others, and the ability of some groups to organize social life to their own advantage. As power is exercised and contested, social relations are organized, and come into some degree a system . . . both class and gender are *historical* systems . . . indeed it may be better to think about them as *structuring processes* rather than 'systems', that is, ways in which social life is constantly being organized (and ruptured and disorganized) through time (Omi and Winant, 1986, p. 180).

Viewing race, class, and gender as involving control, and the "ability of some groups to organize social life to their own advantage," allows us to see race, gender, and class as processes of exclusion and subordination that involve differential access to resources. These forms of social division emerge historically, which suggests that these

relationships may change, as Connell argued, "as power is examined and contested." Within these relations of domination and oppression, on a functional level, there are some who control, and there are others who are controlled. However, the relation is complex in that this relation is not simply reproduced in institutions such as school, the media or the legal system. Rather culture, social identity, and social relations are produced through a dynamic of structure and agency. Here, it is important to note that relations are produced through the creation and negotiation of meaning and culture in contexts that are dynamically shaped by structures of power relations.

The idea of hegemony is important in understanding the notion of control and the meanings these young men give to their experiences as they construct their social identity. Hegemony can be seen as a form of social control based on consent. Femia (1981) suggests schooling, in tandem with other institutions, "shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby men (sic) perceive and evaluate problems and social reality" (p. 24). In essence, hegemony acknowledges the tensions between groups and *how* these groups are formed. The depth of social consensus about meanings, images, and relationships is important to sustain the relationship between groups. This does not mean that there are individuals and groups of individuals who do not recognize and challenge their domination. Rather, "It is a question of how particular groups of men (sic) inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce social relations that generate their dominance" (Carrigan. et al, 1985, p. 92).

Beyond a "natural" differences approach

Both race and gender rest on meanings, images, and representations about apparent "natural" differences among certain race groups, and between men and women. Gender and race formations reflect the social construction, representation, and organization of gender and race differences. However, the representations and

practice around, for example, gender, "are themselves not the product of this difference but originate in social relations that include those of class and race and ethnicity" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 112). In this way, the racialized representations these young men make of schooling may also be simultaneously shaped by classed and gendered interests.

So within our society, for example, we have a gender order that socially ranks and rewards men and women. Connell (1987) suggests that such a gender order reflects three major structures, focusing on the division of labor, power relations between men and women, and sexuality. As we interact with others in our lives, we learn about gendered statuses and identities through how we act and respond to others, and thus "simultaneously construct and maintain a gender order" (Lorber, 1994, p. 32). Gender and other dimensions of the social structure are relational processes. As Flax (1987) argued, gender both as "an analytic category and a social process is relational . . . constituted by and through interrelated parts . . . each part can have no meaning or existence without the other" (p. 628). Gender and race are given meaning in relation to each other, for example, white/black, male/female. But there is not one meaning of woman or man. As we think about race-gender connections, constructs of African-American men are "being constantly constituted" (Marshall, 1994, p. 91) in relation to, for example, white men, and African-American women. Thus, I would argue that there are various versions of African-American social identities within our class-based and race-formed social order.

Debates about explaining gender as an analytic category and as a social process are not simply about critiquing past arguments and discussions about gender. Much of the debate is focused on the interconnections of race, class, and gender that challenge many of the additive models of oppression and patriarchal and class forms of domination. It is when we look at race, gender, and social class as interconnected that we learn how the relations of domination and oppression often lead to the

Race as an axis of social organization

Also significant to my understanding of a matrix of race, class, and gender

domination and oppression (Collins, 1990) has been the challenging work about

conceptions of race articulated by Omi and Winant (1986). They give theoretical

primacy to race as "the fundamental axis of social organization in the United States."

They argued that

> The meaning of race is defined and contested through a society, in both collective
> action and personal practice. In the process, racial categories themselves are
> formed, transformed, destroyed and re-formed. We use the term *racial*
> *formation* to refer to the process by which social, economic and political forces
> determine the content and importance of racial meanings, and by which they are
> in turn shaped by racial meanings (Omi and Winant, 1986, p. 61)

Their work is helpful in conceptualizing race, particularly the process by which the

meaning of race is "defined and contested" in a society. Rather than arguing that race

reflects "cultural differences," they argue that race is built into the structure of

society. As Baca Zinn and Dill (1994) argued, the problem with the cultural

difference approach as a central explanation of inequality "is the tendency to

marginalize each cultural group, to view as unique, and to imply that each differs from

some presumed standard. This often leads to blaming a people's cultural values and

practice for their subordination" (p. 4). Through focusing on race at the levels of

institutions and social practice, they argue that racial categories can be seen as always

in the making, as "race both shapes the individual psyche and 'colors' relationships

among individuals on the one hand, and furnishes an irreducible component of

collective identities and social structures on the other" (Winant, 1994, p. 59).

Important in understanding racial formation is understanding that the meaning of

racial categories may differ from one national context to then. For instance, under the

apartheid regime in South Africa, "Black" was used as a social category to define people

who spoke indigenous African languages that included Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu, and was a

separate racial category from "Colored" (of mixed race).

Understanding race as a social construct and as a component of social structures and practices becomes relevant in explaining the experiences of these young men as they went to school and made sense of the world. For example, in the lives of these six young men, while in some way they may be seen as benefiting from a gender order, race and social class intersect with their gendered experiences in ways that they may be privileged because of their gender but penalized because of their race, and possibly social class, depending on their location within a system of class relations. To grasp the ways in which these young men are privileged or penalized through systems of race, class, and gender, we need to understand the ways in which race, class, and gender play out in their lives. Collins (1990) argued that people resist and experience race, class, and gender domination on three levels, namely the level of personal biography, the group level of the cultural context, and the level of social institutions.

Within this overlapping and interconnected framework for understanding domination and oppression, conceptualizing the identities of these young men required understanding their experiences among these various levels. For instance, at the level of their personal biography it seemed that they each reflected a uniqueness that was textured by their "experiences, values, motivations, and emotions" (Collins, 1990, p. 227). By the same token, these young African-American men's individual biographies are rooted in a variety of overlapping cultural contexts, where groups are defined by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation as they inhabit institutions such as schools and churches or watch TV and read magazines and newspapers.

RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN

These young men may have had different experiences at school and may have encountered different opportunities and options along the way. What is important to explore is the ways in which race, class, and gender play out in their lives in order to

understand the barriers and privileges they encountered in their lives. This means, on the one hand, focusing on their meanings and experiences and, on the other, providing explanations for how they make their identities given the institutional options, constraints, or barriers they encounter. Their narratives reflect the on-going construction and maintenance of structures and cultures of dominance and resistance in relation to their daily lives.

Scholarship or the popular press often informs us about the decrease, or stabilization, of the number of African-Americans who drop out of or remain in school. But these statistics tell only part of a story. Imbued with a belief that personal failure is due to poor performance, many African-Americans continue to strive for the high school diploma and/or for the college degree. They live with the hope that such badges of achievement will reap success, happiness and security -- and an opportunity for social mobility, economic security, and participation in the political process. Statistics about success or failure do not uncover the hardships, the traumas, the sense of hope and hopelessness, not only for those who have been pushed out of the public school system, but for those who stay in school. Further, these statistics do not uncover the complexities of the fundamental inequalities so firmly rooted in our institutions and daily practices.

Responses to schooling

Those who remain in school remain tied to an institution where the interaction of structure and social practice contributes to the reproduction and production of race, class, and gender relations of domination in society. But the education system does not do this alone. It is connected to other institutions that also reflect the interests and activities of the dominating groups. Mac an Ghaill (1993) argued, "The education system is part of a wider system of constraints which, often unwittingly, help to

maintain blacks in a position of structural subordination. The major problem in the schooling of black youth is not that of their culture but of racism" (p. 3).

In recent years there have been a few studies that have focused on black young men and their relationship with school. Mac an Ghaill's (1988) study in England, MacLeod's (1987) study in the U.S., and Solomon's (1992) study in Canada each attempted to blend stories of black men's relationship with school with larger issues of inequality and oppression. An additional significant contribution has been Weis's (1985) *Between Two Worlds* where she provides a powerful ethnographic account for understanding the culture that black community college students construct.

Mac an Ghaill's (1988) *Young, Gifted and Black* examined teacher ideologies and practice and black male and female students' responses and resistances at two inner-city schools in England. He focused on how racism is mediated through the institutional framework of the schooling process and students' responses to racist practices in school. The black young men and women in his study experience a "different reality" from the white population at school and in the larger society. Their responses to their experiences, can be seen as "involving creative strategies of survival" (p. 155). Through focusing on the ways in which class location informed different students' experiences he argued that "class location informed the students' experience of and response to the dominant social relations of the school and the wider society and, through these relations, their experience and response to racism" (p. 138).

Mac an Ghaill explored the responses of black working-class young women, the "Black Sisters," and argued they responded to their schooling through a strategy of "resistance within accommodation" where they simultaneously rejected "the racist curriculum" and highly valued "the acquisition of academic qualifications" (p. 11). But they valued the academic qualification because it had meaning beyond a vehicle for economic survival via a job. Acquiring the credential was also seen "as a means of social psychological and political development" (p. 35). The black males' responses to

schooling, reflected in an Afro-Caribbean group "The Rasta Heads" and an Asian group "The Warriors," suggested different patterns of resistance between the two groups and to the black young women. The two male groups adopted different strategies of resistance because they were perceived differently by teachers. The Rasta Heads were perceived by teacher as "rebellious." These students managed and perceived this racism through adopting a response "that was expected of them, and overtly challenged the authority of the school" (p. 85). At the same time, the Warriors were perceived as passive by the teachers who imposed middle-class values upon all the Asian males, which, Mac an Ghaill argued, helped to make the forms of responses in school seem "invisible" compared to the visible forms of resistance adopted by the Rasta Heads. Thus, both groups rejected formal schooling, but adopted different strategies. Together with the Black Sisters, they all viewed racism as a major problem in their schooling. But their differing experiences saw the strategies of resistance of the young black men contrast with the Black Sisters' response, a strategy of being pro-education but anti-school. The explanations for the different responses suggests how the different strategies reflect various patterns of gender, race, and social class interwoven through their lives. Mac an Ghaill's study is one of the most comprehensive works that explore the interplay of raced, classed, and gendered structures and cultural practices in the lives of different sections of the black community that see different responses and resistance to school emerging.

In this light, Solomon's (1991) study, *Black Resistance in High School,* about West Indian immigrants in Canada, provides a well-documented account of the formation of an oppositional sub-cultural group in school. He focused on a group of young black working-class men, the "Jocks," and highlighted the institutional and broader societal factors that give rise to the oppositional nature of the relationship between the students' subculture and the authority structure of a high school. Solomon suggested that the Jocks' culture of resistance is linked to "a history of white

superiority and black inferiority in the slave culture followed by a black exclusion from full participation in the economic, social, and political life [which] nurtured the development of a black oppositional identity" (p. 106). Thus these students arrived at school with a "predisposition to oppose the dominant-culture institutions they perceive as biased" (p. 107). He argued that the Jocks were able to resist the forms of schooling they detested and simultaneously maintain their commitment to achievement ideology. But their response to school, that of rejecting the dominant culture of schooling, saw them forming an oppositional culture which is not rewarded in the ways that dominant cultural practices are rewarded. The study is significant on one level because it links social responses to school to factors both inside and outside of the school, and on another because it addresses the ways in which race and social class play out in the lives of these young men.

Another significant study that focuses on race and class in the lives of students is MacLeod's (1987) study, *Ain't No Making It*. MacLeod explored the lives and orientations towards school of two groups of working-class young men, an African-American group, the "Brothers," and a white group, the "Hallway Hangers." These young men attended the same school and lived in the same housing project, yet they responded to their circumstances differently. MacLeod explored the relationship between schooling and achievement ideology in the lives of these two groups of young men and argued that the Brothers embraced schooling because they believed the era of civil rights had created possibilities for equality of opportunity. On the other hand, the Hallway Hangers did not embrace school. In fact, they rejected schooling because they saw they their parents struggling to get ahead with little success and saw no hope for themselves. The study is impressive because it focused on differences in family, social class, and attainment that led to the Brothers accepting achievement ideology and the Hallway Hangers rejecting such beliefs. MacLeod develops a fine-grained analysis of the interplay of social class and race in the lives of school-going students.

These three studies are significant because they explain the ways in which race and social class experiences interact in the lives of young black men in school. They also suggest that patterns of resistance may take different forms depending upon the historical and situated circumstances of race-class groups in particular national contexts. These studies not only focused on the lives of young black men inside school, but also examine their lives outside of the context of school, in their families and in peer group networks. Together with the autobiographical accounts such as Ladd (1994), McCall (1994) and Staples (1994), these works help us understand the complex circumstances and experiences of African-American men in U.S. society. My study builds upon these studies and further examines schooling, family and peer networks through trying to understand how race, class and gender are made in their lives through the meanings they give to events and experiences.

Beyond unidimensional images

Having discussed these works, it is important to note that there are relatively few accounts of young African-American men's relationship with school, particularly those who decide to stay in school. In fact, there is a dearth of studies that reflect the experiences of a *range* of young African-American men and their relationship with school. Those studies that focus on African-American men's experiences in or out of school, in the main, tend to focus on the inner-city experiences. In saying this, I do not want to minimize the importance of documenting the complex circumstances and devastating consequences over time of the life experiences of young black men in the inner-city. Rather, I am arguing that there are few accounts that reflect a range of experiences about young African-American men's relationships with schooling. Notably, many of these studies do not explain the multiple emerging identities of black men through a race, class, gender lens. The relatively small number of accounts that

represent the range of interests and struggles of African-American men and their

relations with schools is no accident. West (1993a) noted that

> The modern black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be
> understood as the condition of *relative lack of black power to represent*
> *themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to*
> *contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by*
> *white-supremacist ideologies* (p. 16).

In noting the paucity of studies about African-American young men's

experiences in school, I am suggesting that there are few that focus on schooling

through a race, class, and gender matrix. Further, there are very few studies (see

Benyon, 1990; Measor, 1983; Solomon, 1992; Thorne, 1993; Mac an Ghaill, 1994b)

that have considered the social construction of masculinities and taken gender as a

central axis of domination for understanding the gendered lives of boys and young men

attending school, let alone focus on race, gender, and class interconnections.

Many of the studies about schools as gendering contexts have focused more

extensively on girls than boys. Among the studies that focus on girls and young women

in schooling, only a few studies, notably, Brah and Minhas (1988), Fuller (1980)

and Grant (1992; 1994), have focused on race-gender connections, and there are

others that have focused on gender-social class connections (see Anyon, 1984). In the

main, studies about gendered identities have been guided by "sex role" theory, a

position that argued that particular behaviors, attitudes and attributes were associated

and seen as appropriate for men and others for women, and thereby "continued to mask

questions of power and material wealth" (Carrigan et al., 1987, p. 72). This analysis

challenges "sex role" theory that "directs attention away from larger structures and

focuses explanation of inequality on what's going on in the heads of the subordinate

groups" (Kessler et al., 1985, p. 35). As West and Zimmerman (1991) point out, we

are *always* doing gender. They suggest that although it is individuals who "do gender,"

that "rather than a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent

feature of social situations: as both an outcome of and a rationale for various social

arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions in

society" (p. 14).

Emerging from these discussions has been research (Carrigan et al, 1985;

Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Hearn, 1987) of men and masculinity that argue there

are multiple masculinities where "the meaning of masculinity is neither

transhistorical nor culturally universal, but rather varies from culture to culture

and within any one culture over time" (Kimmel and Messner, 1992, p. 9). These

advances together with significant contributions from feminist scholars have

dramatically influenced notions of gender and masculinity. "Studying masculinity

transformed the question of sexual difference from asking how women are different

from men, to investigating how men are constituted by gender" (Baron, 1994, p.

150). For example, in the case of the six young African-American in my study, their

versions of masculinities may be considered as forms of subordinated masculinities.

Such forms of masculinities in part come into being through, for instance, responses to

the institutionalized structure of schooling that seem to strongly shape the

construction of racialized masculinities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994a). However, such a

process is not smooth. Hearn and Collinson (1994) noted the complexity of the

masculinity formation process and argued that "masculinities may simultaneously be

an *assertion* of a social location and a form of resistance of one social location to

another" (p. 110). Hearn and Collinson (1994) point to an important issue in debates

around the social construction of social identities, namely that of the complexity in the

shaping of masculine identities.

Not only has there been little attention to the gendered identities of men in

general, and in particular African-American men, an examination of the complexity

and multidimensional nature of their lives has been neglected. Important contributions

that address this concern have been advanced by Franklin (1991), Hunter & Davis

(1994), and Majors & Billson, (1992) who, among others, point to the contradictory

nature of the emergence of black masculinity, where African American men are seen simultaneously as agents and victims of their destruction. McCall (1994) writes about the hardships facing some African-American men:

> Sometimes I get mad at the brothers, especially those hanging idly on street corners, thinking they were bad. At the same time, I understand why they were having such a hard time getting it together. I know why many young brothers, and black people in general, were losing their minds. They look up and see that they're catching hell from the cradle to the grave, and that the whole fucking country is pointing fingers at them and saying it's black people's own fault that they're catching hell. They're beating the pavement, trying to find work, and nobody will hire them, and white folks cite them as examples of people who are trifling and don't want to work. And those blacks who have jobs are catching hell, trying to move up the ladder, like everybody else, and the same white folks who hold them back accuse them of being lazy and unambitious. Times for brothers were getting rougher when it seemed things couldn't get any worse. When I think of all that the brothers have to go through in this country. I am reminded of something I once heard someone say: "If we ain't in hell, we sure see it from here" (p. 362).

This poignant image painted by McCall (1994) reflects the complex circumstance of African-American men in the inner city. In essence, McCall's (1994) autobiographical account challenges the unidimensional images of African-American men dominating the popular press and society at large. Often cited are the exaggerated and self-destructive aspects of some African-American men. But these accounts need to be seen as related to African-American men's responses to economic and social inequalities, historically shaped by institutional and cultural forces of racism that promote high rates of unemployment, crime and poverty among the African-American community (Staples, 1987). Further, as Roberts (1994) argued, "Rarely, if ever, is the issue raised concerning the possibility of healthy and constructive relationships among African-American boys and young men" (p. 381). In this light, Franklin (1991) and Staples (1986) noted that African-American men are visible figures in the U.S. yet their lives and everyday experiences are little understood. In particular, Staples (1987) argued that dominant ideas about African-American men as 'deviant,' 'socially disorganized,' and 'sexual' seem to disregard the systemic racism most African-American men confront daily. Duneier (1992) also argued that "Black men

are badly misunderstood, probably no less because of the well-meaning liberal media's constant barrage of images showing how bad things have become than to Republican advertisements indicating that liberals have placed killers like Willie Horton back on the streets" (p. 25).

African-American men are placed at risk in society (Gibbs, 1988; Madhubuti, 1990; Staples, 1987) not only because of structural factors such as racism, unemployment, and poverty (Glasgow, 1980; West, 1993a; 1993b; Wilson, 1987), but also because of cultural factors (Franklin, 1984; Oliver, 1988; Staples, 1982; 1986), such as the expressive rage of the African-American men which is often portrayed as "hypermasculinity." But these accounts often represent only *some* of the visible strands of *one version* of black masculinity, and tend not to represent the *array* of masculinities that exist not only within urban areas, but within the larger African-American community itself. Westwood (1990) argued that accounts that focus on role provide a limited view of masculinity, one which reduces gendered relations and identity to role. Such accounts serve

> to pathologize and stereotype black men noting the difficulties they have in assuming the male role due to the forms of socialization, the black family structure etc. It is an account which feeds on and feeds racist assumptions about black men, and while racism is crucial the problem also relates to the insistence of 'the male role' against which all men must be measured (Westwood, 1990, p. 58).

Further, hooks (1992) argued that much of the writing about black men "does not attempt to deconstruct normative thinking" and laments "that black men have not had full access to patriarchal phallocentricism" (p. 97). Alternative conceptualizations of masculinity are important in understanding and explaining the identities of black men of varying experiences. Such conceptualizations also seem important in understanding young African-American men's relationships with schooling. Masculinity "must be seen as an active process of construction, occurring in a field of power relations that are often tense and contradictory, and often involving negotiation of alternative ways of being masculine" (Connell, 1993a, p. 193). Such an approach seems to demand an

alternative conception of gender relations, as well as an understanding of gendered identities within a matrix of race, class, and gender domination and oppression.

The stories I share about these young men's experiences in schools, with their families, and in peer relationships are not intended to reify images of African-American men. The stories provide glimpses of the complexity of individual circumstance which allows us to consider these circumstances dynamically in relation to larger social and political contexts. Therefore, this study aims to build upon studies such as those by MacLeod (1987) and Mac an Ghaill (1988) through attempting to explore the meanings and experiences that six African-American young men developed in relation to schooling. In addition to examining their different and similar day-to-day experiences in school, I also explore their relationships with family members and friends inside and outside of school.

To conclude, the study has a number of aims: first, to explore range of meanings these young men gave to schooling and their relationships in and out of school; second, to explore the multidimensional nature and the complexity of their individual experiences; third, to understand the relational nature of social identities and the meanings of symbols, interests, images, and relationships with others in the context of institutional and social practices that the young men develop; finally, to examine the ways in which the structures and social practices of race, class, and gender interplay in these men's daily experiences.

FRAMING MEANING OF SCHOOLING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Unraveling the interconnected strands of these young men's identities as represented in their meanings, images, symbols, relationships, and experiences is no easy task. One of the reasons for this complexity is that social identities are not constructed in a vacuum. They are multilayered and complex, constructed through interactions among social actors within social institutions. Viewing social identities as

in the process of becoming, I believe, allows room for explaining not only how

identities come into being, but how identities change over time. At the same time, the

approach is helpful in explaining how identities and the interests that flow from them

become gendered, raced, and classed.

The following chapters will unravel and explain the meanings the young men

develop of schooling and their relationships with family members and peers. Although

my study was initially framed through a central research question about "why do young

African-American men stay in school?", I realized, as I began to have conversations

with the young men and during the post-field analysis, that my study increasingly

became one about identity construction and the connections among the institutions they

inhabited. Part of this emerging focus was influenced by the content of the young men's

narratives. The focus also changed because my understanding about the connections

between social experiences and social identity changed. I began to realize how complex

it is to unravel and understand their various experiences and try to explain these

experiences in the context of their social identities in the making.

While a race-class-gender matrix is important to my analysis, dimensions of

the matrix are explored unevenly in this work. For example, this study provides little

exploration of their sexualities and their sexual relationships with others. I point this

out because understanding sexuality is integral to understanding these young men's

locations in a gendered order and thus a social order. One of the reasons for this

omission is linked to the broad range of issues and topics we covered, that some topics

or issues naturally were less focal than others. Studies such as this are extremely

time consuming and required not only my time, but the valuable time of the

participants, and not all topics could be discussed in equal depth. Another reason, I

believe, was that discussing their sexuality with an almost stranger may have been

troubling for them, and thus they steered away from naturally introducing such issues

into the conversation. Consequently, our minimal discussions about their sexuality

suggests that the images, meanings, and interpretations I present here are partial and incomplete.

As I sketch the unfolding of the following chapters, there are a few points that I want to make. First, these chapters are shaped, on one level, by what these young men chose to tell me given my questions, at a particular point in time. Second, there was certainly a social distance between us, given that I was an outsider to their cultural and social lives, and an outsider carrying certain status and privilege because of my age, race, and social class. Third, their identities were continually unfolding as they engaged in different experiences in different contexts over time. I present much of what they said in the past tense, as this representation suggests the narratives are situated in time and place, the meanings of which may be told differently today. In some of their narratives I am able to show how their relation to schooling or with friends changed over time.

Most importantly, the stories I present provide particular glimpses of their emerging identities. A thread that dominated their discussions was the attention to racialized meanings and the emergence of their racial identities. This means that my analysis does not fully capture explanations of the dimensions of gender and class in their lives. Consequently, for the purposes of analysis, I conceptually separate the dynamics of race, class and gender, and examine the ways in which for example, the dimension of social class interacts with race, or race with gender. Thus, many of the stories on their own represent only partial interpretations of a race-class-gender dynamic. Towards the end of this work, however, I begin more systematically to explore race, class, and gender connections. This analytic approach reflects the complexity in unraveling the multilayered and interconnected themes that were interwoven through their lives, and by no means is intended to suggest that the dimension of race is more significant than gender or social class in understanding their experiences in school.

The next chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the study and the young men and my experiences of the research process. This chapter, entitled *Methodology,* provides an autobiographical account of my experiences as a teacher, teacher educator, and activist. Within this chapter I also note the dialectical relationship between research and theory and some of the uneasy tensions that dominated my thoughts and feelings about this study. In addition, I provide an introduction to the narratives that unfold in the following chapters, share glimpses of how I met the young men, and note some of the important issues that seemed to dominate their lives.

Chapter 3, *Situated Meanings of the High School Diploma,* explores the various meanings these young men developed about the high school diploma. I examine their meanings of the high school diploma by connecting their experiences inside and outside of school to the ways they made sense of the high school diploma and schooling. The chapter gives central importance to the racialized and classed identities of the meanings they developed.

In *Accommodation and Critique of Life in Classrooms,* Chapter 4, I explore the kinds of relationships with and experiences of curriculum, pedagogy, and relationships with teachers these students experienced in their various classrooms. This chapter is dominated by their discussions of the racial images and meanings they encountered in classrooms. At the same time, I also contrast the social class experiences of the young men. Thus the stories predominately are shaped by understanding their racial and social class experiences in school. Although gender is not particularly part of their conversation, it is very much part of the subtext of their identities in the making. Thus this chapter tries to untangle race, social class, and gender in an attempt to show how their masculinities are shaped by race and class relations.

In Chapter 5, *Building Connections,* I examine their relationships with others in and out of school and connect these relationships to their gendered and racialized

identities in the making. In particular, I examine these young men's relationships with family members, considering the ways in which schooling and work play out in the making of their relationships in families. I also explore their relationships with friends, examining the peer groups they formed and consider their relationships with others in formal and informal organizations and networks in and out of school.

In Chapter 6, I explore the various racialized and gendered images of others that they talked about. The chapter, entitled *Images of Self, Images of Others*, explores the relational and oppositional images of themselves and others. The chapter unravels their conceptions of "acting white" and examines the sexualized images of young women in the context of the making of their racialized gendered images.

In the final chapter, entitled *Power, Privilege, and Inequality,* I focus on two central and complex themes interwoven through this study. First, I examine the complexity of the range of meanings the young men gave to schooling. This discussion is informed through considering the interconnection of the social institutions they inhabited daily in the making of their meanings of schooling. Second, I discuss the conceptual challenges I encountered as I tried to unravel the social worlds of these six young men through a matrix of race, class, and gender domination and oppression.

wish to imply that the experiences and stories I write about capture the full range of stories or explanations for these young men's experiences in and out of school. These stories represent aspects of their lives during a particular moment of their lives. I am sure that there are other interpretations, meanings, and ideas in their lives, just as some of their interpretations remain the same. In order to provide the reader with an understanding of the shape of this study, this chapter intends to discuss some central issues about methodology, and collecting and analyzing data, and

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter I noted the important theoretical frameworks and issues that interweave this study about the lives and experiences of six young African-American men who decided to attend school. Although their narratives are one of the central threads that shape this study, there are certainly other threads that are significant in this work. For instance, while their talk about school and their experiences tells us something about how they saw their lives, it also tells us something about the contexts of school and the larger institutional forces that intermingled their lives as they went to school, lived in their neighborhoods, and experienced the world around them. My task is not just to describe the lives of the young men. It is also to consider their lives and experiences as a window for understanding the institutional and social processes that are interwoven through their lives. As Burawoy (1991) noted: "We are interested not only in learning *about* a specific social situation, which is the concern of the participant, but in also learning *from* that social situation" (p. 5). Narrating what we learn about and from a social situation is no easy task because it is complicated by the complex, contradictory, and multilayered aspects of the young men's experiences.

In viewing these young men's lives in relation to schooling, family, and peer groups as multidimensional and multilayered, I am committed to presenting the images in ways that will not lead readers to generalize interpretations of these young men's experiences to all African-Americans attending school. Having noted this, I also do not

wish to imply that the experiences and stories I write about capture the full range of stories or explanations for *these* young men's experiences in and out of school. These stories represent aspects of their lives during a particular moment of their lives. I am sure that there are other interpretations of the events, meanings, and ideas in their lives, just as some of their interpretations may change or remain the same. In order to provide the reader with an understanding of the shaping of this study, this chapter intends to discuss some central issues about methodology and collecting and analyzing data, and to introduce the reader to the young men. I begin with a discussion about methodological framing of issues and concerns. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the six young men.

METHODOLOGY: FRAMING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

As a teacher and teacher educator I have been intrigued by certain themes and issues; in particular, understanding the experiences of traditionally underrepresented groups and their relationships with school. But my reading has gone far beyond schools and schooling in that I have read much literature in sociology, history, philosophy, and women's studies that had me exploring issues of identity construction, social inequalities, emancipatory pedagogy, and transformative politics writ large. These interests did not emerge in a vacuum; they are deeply connected to my sense of activism in schools and the larger community. Understanding and explaining the day-to-day experiences of marginalized people such as these young men is one thing. Another is how we address what we learn from such a study through action in schools and the larger community. In a sense this work of mine represents what Fine (1994) described a "troubling but delicious stew of theory, politics, research, and activism" (p. 31).

Influences upon the frame for the study

In the previous chapter I introduced the reader to some of the significant theoretical frameworks and issues. I noted that critical and feminist works have been influential in the ideas and meanings I develop. My learning about these frameworks, ideas and issues has been an on-going process. As I designed the study, had conversations with the young men, and conducted post-field analysis my understandings of connections, explanations, and interpretations for the various experiences and meanings of the young men began to take root.

The form and process of this study draw from a number of research traditions. Primarily, I view my study as an "interpretive study" located within critical and feminist research traditions (see Connell et al., 1982; Fine, 1991; Lather, 1991; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Harding, 1987; Weis, 1990). Like "critical ethnography," my approach is one that is influenced by debates in research that emerged from a dissatisfaction with social accounts of "structures" that dehumanize social actors, and a dissatisfaction with cultural accounts of human actors which neglect broad structural constraints such as class exploitation and oppression, patriarchy and racism (Anderson, 1989). In addition to exploring the role of structure and social processes in the lives of human actors, I have wanted to consider the influence of *a priori* theory in developing analyses and the connections I make between data and the various frameworks, issues, and ideas. Feminist scholars have advanced important arguments in this debate, particularly about situating the personal biographies of the writer within the research. This entails acknowledging one's political stance, one's relationships with the participants in a study, and how we come to shape texts in the ways we do. Essentially, this involves what Gitlin (1994) articulated as acknowledging "the way power infiltrates method and the process of knowledge production" (p. 7). In this section I will explore these themes.

On describing my "methods" for this study, I want to draw from the distinction that Harding (1987) makes among method, methodology, and epistemology. "A research *method* is a technique for (or a way of proceeding in) gathering evidence" (p. 2), while "*methodology* is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed," and an epistemology is a theory of knowledge" (p. 3). I make this point because many people may define my study as an interview study. But the "method" does not define my study; it reflects how I gathered evidence for the assertions I developed. The method I used was open-ended interviews. We had a number of informal conversations, and I interviewed each of the young men between two and seven times (a more detailed account of the interviews is provided at a later point in this chapter). I decided to use open-ended interviews as a vehicle to learn about the young men because I wanted to understand their perspectives on schooling, family friends, and their social identities, not to observe *how* they went about constructing these meanings. Thus the interview, and an open-ended, as opposed to a highly structured interview, seemed the most appropriate way to proceed given the focus of my study. While the interview was one of the central vehicles for gathering evidence, this does not define my methodological and epistemological stances as a researcher. The way I gathered evidence, how I analyzed the evidence, how I developed texts to represent the lives of these young men, and how I position myself in relation to their narratives all reflect critical and feminist influences.

My biography and the emerging research project

In order to provide the reader with a strand that is significant in understanding this study, I believe it is important to identity myself as a researcher and share with the reader some of the political, personal, and professional experiences that are integral to this project. Perhaps most influential in this study are the roles I have played as a teacher educator, teacher, and activist in South Africa and the United States.

In South Africa, through my experiences in grassroots organizations and as a high school teacher, I was able to learn about the brutality of racism, exploitation and oppression. It was also in this work that I learned about the intermingling of politics in every aspect of human endeavor and experience. In my teaching of high school students and undergraduate students at Michigan State University I have always been aware of the significance of trying to understand students, their experiences in and out of school, and their interpretation of the world around them. With my undergraduate students there have been concepts and ideas that I have struggled to teach. In particular, I struggled with crafting a pedagogy that provides opportunities for students to explore connections between social structure and the individual.

I wanted to share with the young men stories of my experiences in South Africa. I learned that they wanted to have conversations about South Africa too. Of the six young men that I came to include in this study, namely Shawn Braxton, [5] Jeff Davidson, Rashaud Dupont, Dwayne Reynolds, Zakeev Washington, and Marcus Williams, South Africa was of particular interest to four of the young men -- Dwayne, Marcus, Rashaud and Zakeev. In fact when Marcus introduced me to his friends, he introduced me as his "friend from Africa." These four young men were interested in the study not only because they wanted to talk to me about their experiences in school and their broader social life, but because they were intrigued with me as a person from Africa. This is not to say that they didn't see me a white person, but they didn't always see me quite in the same light as a white American. During an initial conversation, Dwayne asked me about why I came to the United States.

       Dwayne: Did you just come here for the experience?
           JP: Yes, and to learn from Americans.
       Dwayne: Where you born in South Africa?
           JP: No, I was born in England. I went to South Africa as a teenager, and
                then was a high school teacher there. One of the thing I wanted to do
                was learn from the U.S., issues about black and white people's

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[5] All names used are pseudonyms, including the schools they attended and the towns and cities they lived in. The exceptions are my use of the actual name of the city of Detroit and the Jack and Jill Club.

experiences. And I want to learn that from you. Instead of reading in a book, I want to go to people and find out.

Dwayne: Yes, 'cause the books don't tell you the whole truth.

It was in such conversations that I was able to tell them that although British-born, I spent fifteen years living in South Africa prior to coming to Michigan State University. Presenting myself was not only an issue of honesty, and one of trying to establish myself in relation to each of these young men, it was letting the participants know about me because I did not want to portray myself "as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (Harding, 1987, p. 9).

I told them how in 1980 I became involved in grassroots anti-apartheid activities at the student, community, and national levels in South Africa. On leaving the university setting, my commitment to transformation in South Africa led me to working in a number of different organizations: broad-based community action groups, youth, and education organizations. For three years I taught at Bethelsdorp High School, a "Colored" high school, in the city of Port Elizabeth. The school, although equipped for 750 students, had a population of 1400 mostly working-class students. Bethelsdorp provided an important place for me to continue my work and commitments. I taught Business Economics, Grades 10 through 12, and Accounting Grades 8 through 12. My classroom teaching and work provided me an opportunity to further develop my ideas about schools and classrooms as sites for social change. Out of my commitment, I worked on campaigns relating to education, youth, workers, and women. During the mid-80s in South Africa, teachers, parents, and students in black schools through their individual and broad-based organizations played an important role in the struggle against the practices and institutions of apartheid. After the imposition of the 1987 state of emergency, many of our teacher, student, and community organizations were considered banned organizations and prevented from operating. A number of our

school's teachers, parents, and our school principal were also detained. Despite these obstacles, we were able to continue our work, albeit under very stressful conditions.

These experiences at my school, in the community, and in organizations were foundational to the development of my ideas and practices about the role of schools in society and the nature of social change. My involvement in student and community politics became a catalyst to challenge my own thinking and actions. I was not content with attending meetings, handing out pamphlets. I wanted to be a part of the fundamental societal change that we talked about and worked towards. We talked with hope, with passion, and we acted with dedication. These challenges alongside my commitment to social justice, equality, and participatory democracy are influential in the shaping of this study.

Guiding questions

At the beginning of this study, I entered the conversations with a set of issues that I felt important to explore. These issues were informed particularly by theoretical and empirical considerations I noted in the introduction to this study. As I scoured the vast literature, I found very little attention given to the connections between African-American men's identity and their experiences in and out of school. In particular, there are few studies that focus on the perspectives of African-American young men. At the same time, I wanted to explore the experiences of these young men beyond school, because the students inhabited these institutions for but part of their day. I wanted to learn about their experiences outside of school and learn about how school experiences are constructed not just within the schooling process -- through direct experience within school -- but through interactions with others in what they said, or how they related to school, or how they viewed the role of schools and education. Further, I wanted to better understand relationships in their lives,

particularly relationships in their family and peer networks. Thus, the interview

questions were in part shaped by the following original research questions:

WHY DO AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES GO TO SCHOOL?

(a) What does school mean to young African-American men?
(b) What is the role of family in the lives of this group of young African-American men?
(c) What is the role of peer relationships in the lives of this group of young African-American men?
(d) What do masculinity and femininity mean these young African-American men?
(e) According to these six young African-American men, what does it mean to be African-American, Latino, and white?

These questions in a sense framed the territory of our many conversations and framed

many of the questions I came to ask the young men, although, admittedly, many of our

conversations went beyond these questions. The first three questions were about

uncovering the experiences of students in the school, in their family, and with their

peers. The fourth and fifth questions attempted to connect the gendered and racial

identity of these students in these institutions and their raced and gendered experiences

to interactions in school, with family, and with peers.

While these questions framed the territory of the conversations, they were just

a beginning. Many of our conversations were focused on accounts of incidents in school,

or with family members, or with friends. Over time, however, the focus of this study

shifted because of the kinds of conversations that emerged and my evolving

understanding of the significance of production of meaning and the relationship of the

production of meaning to social identity construction. Thus, the study developed into

questions about the meanings, images, and experiences of schooling, family, and peer

relationships. It wasn't just about the "role" of these social institutions in their lives.

It was about how they came to understand and give meaning to these institutions. As

noted in the previous chapter, I began to think about this study as being shaped by the

research question:

What meanings and experiences of schooling become significant to young

African-American men in their lives in and out of school?

This research question represents a number of subsidiary research questions.

For instance, as I was learning more about these young men's experiences of schooling,

and asking questions about family and friends, I began to realize how interconnected

were their various social relationships. Hence, while this study started off primarily

as one about schooling, the subsidiary interests of family and peer relationships

became integral to the study. Further, as I began to have conversations with the young

men, and to analyze the accounts they provided of their experiences, I realized the

significance of understanding the construction of their social identities in relation to

the meanings and experiences they talked about. Thus, the research question noted

above encompassed the following emerging subsidiary research questions:

1. What meanings and experiences of schooling are significant to the young men?
2. What meanings and experiences of family are significant to the young men?
3. What meanings and experiences of peer relationships are significant to the young men?
4. What is the significance of schooling and relationships with peers and family as the young men construct their social identities?

While I separate these questions for analytic purposes, the reality remains that these

questions are so interwoven that in my discussions they become difficult to untangle.

Initial contact with the young men: Entering the field

From the beginning I intended to select a group of young men attending the same

high school in Allerton. I was hoping to include between five and eight young men who

were in Grade 10, and in different tracks within the school. In the U.S., Grade 10

seems to represent a significant point in the schooling of subordinated groups, a point

at which they decide to drop out or continue to attend school (Fine, 1991). Through

focusing on Grade 10 students, I wanted to explore the similar and different

experiences of young African-American within the same school. This plan did not hold for too long.

The central criterion I used to select the six young men was their willingness to participate in this study. An equally significant criterion was the contrast each of their experiences provided in relation to one another. Marcus and Zakeev were the first two to agree to participate in the study. I asked a teacher at a high school in Allerton to describe my study to her class and ask for volunteers to participate in the study. Out of this request, Marcus and Zakeev were the ones who finally agreed to participate. Through Marcus, I met a friend of his, Latasha Butler. She was perhaps the most helpful in suggesting participants for this study. Through her various networks of friends, I met Rashaud and Dwayne. I decided to selected these four because each of their experiences potentially provided contrast. I then met Jeff through Latasha and included him because his experiences seemed different from the other four young men. Shawn was the last participant to be selected in this study. I chose him because he attended a middle-class school and was in the same grade as Dwayne. As I met with each of the young men, I asked then if they knew of anyone else interested in participating. Although they suggested names, they did not follow up. Notwithstanding, before I knew where I was, six months had passed since my initial contact with Marcus in August 1992 and there were six young men in the study.

At one time, during the preliminary stages of crafting the study, I thought I would work with a classroom teacher and with a group of young men from that classroom. As I further thought about this approach, the strategy caused me much anxiety. I did not want to be associated with the institution of school, particularly the authority structure of schooling, as I thought it would hinder my opportunities to be open with the young men, and their ability to connect with me. So, I decided not to formally begin my study in the institution of schooling. This was not an easy decision.

I'm sure that my study and access to participants would have gone much smoother had I decided to begin my study through direct access to a high school.

Mac an Ghaill (1991) reflected on a similar conflict in his study *Young, Gifted and Talented* (1988): "I found that while observing and participating with both the Kilby School teachers and the anti-school students created tensions of identifying and being assumed to be identifying with groups who were hostile to each other, it was productive for understanding what was really going on in the classroom" (p. 116). Given Mac an Ghaill's focus, it seemed that involvement in school proved helpful to his study. My study is not about the perspectives of teachers, nor was I seeking their approval or the sanction of other groups. It is about the lives of the young men and therefore it was their approval and trust I sought. My study is about the meanings that young men develop toward schooling, not about my observations of how they went about going to school, or how these meanings are developed in school. Thus, my priority was to gain acceptance and trust of the study's participants. Consequently, I decided to interview the participants outside of the institution of school, in their 'own' territories and in places they felt most comfortable in their neighborhoods. Inevitably this also meant *not* interviewing them at their home. To the contrary, they wanted an excuse to be away from home. They also wanted an opportunity to talk freely without their mother, brother, or sister prying or eavesdropping. They took this study seriously.

The Interviews

The interviews were both situational and situated within the context of the experiences that I brought to the conversations and the larger study, and the kinds of experiences they chose to share with me in response to questions I asked or comments I made. The interviews included more informal conversations and more formal, through relatively unstructured interviews. Conversational and relatively unstructured

interviews were also conducted with some of the family members of the young men in their homes. These conversations were difficult to arrange because of the various family, work and community commitments of the family members. All unstructured, more formal interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the young men and their parents.

I began most conversations with an introduction about me, my interest in the lives of African-Americans and why I think a study about young African-American men is important. From there I launched into what I considered a "safe" question, that being "tell me about your school day." I began with this question, because I felt as though it provided the participant with an opportunity to talk at his own pace, with few questions from me. I learned a lot from asking this question, and the question provided me with opportunities to pursue themes that I saw as significant. It also allowed me to understand what activities or interactions they gave importance to in their school day. In subsequent conversations, I began with questions such as "how have things been going at school?" Once again this open-ended question, while framing the conversation, provided opportunities for the participant to shape somewhat the direction of the discussion. However, sometimes this second question was not always fruitful. For instance, Dwayne, once responded "its alright" and said little else. Thus I turned to questions about his friends at school and out of school. In this way, the starting point of the interviews may have been similar across the participants; however, we ended up pursing questions in very different ways.

Over time I learned that it was important for some of the young men to have someone to talk with, not only about their experiences more generally, but about their day-to-day encounters. This was of particular significance to Zakeev and Marcus, who I interviewed more than any other people in the study. From the beginning, Marcus wanted to talk about more than school, as the following interaction reveals:

JP: Has there been anything interesting that's happened since I saw you last week that's been going on? In your job, or at school?

Marcus: Something happened, I just kind of got mad because someone was kind
            of saying that I wasn't doing my job, 'cause the busses that I work
            with, they are white anyway, and they went and complained to the
            manager trying to say I wasn't doing my job. But, I was the only one
            on the floor bussing tables.
JP: Was it the woman manager who made you angry last week?
Marcus: They're all there, 'cause on Sunday's all the managers are there.
JP: How long do you work on Sunday?
Marcus: Long time, seven o'clock till two thirty.
JP: Seven in the morning?
Marcus: Yeah. To me that's a rip off, 'cause you don't make no kind of money,
            Like seven hours, that's too long, plus you don't get paid that well, and
            they be trying to work you to death. So worn out from the last day,
            you don't have enough energy to work again.
JP: Tell me about your work schedule. So, you work every Sunday?
Marcus: Yeah, I always work the weekends, I just now started working on
            Saturday. Take these off in the summer time. Fridays and Saturdays
            I take off in the summer time. Now I've got weekends, I've got the
            whole weekends and they give me like two days during the week. So,
            basically, Sundays, I always work on Sundays.
JP: And do you get paid weekly there?
Marcus: No, every two weeks, still don't come out to nothin'. I don't even make
            a hundred dollars. I may come out, like the comparison, the amount
            of hours that I'm getting there I should be making around three
            hundred dollars. I don't even make, I make like ninety something.

In this interaction Marcus talked not only about his job and the amount of hours he

worked, he also talked about how he felt underpaid. This interaction, as with many of

the interactions among the young men, provides a glimpse of our interactions. I really

felt as though they did want to talk to me, and for most of the times, with the exception

of Shawn, who described himself as a quite person, there seemed little reluctance to

talk about their life. In fact, Marcus and Zakeev each told me that they looked forward

to seeing me. But even Marcus and Zakeev were not consistent in their contact with me.

It was difficult to maintain a sustained relationship with these young men. As noted in

a later section of this chapter, they had responsibilities and preferences in their

complicated lives which meant that conversations with me were not always a high

priority for them. By the same token, I was a full-time student, with responsibilities

as a graduate assistant for teaching and as a researcher in a large study about education

policy and practice relations, which saw me having to juggle my time so that I could

make the time to meet and talk.

Besides the interviews, which I transcribed within days of the interview, I also kept various sets of fieldnotes. One strand of these fieldnotes described interview situations and environments, descriptions of the neighborhoods they lived in, and any interactions of the participants I deemed significant. Another strand entailed accounts of telephone conversations and conversations that were not tape recorded. I also kept a summary journal. In this analytic journal I recorded my personal reactions to conversations and interactions among the subjects, inferences and emerging questions and assertions. I was also able to highlight important aspects of conversations I had with each of the young men in this journal. The journal was kept separately from any observational fieldnotes I collected. The purpose of this journal was to assist me in keeping track of interesting questions, responses and ideas that emerged from conversations with individual young men. These notes were helpful to me as it was sometimes weeks, and in some cases a couple of months, from one interview to the next. I used these notes to help me focus and help me make connections through the episodes and experiences they chose to discuss with me. In this journal, I also kept track of issues and questions that the young men were reluctant to talk about, and those questions and issues that they seem enthusiastic to talk about.

Collecting data

I went into the study with open-ended questions in my head, not really knowing how or specifically what I was going to ask, and a little nervous about how I would be received by the young men. The process of meeting the young men, including arranging the times, venues and striking up the conversations, was much more difficult than I initially anticipated.

I entered the field with the idea that it would take time for me to develop a rapport with the young men, and that we would be able to spend a lot of time talking about various topics and issues. The reality was, however, that we did not spend as

much time talking as I had hoped. As I suggested, these busy young men did not always prioritize talking with me. Not only was the time I spent with the young men different than I envisioned, the entire process of collecting data was vastly different than I had anticipated.

My original strategy for data collection involved two phases. During the first phase, I intended to conduct three in-depth interviews with each young man. These interviews were to be shaped primarily around the first set of questions I have detailed above. I was to ask about their experiences with school, their views of schooling, and the kinds of activities they engage in. I anticipated this initial phase of interviewing to begin at the end of August and to be completed by the end of October. The second phase was to be developed by looking at issues in common to these young men but also following up on issues particular to each of their lives.

Well, that was my plan, a plan that didn't hold for too long. While I knew that qualitative research is certainly influenced by constraints outside the control of the researcher, I was unprepared for the length of time it took to contact and negotiate participation in the study. By the end of October, I had met only four of the participants, and conducted one relatively unstructured but formal interviews with Dwayne and Rashaud, and three each with Marcus and Rashaud. I had not met Shawn or Jeff by this stage. So, it emerged that I would not be able to enter into parallel conversations with each young man, complete that round, and then engage in the next phase of the research, as I had originally anticipated on designing this study. Therefore, I began to develop a research agenda for each young man. This is not to say that I did not pursue the same kinds of topics, questions, and issues with each of them, but that the time in between the various interviews across the six young men differed, as did the number of interviews I conducted with each of them. For instance, I conducted seven more formal interviews with Marcus yet I was only able to conduct two

more formal interviews each with Shawn and Jeff, with each interview lasting about two hours. In each case we had between four and twelve informal conversations.

Data Analysis

Given that most of my questions were open-ended, and that I did not have an interview protocol at all, but a set of issues I wanted to interweave into our conversations, the flow of conversations and the prominence of issues within conversations were not always of my making or my choosing. Maybe this is not surprising as I tried to create interview situations that were intended for these young men to "tell their story" as much as was possible given the conditions and our relationships. What this did mean for me was that numerous themes began to emerge. Having such an abundance of data certainly required continual and intensive data analysis. In qualitative methodology, "Data analysis refers to a process which attempts to identify themes suggested by the data" (Weis, 1985, p. 173). Such analysis promotes the development of strands of analyses that are surprises to the researcher, and in fact may not have been noted by the researcher on framing the study. But allowing room for issues to emerge from the data requires a close reading of data and the variants of the themes emerging.

Data analysis is not something that occurs after data has been collected. It is a continual process of construction of themes and issues that we interpret, looking for multiple alternative interpretations. This process became more focused during the post-fieldwork stage, but actually occurred from the beginning of data collection through the actual writing of descriptions and interpretations. Lather (1991) makes a crucial point about the fluidity of propositions and analyses emerging from the data. She argues, "Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured" (p. 62).

Such a stance is difficult yet crucial if one is committed to understanding and explaining the perspectives of the participants. I agree with this point and would add that this does not negate the fact that we all bring perspectives to the context of our study, and we use these as lenses to understand and explain the world.

Part of generating a dialectical relationship between our frameworks and our data is not only how we frame issues, but how we allow for our questions that may initially have framed a study to change along with our interpretations. Let me share a couple of examples of how my questions began to change, as I collected the data, conducted analysis, and wrote about their experiences. These examples relate to the significance of family and peers in their lives.

I began asking the young men questions about their relationships with family members. I learned about how they related to their parents and to their brothers and sisters. Along the way, particularly in the post-field analysis, I discovered an interesting question about the shape and form of families. I began to recognize that many of the young men drew a distinction between family and household units, that the people who counted as family to them were more than the people who lived with them at home. I thus began to explore the different ways in which they conceptualized family.

Another example emerged when I began to explore the patterns of friendships in their lives. They talked about the various friends, the difficulty in maintaining friendships because they trusted few people, and the dimensions of friendship they deemed significant. As I began to unravel their friendship patterns, I began to realize that my initial question, which focused on who they were connected with and what did they talk about, was a little skewed. I wanted to know what they talked about with their friends, but for the young men, an equally important issue to talk about was the meaning of friendship in their lives. Further, initially I was so intent on using the institutional connections to shape my analysis and frames that I tended to fragment their relationships with others although these relationships did not seem fragmented to

the young men. For instance, they may have had friends at school, but these friendships may have simultaneously developed outside the context of school. And it is only by understanding the patterns of friendships in each of their lives that I was better able to understand their meanings. Therefore, I came to focus more on the actual features of the process of relationships, not solely the institutional contexts in which these relationships were developed. This may not appear too different. But what my analysis began to allow for was more fluidity, connections, and disconnections among the relationships in their lives.

Some critical reflections

As I looked back on the year I spent collecting the data, I began to recognize just how long it took me to actually interview and get to know six young African-American men. And then, I asked myself, how well did I really get to know them? Maybe what I did learn is that I was able to tap into only a small aspect of their lives, that the study on some level was very narrow in conception, despite the wide range of topics we covered.

I've tried to question how I would have done things differently, but there is not an easy answer to these questions. I wanted to study these young men outside of the school environment, not because I wasn't interested in understanding their experiences of schooling but because I wanted to understand the world from their perspectives, and school may not be as pivotal in the lives of students as many educators would like to assume. Also, I believed that I would have a better chance to get insights into their perspectives of school by talking with them in environments in which they were comfortable, in places they chose.

There were a number of topics that never arose during the discussions, and it became very difficult for me to ask them about such topics. As suggested earlier, one of the topics was their sexuality. This tells me something about how close I really was to

each of them. It also may reflect the ways in which "discourses of desire" (Fine,

1991) are much more difficult for them to talk about than discourse about race.

While they all "passed" themselves as heterosexual through the heterosexualized talk

about young women, I learned very little about how they thought about their sexuality

as young African-American men. Such questions, I believe would only emerge after

long contact time, and a more intimate and connected relationship. I felt that they were

very vulnerable at times, and I tried to respect their situation and their position in

relation to me as a white researcher from the university. But there were other topics

that were of a sensitive nature that they spoke about with ease, so it seems that there

are some topics that are more sensitive than others to them, while these topics may

appear equally sensitive to the researcher.

The interviews themselves did not always go as planned, and neither did the

interactions nor the ensuing relationships. For example, during a discussion with

Marcus, about four months after I had met him, I began to ask him about his

discussions with friends at school. He had told me that he talked about friends and

women during some of his conversations, so, I turned and asked him what he had

discussed. Rather than answering my questions, he began to explain to me the language

he uses, and implicitly he explained how he takes much of it for granted, -- it

remained unexamined:

JP: What kind of things do you talk about when you talk about women?
Marcus: Women, yuuu!
JP: What? "I like her" or "she's going with this guy"?
Marcus: One we don't use them terms of words.
JP: What terms don't you use?
Marcus: We don't say "girl," we say "female." And we don't say "go together,"
          we say "hook up."
JP: This is maybe American, I'm a foreigner. You know white Americans
          don't understand all my expressions. I'm learning about African-
          American culture as well, I don't know much, so you're teaching me
          stuff. It's important.
Marcus: (Laughs).
JP: What you're finding funny? The language?
Marcus: The language! How you ask me what it means. That's basically how
          we talk. It's just how people say, ghetto language, street talk. There
          is a difference though in the language. I could talk the language I talk

right now and still a lot of people say you switch your language over to a different language to talk to white folks. You know, I need to talk your language, but just don't use so much slang. Like de', he', you know like that kind, because I had that, when I moved up from Port Edward because we cut off all our words. I still got a little bit, not as tight.

This interaction began with my trying to find out about the content of the conversations among his male friends about young women. But our conversation drifted away from that focus, in that Marcus began to talk about our different usage of language. This is a good example of how the participants in the study in a sense shaped the direction of the conversations. The path that Marcus chose seemed an interesting one to pursue further. Incidentally, I never used the word "girl" in our conversation prior to that point. This was, however, something that he associated with me, given my white racial identity. A further point worthy of mention is how he informed me about his switching his language code because he was talking with me. I found his discussion about language usage very interesting, because in my eyes, he seemed to "cut off" many of his words, and he used a fair amount of "slang" when he talked. For instance, the way in which he talked contrasted dramatically from Rashaud or Shawn, yet in his eyes he saw himself as switching codes.

This interaction not only told me about how Marcus gave racial meaning to language usage, but it also reminded me of how he saw me. He may have trusted me, he many have been open with me, but the fact remained, in his eyes, I was a white person associated with racial power structures of in the U.S. Understanding what Marcus thought and understood about the meanings he developed is at the heart of understanding how he saw himself in the world. This is important for the reader to bear in mind on reading the rest of this study. At times, the reader may think that one of the participants may not understand a certain issue, for example, exaggerating the racism embedded in a certain action or thought. Whether this interpretation may or may not be the case, the important issue to remember is that my focus is understanding the meanings the young men made of their world. From there I try to situate these

meanings within a broader context and simultaneously explain dimensions of their social identity.

CROSSING RACIAL DIVIDES: SOME REFLECTIONS AS AN OUTSIDER

Engaging in research that saw me, a white, middle-class male, researching African-American men of varying social class locations posed some uneasy tensions as I collected the data and continue to write about their lives. A critical concern that continued to surface as I progressed with this study was the nature of my relationship with the young men. I felt a degree of hypocrisy that this work brought about for me, both before and during data collection. I was an outsider to a community, trying to understand their social world, and these young men were providing me honest, heartfelt stories and accounts of their lives. Yet what was I providing in return? I was, on one level, a passive listener, a taker. Although I shared with the young men glimpses of my life, they did not really get to know me in reciprocal ways. At the same time, I recognized that I was not going to be in these young men's lives for a lengthy period, as I would soon be moving from the area. Consequently, I presented myself to the young men as a researcher wanting to tell their stories about school and their experiences as young African-American men in and out of school. In presenting myself, I felt it only ethical for me to be as honest as I could about why this study was important to me. I was conducting a study to complete the requirements of my Ph.D. at Michigan State University, but I was not pursuing the topic merely for the sake of the degree. This study has a political importance to me because it provided me the contact and opportunity to learn from a group of people that I not only care about but am committed to politically, socially, and culturally.

Revealing myself and my intentions and trying to be open with the young men was but a first step in building a relationship. It was not enough by itself. As I stood back, it still seemed that I was attempting to clear my conscience about the purpose of

the study and that talking with them about my research intentions would somehow strengthen our relationship. Maybe it was a good starting point. But there was so much that lay between us: the fact that I was a white man, middle class, albeit from another country, in some ways had me continually unsteadily walking a fine tightrope with me feeling that they trusted me but they were also wary of me. The social distance that lies between the participants and researcher is one of the enduring questions that pervades research such as mine. Andersen (1993) raised some important questions in this regard. She asks: "How can white scholars elicit an understanding of race relations as experienced by racial minorities? How can white scholars study those who have been historically subordinated without further producing sociological accounts distorted by the political economy of race, class, and gender?" (p. 41). Responses to these questions, in part, require me to not only acknowledge my social identity, but to situate myself and my view of the world in relation to these young men's lives.

Andersen's (1993) questions are important questions that are central to research about racial minority communities conducted by white researchers. While I may argue that it is important to generate multiple perspectives of the life experiences of racial minorities, at the same time, there are significant ethical and political imperatives that seem to pervade work such as mine. An important question I continually asked myself was: whose interests does this work really serve? I was entering their worlds, and in some ways I provided support for some of the young men as they went about their activities and relationships, but the fact remained, I was an intruder to and outsider in their world. Granted, there was distance between us, and to a certain degree, the distance lessened, depending on the particular individual, their need, their trust, and the number of times and the ways in which we met. Although I was keenly aware of the intrusive role that I played in these young men's lives, the conversations themselves were not entirely framed by my questions. In fact much of the interaction was initiated by the participants. For instance, I learned about the

various kinds of friendships they had, and I learned about who they were friendly with at school. Such conversations emerged from comments they made, which I followed up on. Sometimes I asked open-ended questions, such as "how do you spend your time after school?" While the question may have shaped the territory of the particular interaction, it didn't limit what they talked about. Notwithstanding, I still carry with me an overwhelming sense of intrusion into their lives. I was entering their worlds and they really didn't enter mine. They were telling me all, but what was I *really* providing in return? There is no way of really knowing the answer to that question. But the question in itself does raise some central ethical issues and questions that need to be examined as we continue to develop research and explore issues and ideas in the lives of people around us.

The question about whose interests this study serves was raised by some of the young men. Some of them raised the topic of my intentions, and my rewards, especially material rewards reaped from conducting this study. One of the young men, Jeff Davidson, was particularly critical of this kind of study. His mother refused to be interviewed. Her rationale, he told me, was that there are many white people who conduct studies of African-American people, write a book, and make lots of money. Whether this is a reality or not, for the vast majority of researchers engaging in studies similar to mine, there is no doubt that the researcher has something to gain and the researched little.

A central theme in this discussion about the ethical and political dimensions of this study has been about the social distance that pervaded my relationships with the young men. An additional, equally significant question concerns how a white researcher can generate an understanding of social relations as experienced by people of color. These questions are fundamentally questions about the political context of relationships in research and how knowledge production is in essence political work.

Unquestionably, the relationships between the young men and me were unequal,

given that as a researcher I would be able to build an academic career through this

work. Baca Zinn (1979), a Chicana sociologist, noted the thorny methodological

problems she faced when conducting research about Chicano families. She argued that

> Gestures of reciprocity do not, by themselves, alter the unequal nature of
> research relationships. Nor is having research conducted by insiders sufficient
> to alter the inequality that has characterized past research. Field research
> conducted by minority scholars may provide a corrective truth to past
> empirical distortions in that we are able to get at some truths. However, our
> minority identity and commitment to be accountable to the people we study may
> also pose unique problems (p. 218).

Conducting research in racial ethnic communities undoubtedly poses methodological

and ethical problems for *all* researchers. However, there are critical questions that

need to be raised and discussed in relation to white researchers conducting research in

racial ethnic communities. There is no doubt, as Andersen (1993) argued, that

"minority group members have insights about and interpretations of their experiences

that are likely different from those of white scholars" (p. 43). Maybe the most

central questions becomes ones about which interpretations should be considered as the

most authoritative (hooks, 1989), or should one interpretation be considered as more

authoritative than another.

Responding to these questions does not resolve the uneasy tensions that plagues

research such as mine. But they certainly do force me to address the central political

and ethical dimensions that pervade my research. From these questions, I argue that

my interpretation as a white middle-class man represent one of an array of potential

interpretations and that my interpretation should not be considered as *the*

interpretation of these young men's lives. Such a stance requires me to acknowledge

that my understandings of these young men's lives will be partial and incomplete and

requires a continual investigation of my own privilege as a white male researcher.

My interpretations are intended to be considered as a contribution to various questions

and issues in the hope that our collective questions may help us explain and understand

the lives of these young men and broader questions about race, class, and gender relations of privilege and power.

From the various methodological and ethical issues I have raised, I will now turn to an introduction to the six young men. While each of the following chapters intends to build upon the other in unfolding the young men's experiences. In this following section, I intend to provide a brief introduction to the young men in order that the reader enters the following chapters with a sense of who they are and their differences.

THE SIX YOUNG MEN

I interviewed the six young men across the 1992-93 school year. Each of the young men lived within the metropolitan area of Allerton in Michigan. Allerton's economic base reflects both public and private sector employment, with many of the private sector jobs being located in the service and manufacturing industries. Like many large metropolitan regions in the United States, the area has been plagued with unemployment, thereby swelling the number of people who live below the level of poverty in the city. Local newspapers and the Children's Defense Fund have reported that one out of four families live in poverty. At the same time, the larger metropolitan area of Allerton has considerably affluent neighborhoods. Consequently, school students living just a few miles from each other may find themselves living in very different conditions, and experience a very different education. The metropolitan area has a diverse racial/ethnic community, with a sizable African-American population.

Of the six young men, three of the participants attended school in two of the large urban high schools in Allerton. Two of the participants lived in Cedarville, a neighboring town to Allerton. Cedarville is considered part of the larger Allerton metropolitan area. One participant attended a private Christian school in Allerton. All the participants were in Grades 10 or 11 at the time of the study. Common among the

participants was that they all had decided to stay in school, were all African-American, and were all young men. TABLE 1 provides an overview to aspects of the young men's backgrounds.

Table 1. *Background information on participants*

Name	Age	Participants' Social Class	Grade	School	School's African-American student %
Shawn Braxton	17	middle class	11	Cedarville H.S.	6%
Jeff Davidson	17	working class	10	Allerton Christian School	3%
Rashaud Dupont	15	middle class	10	Cedarville H.S.	6%
Dwayne Reynolds	16	underclass	11	Central H.S.	46%
Zakeev Washington	16	working class	10	Western H.S.	30%
Marcus Williams	17	working class	10	Central H.S.	46%

TABLE 1 reveals their ages ranged from fifteen to seventeen years-old, and they attended four different schools where the percentages of African-Americans attending ranged from three to forty-six percent. Of great significance is their differing social class locations. Not reflected in the table but also significant to their stories is that they lived in household units of different structures.[6] Some had more friends than others; one had fathered a child; two had recent encounters with the criminal justice system; some seemed more engaged than others in school.

Unraveling the social class location of these six young men has been difficult. In the previous chapter, I noted that understanding patterns of hierarchy, domination, and oppression are integral to understanding social class. But part of the problem in

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[6] In chapter 5, I discuss the significance of their differing household units, and their conceptions of family.

using certain social class categories of students, as Mac an Ghaill (1994) noted, is that they are not fixed unitary categories, and selecting the categories is essentially a heuristic device to highlight a range of experiences. Having noted this, I began to think about these young men's access to material and cultural resources as a way of thinking about their social class location. Thinking about these young men's class position, I turned to the work of Langston (1992), Messner (1992), and Connell et al. (1982). Langston argued that important elements in understanding social class locations are the ways in which people live their lives, the kinds of options they have and use, and the kinds of priorities they place for themselves. Messner, in his study about sport and the social construction of masculinity, considered the kind of parents' work, living conditions and the kind of schools the participants attended to develop social class locations. In understanding social class location, Connell et al. argued it is what people "*do* with their resources and their relationships that is central" (p. 33). Bearing these points in mind, the social class categories in this study are developed through considering the *kind* of work their parents did; they are also based on my inferences about their living conditions, how they spent their recreation time, the kind of schools they went to, and their experiences at school. I thus began to consider a number of dimensions of their lives in order to get a sense of their social class location.

Dwayne Reynolds spent most of life in Detroit up until the beginning of the 1992-1993 school year, when he moved to a foster home with a working-class family. He seemed to have lived in poverty for much of his life, and at an early age began to attend school infrequently. His involvement with drugs resulted in him being arrested at the age of thirteen and spending three years in a juvenile home up until he moved to Allerton. It is through such considerations that I came to think of Dwayne's social class location as underclass. Although I acknowledge that *underclass* is a contested category, there seems a vast distinction between Dwayne's access to resources and that of the other five young men. And having noted this distance between

Dwayne and the other five men, there also seemed a distinction in the access and opportunities available to Marcus Williams and Zakeev Washington, on the one hand, and Rashaud Dupont and Shawn Braxton on the other. Marcus and Zakeev's parents performed blue-collar or pink-collar work, and lived in a seemingly predominantly working-class neighborhood. While they attended multi-classed schools, their schooling in a sense represented the distinctions that Anyon (1981) made about various students from different class positions. In the main, Marcus's and Zakeev's experiences in school reflected a teacher-controlled curriculum, and a teacher-centered pedagogy, where much of their time in classrooms involved completing assignments and worksheets which emphasized memorization and seemed to demand minimal student engagement. Noting this and other information they shared with me, I suggest that they occupy working-class locations.

Marcus's and Zakeev's experiences dramatically contrasted with the schooling experiences of Rashaud and Shawn, who attended a predominantly white middle-class high school. For example, Rashaud and Shawn talked about the centrality of discussion in their classrooms, the use of multiple resources in their learning, and the limited use of textbooks. Further, their parents performed college-educated professional jobs and they lived in a professional community. Through considering these dimensions of their lives, I argue they occupy middle class positions.

Most difficult to determine a social class location was for Jeff Davidson. I began to hesitate a little about his class location because he moved from attending the same school as Marcus and Dwayne, having almost dropped out of school, to attending a private Christian school. His parents both worked in the manufacturing industry and he lived in a working-class neighborhood, the same neighborhood as Marcus. These experiences may see him as having both working class and middle-class experiences. However, weighing up all the information, I decided that he seemed to be located within the working-class because at the time I met him he had recently enrolled in the private

school, and most of his experiences and circumstances seemed similar to Marcus's and Zakeev's.

I raise the issue of the complexity of capturing the social class location of the young men because I want to acknowledge that categories are complex and reflect a fluidity in their social class locations. While I have outlined some elements that may be used to characterize class differences, the structural and cultural aspects of these young men's lives clearly reveal that each class fraction is far from a heterogeneous and neat category. Structural racism, the racial and gendered division of labor, the gendering of institutions and social practices also dynamically shape their access to options and privileges. Nevertheless, social class seemed to be a powerful explainer, in part, for some of their different and similar experiences, opportunities and the barriers or privileges they encountered. In the end, I came to think about the social class categories for each of the young men through taking into account the differences in their access to economic and cultural resources.

With this glimpse of the social class backgrounds of the six young men, I will now turn to a brief introduction to each of them.

Marcus Williams

My first conversation with a participant in this study was with Marcus Williams. My first face -to-face conversation with Marcus occurred after numerous telephone conversations. Marcus worked almost every day in two different jobs at two different fast food restaurants. Thus, it was difficult for him to make time to see me in a face-to-face interview. I met him in a neighborhood MacDonald's restaurant, about 150 meters from his house. Arranging this first interview was not easy. At this time, Marcus was not living at home with his parents, and he spent much of his time outside of school working to pay for his living expenses. This first meeting lasted almost three hours. I had a few issues that I wanted to talk about, but it became apparent that many

of the questions I wanted to talk about were not always focal in our conversations. Marcus wanted to talk politics and he wanted to talk about the conflict between him and his parents. Marcus was a member of a study group that read the work of Farrakhan and other Africanist black leaders. Marcus was also very proud of his knowledge of and commitment to the lives of African-Americans. He was particularly committed towards generating unity among members of the African-American community and talked constantly about the centrality and strength of the African-American woman in binding the African-American community. These were important topics for Marcus, and it is through these topics that I was able to bring up some of the issues and concerns that I thought important.

Marcus's relationship with his parents was complicated. He seemed emotionally attached to his mother, but had a very strained relationship with his father. He resented his step-father of six years, and yearned for greater contact with his biological father. At the same time, his mother constantly ridiculed and criticized Marcus' biological father. But this did not weaken Marcus' ties with his biological father. In fact, he would try to see his biological father as many times as possible, even though he lived more than a hundred miles away.

Marcus was a very independent and self-sufficient person, despite his age. In fact, my struggle as to what to call this group of African-Americans was influenced particularly by people like Marcus, Dwayne and Jeff. These "young men," as I decided to represent them, as opposed to "boys," had experienced hardships, problems, and difficulties that many people of their age would never experience in their lifetime. Their lives were hard, complicated, yet they still had the fortitude to continue, not blindly, but through a double-edged sword of realism and hope.

Most striking about Marcus was the disparaging ways in which he spoke about the education system. Particularly he spoke of the racism infiltrating and dominating his schooling experiences. But his critique of racism was not confined to schooling. He

also talked about racist images that dominate the commercial media and racism at his place of work. After graduating from school he hoped to work in a restaurant because he loved to cook. His dream would be to open a black-owned business that he said would more than likely be a restaurant because he liked cooking, and most significantly because he argued "we need black- owned businesses." Throughout the ensuing chapters, the reader will increasingly become aware of the various layers and facets of Marcus's life, a world that reflects a complex and contradictory arena of discontent, hope, critique, and acceptance.

Zakeev Washington

I spoke with Zakeev Washington and his mother a couple of times on the phone before our first meeting at his home. After this first meeting, we met and talked in a local fast-food restaurant. As time passed, it became apparent that Zakeev had few friends out of school and really enjoyed the companionship generated through our discussions. He was an energetic talker and loved to tell me about his life in school.

Zakeev was born in a manufacturing town in northern Illinois and moved to Allerton in early grade school. Zakeev had attended a number of schools, five elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. He didn't like the fact that he moved around a lot as he said it was difficult to make friends. Unlike the other young men I came to know, he did not have a network of friends that he spoke with on the phone daily, nor did he have a group of friends that he would hang out with after school.

Zakeev lived with his younger brother and his mother. His mother had been divorced for a number of years; while working full time as a sales representative, she struggled to support her family. His nineteen year old sister attended a university in Ohio, and his twenty two-year-old brother was in jail. His father lived in Detroit, with a partner and their child. He occasionally saw his father, but not very often.

Zakeev was an avid reader, and spent much of his time reading novels or informational books from the local public library. Occasionally, he played basketball after school, but other than that, he had few friends he interacted with in his recreational time after school. He was a regular churchgoer and attended church every Sunday with his brother and mother. As the year passed, by he joined a black male youth group connected with the church that would meet sporadically on a Saturday. Coincidentally, I was able to briefly observe one of these meetings that met in a conference room at a local airport. At this breakfast meeting, which Zakeev attended with his brother, I noticed that Zakeev and his brother sat to the side of the main group, seemingly interacting little with the other members of the twenty-member group.

Despite the apparent ease with which he spoke with me, he was very wary at times. Some things he refused to talk about. For example, he would not discuss why his older brother was in jail. But on other topics he was extremely forthcoming. He lamented about how difficult it was to make friends at school, and that he was trying to figure out what he was doing "wrong" at school. He was also open about how he felt about school. He resented much of the content at school and did not always speak highly of the pedagogy or the connections teachers developed with him.

In many ways, Zakeev seemed a loner, proud of his African-American heritage, critical of aspects of schooling, yet he believed going to school provided him better options than dropping out. He seemed very aware and articulate about the racism in the labor market that he believed privileged white people over black people. Not getting the high school diploma and dropping out from school to him meant that he would be unemployed and living in poverty. And while skeptical about the likelihood of getting a job after high school, he had ambitions to be an orthodontist.

Dwayne Reynolds

I first met Dwayne Reynolds at Latasha Butler's house, a tenth grade school friend of Marcus. I was visiting her because she had asked two other young men, Kevin and Nico, to visit me that evening at her house as she thought they might be interested in the study. In the end, they decided not to participate in the study. Dwayne and his foster brother also visited Latasha that evening. Latasha began to tell Dwayne about my study and how it was important for him to participate. He told me that he really wanted to talk with me. I asked him to think it over. A few days later I spoke with his foster mother and foster father and they each were interested in the study and said Dwayne could participated if he really wanted to.

My first meeting with Dwayne was a little tense, not just because I was almost a stranger to him but because of the venue we met in. We met in his neighborhood's MacDonald's and he was a little late for our arranged meeting because he had fallen off his bike along the way. He was *so* apologetic that he was late. But that wasn't the only reason I ascribe to the apparent tenseness. He seemed to be very wary of the people, especially the youngsters of his age that frequented the restaurant.

At this first encounter, after buying something to eat, we began to settle into an fascinating conversation about his life in Detroit. As we talked, however, I found him continually fidgeting and turning around in his seat. It was hard to sustain a conversation with him. He was intent on observing just about every person who frequented the restaurant that evening. He was also concerned about his bicycle that he had propped up against an outside wall of the restaurant. After about half an hour into our conversation, he jumped up without warning and ran outside. A few minutes later, her returned to explain that he had thought someone had stolen his bicycle, but that it was still there.

This first meeting lasted almost two hours. At times the pace was slow. Part of this was him trying to understand my accent and me trying to understand his, but part

of it was also because he initially was not very forthcoming in the conversations. So, as we talked I began to reveal aspects of my life and my experiences in South Africa. School did not really seem to be a topic that enthralled him. Nonetheless, he did talk about school and his friends. I began to learn just what a complex and frustrating life he had lived. Dwayne's family seemed virtually to have been destroyed by life in inner city Detroit. His mother was on welfare. He described her as a regular drug-user. His younger brother and sister lived with his mother, as did his uncle and grandmother. Two other brothers were in foster homes. His father, who did not live in the family home, was laid off from Chrysler about eight years previously and had not worked since. His older sister was still looking for a job and did not stay at home. Dwayne said he had been taking drugs since he was about twelve years old. He said he took them mainly to escape from the world in which he lived, and as a way to connect with his "boys" in the neighborhood. He also said it was a way to make money. For the past three years, since he was thirteen, he had been in juvenile centers.

Dwayne's relationship with school was erratic. He had been to a number of schools before attending Central High School, and for a period of time he did not attend school as he ran away from the placement center. He did not seem particularly interested in school, and talked little about what he did in school. This is not to say that he was not committed to going to school, just that there seemed little in classrooms that excited him.

A central strand of Dwayne's view of the world was that "the odds" were against him. He believed that being African-American would hinder him as he tried to "make it" in the world of work. At one time he said, "Yeah, it's still slavery going on right now, but it is an illusion, it still goes on ... You will never see a black man getting paid more than a white man in a job. You got some white man who'll get a job before a black man." Despite all the barriers and constraints Dwayne seemed to generate a sense of hope about life ahead of him. He had hope that he would acquire the high school

diploma, that he would no longer be a statistic, and that he would get a job that would provide him with an income to support his family.

Rashaud Dupont

I met Rashaud Dupont through Latasha Butler, the same friend of Marcus who introduced me to Dwayne. I had asked her if she knew anyone from Cedarville, knowing that it was a predominantly middle-class area, and as it happened she knew Rashaud from a social organization they both belonged to. I met Rashaud at Latasha's house, and after a while we were joined by Dwayne and two other young men that came to visit Latasha. As it happened, this first conversation with Rashaud was extremely interesting, because it was one of the few conversations that I was able to conduct with a number of youngsters simultaneously. The other conversations I had with Rashaud, at his house or over the phone, were one-on-one.

Through our conversations I learned he had lived and attended school his whole life in Cedarville. Cedarville is a decidedly middle-class neighborhood with a very small number of people of color. He was an only child and lived with his mother in a double-story house. He had lived in the house for much of his life. In fact, I learned that out of the six young men Rashaud was the only one who was born in the greater Allerton area. Four of the others came to Allerton in the early years at elementary school, while yet another arrived in the ninth grade.

Rashaud Dupont, like Zakeev, also struck me as a very lonely person. He said that he really only had one friend, an eleventh grader whom he had befriended during his tenth grade year. Any recreational time he spent with friends invariably was spent with this friend, Siko, whose parents were from Africa. Occasionally, he went to see a ball game, or to the movies or a party. But on the whole, Rashaud had few people he called friends. In order to maintain ties with other members of the African-American community, Rashaud's mother belonged to the *Jack and Jill* club, an organization

established for mothers and their children. Latasha also belonged to this club, and that is how she came to meet Rashaud. The club met generally on a Sunday, with activities aimed at entertaining and educating the children. It was also an opportunity for the mothers to get together. They also organized trips, for example going to Toronto. Most, although not all, the families who were members lived in the more affluent neighborhoods in the greater Allerton area.

Rashaud spent much of his time after school completing homework and engaging in class projects. He seemed to spend much more time than any of the other participants doing homework. He seemed to like school and complained little about the work in classrooms. He seemed firmly located in a college-bound track at school, and unquestionably assumed he would be going to a four year college. He was an honors student at school. Although uncertain in some ways about his future career, he seemed driven by a desire to accumulate material wealth.

Shawn Braxton

Shawn Braxton also lived in Cedarville and was in Grade 11 at the same school as Rashaud. He had lived in Cedarville for over two years when I first met him. He moved from a suburb of Detroit because his father accepted a job transfer. Shawn lived in a relatively affluent neighborhood in a double-story house. He lived there with his brother, who was a year older than him, and his father. His mother, who had remarried, lived in a Detroit suburb with his younger brothers and sisters. While Shawn lived with his father and his brother in Cedarville, he remained close to his mother and his other two brothers and a sister. He attended church almost weekly in Detroit, attempting to maintain ties with his former community and friends. His older sister attended a major university on the east coast.

Most striking about Shawn was how quiet he was. He seemed the quietest of all the young men. In fact he described himself as a "quiet" person. Even though we had

spent a number of times chatting over the phone before first meeting, it was really difficult to generate a conversation with him face-to-face, more difficult than any of the other participants. Most of his responses or statements appeared to be matter of fact, with seemingly little complexity or insight. But Shawn was much more complex than meets the eye. This will become more evident as I explore his stories in subsequent chapters. I struggled as I wrote about him because I wanted to ensure that his voice was present among the other young men.

Shawn had lived for most of his life in a suburb of Detroit and attended schools dominated by mostly African-Americans students. Although he had been living in Cedarville for over two years, he felt that he was still struggling to get used to the school and the neighborhood. Shawn admitted that he didn't have many friends, and he spent most of his time with a couple of friends from school who were in the wrestling team with him, and his brother who was in twelfth grade at the school. Shawn did have friends in Allerton, and in fact spent much of his social time with people from Allerton. He was a member of a brotherhood that had an almost exclusively African-American membership. He felt that this organization was important to him because it allowed him to keep in contact with other African-Americans.

He also belonged to his school's wrestling team. His coach had indicated that he may be in line to receive a wrestling scholarship to attend college. But regardless of whether he received the scholarship or not, Shawn was adamant that he would go to college. He hoped to be a histologist and possibly work in a local hospital. Shawn's career plans seemed mapped out, a striking contrast to Dwayne, who was also in Grade 11 and had little idea of what he intended to do beyond acquiring the high school diploma.

Jeff Davidson

I first heard about Jeff Davidson from both Marcus and Latasha during two separate interviews. He was someone they talked about a lot. They each knew Jeff's girlfriend, Sharon Dixon. Latasha said Sharon was "good" friends with her for a few years. They talked not just about the way Jeff treated Sharon, they also talked about him because he had fathered a child, yet he continued to go out with other women. Given that I did want to capture many different kinds of experiences among young African-American men doing to school, I decided that I would explore whether Jeff would be interested in being a participant in this study. I didn't want to interview him so that I could say "this is how teen fathers see the world"; rather, I wanted to understand his relationship with his girlfriend, and how he felt about fatherhood and going to school in the context of *his* experiences as an young African-American man.

During our first telephone conversation, I learned that Jeff was very keen to speak with me. There seemed no hesitancy at all. At our first conversation, I learned he had moved to Allerton from an industrial city in mid-Michigan when he was eight years old. He attended one elementary school, a middle school then attended Western High School, then Central High School (the same school as Dwayne and Marcus) before transferring to Allerton Christian School. How and why he came to attend a private school is very significant for understanding Jeff's experiences.

Jeff had recently, during November 1992, spent a month in a juvenile detention center. He was charged with armed robbery and assisting in the theft of a vehicle, a crime which he decided to plead guilty to, although he argued he didn't commit the crime. He said he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. As we talked, I learned how his embroilment with the criminal justice system had shaken the foundations of Jeff's life. Before the encounter, he had all but dropped out of school, attending school very infrequently. Yet after the encounter, he not only returned to school, but at his mother's insistence attended a private Christian school.

Jeff did not hold back on telling me about his life, and his time in the criminal justice system. That experience and his newfound love -- school -- were the two main things he talked about besides his girlfriend, Sharon. Sharon was important to Jeff, as was his daughter, Cheranne. During the course of our conversations, I learned that Sharon was white. Her racial identity becomes significant in subsequent analysis.

Jeff's narratives became the most complex to unravel and explain. Each time we met he reflected a nervousness about who frequented the restaurants we visited. Jeff claimed that a gang member who had threatened to kill him lived nearby. However, I was never sure about his reasons for the apparent uneasiness. Despite his complicated life , there seemed no doubt that Jeff wanted the contact with me and that he enjoyed talking with me. Threads of his sentiments about fatherhood, the dramatic change in his view of schooling, and his embroilment with the criminal justice system all seemed at play as he talked about his life.

In this chapter I have focused on some of the methodological issues that emerged during and after data collection. I raise these issues merely to bring to the fore some of the many debates and controversies that seem to dominate qualitative research. One central strand that dominated much of the discussion in this chapter is that the research questions, interpretations, and analyses are continually evolving. Another strand is the inherent political nature of research which reminds me not only about my political responsibility, but also about the intellectual and ethical integrity that is demanded in crafting this work. This chapter also provides a brief introduction to the young men, focusing particularly on how I how I came to meet each of them, and how I went about talking with them. The next chapter provides a more detailed account of their lives and significant experiences. In that chapter I particularly concentrate on their meanings of schooling through a focus of the meanings they gave to the high school diploma.

Chapter 3

SITUATED MEANINGS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

This chapter explores the various meanings of the high school diploma to the six young African-American men. As I asked them why they stayed in school, the diploma emerged as one of the most consistently talked about topics. It seemed to represent a bridge between their present life and their hopes and aspirations beyond high school. For some, it also represented a symbol of achievement in its own right.

In this chapter I argue that the high school diploma did not represent the same symbol, value, or interest for these young men. While there were similarities in some of the ways they thought about the diploma, these young men did seem to hold different meanings about school, the high school diploma, and aspirations beyond school. In part, the meanings they constructed of the high school diploma seemed to be connected to their social identity, which in turn seemed to be shaped by and to shape the meanings they constructed. Understanding the different meanings they constructed can be explained through considering their social location and experiences of race, class, and gender power relations. Here, meanings and ideas were constructed through daily interactions that shape and are shaped by the structure and culture of the social institutions they inhabited as African-Americans, as young men, and as classed individuals.

Although these young men embraced dominant meanings of the high school diploma as a ticket for social mobility, or as a ticket for entrance to higher levels in the education system (Collins, 1979), they were not the only meanings they

constructed. For example, two of the young men explicitly saw the high school diploma as a symbol of personal achievement. It is the purpose of this chapter then to explain the ways in which these young men came to see the high school diploma, examining both the similarities and differences in the meanings they constructed.

Each of these young men attended schools located in the Allerton and Cedarville areas of Michigan. Allerton is a mid-sized city that has many of the characteristics of large cities located across the United States, while Cedarville is a nearby town with a predominantly white middle-class population. During the 1992-93 school year these six young men, aged between fifteen and seventeen, collectively attended four different high schools. Four attended schools in Allerton and two attended a school in Cedarville. Marcus Williams and Dwayne Reynolds attended Central High School in Allerton, Zakeev Washington attended Western High School in Allerton, while Jeff Davidson attended both Central High School and a private Christian school in Allerton. Rashaud Dupont and Shawn Braxton both attended Cedarville High School, the only high school in Cedarville.

This chapter first examines the individual meanings these young men developed of the high school diploma. Toward the end of the chapter I more thoroughly compare and contrast their differing and similar meanings, and also consider the extent to which they seemed to accept achievement ideology.

JEFF DAVIDSON: "IT'S KIND OF LIKE A REWARD"

Jeff Davidson was sixteen years old [7] and attended two schools during the 1992-1993 school year. First, he attended the tenth grade of Central High School, until November 1992. Then, from January through June 1993, he attended Allerton Christian School (ACS), a K-12 private Christian school. Central High School was a large high school of 1500 students with an African-American student population of

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[7] All ages provided are as of the beginning of the 1992-93 academic year

approximately 46 percent, and a white student population of approximately 42

percent. Allerton Christian School had a smaller student enrollment than Central and

had considerably fewer African-American students. ACS was a predominantly white

school of approximately 500 students with an African-American student population of

approximately three percent. Jeff's decision to move to ACS was strongly encouraged

by his parents. The move represented a serious commitment to go to school regularly

and a concerted attempt to acquire the high school diploma. The school itself

represented the possibility of going to school in a "better environment" in comparison

to Jeff's previous school, Central High School.

After his release from the Juvenile Detention Center, Jeff seemed to develop an

enthusiasm to attend school regularly and established a quest to attain the high school

diploma. This represented a dramatic shift in Jeff's relationship with school.

Previously his school attendance was sporadic, because of the disengaging pedagogy and

curriculum at Central and the bitter quarrels with his parents that resulted in his

leaving home. Jeff's new turn seemed to be fundamentally driven by the hope of

acquiring the high school diploma.

JP: Is graduating from high school, is that by the way, something in the
        long run?
Jeff: Oooh, no, that's the main thing.
JP: Why do you want to graduate though, what will that do for you?
Jeff: First of all it will get me out of school. Second of all, it's kind of like
        a reward to me, by graduating, I win. Through my years of school I
        earned it.

Acquiring the high school diploma seemed to become the major incentive, "the main

thing," for Jeff going to school every day. Given the centrality of the diploma in his

rationale for attending school, going to school itself seemed to become a rite of passage

that he had to endure. "[I]t will get me out of school," he said, as though he had to

acquire the high school diploma before leaving school. For Jeff, the diploma was seen a

"reward" and as something he "earned" for staying in school. While the high school

diploma represented a reward, it also represented a possibility of going to college.

After his transfer to ACS, it seemed that Jeff took a dramatic turn and embraced the

possibility of acquiring the high school diploma. This current meaning of the high

school diploma that Jeff constructed needs to be located within the context of his

experiences outside and inside of school and in the context of his hopes and ambitions

beyond high school graduation.

Prior to attending ACS, Jeff was not committed to going to college and was

unsure as to whether he would acquire the high school diploma. However, his move to

ACS seemed to symbolically represent new possibilities: possibilities of acquiring the

high school diploma, of getting "good" grades, of establishing an academic record that

would enable him to meet college entrance requirements, and of going to college. At one

point he said that,

> Allerton Christian would be a whole lot better environment for me, then I got to
> start thinking about college. Get a few years at a good school, get good grades,
> grades I can stand behind, start looking at colleges, and they start looking at me.

Jeff believed that ACS "is a whole lot better environment," in comparison to his

previous school, Central. What Jeff did not like about Central was its "reputation." To

Jeff, Central's reputation was one of "drugs . . . gangs. And em, you know, a lot of

shootings and stuff, fights, crazy stuff." It was Central's reputation that Jeff wanted to

disassociate himself from. Consequently, he changed schools to get out "of that situation

where you know, getting a chance to get back into that group. Well hey, he goes to

Central, and maybe he does do such and such." But Jeff's concern about the reputation

of Central became significant *after* his embroilment with the criminal justice system.

Further, Jeff's mother believed moving from Central might force him to disassociate

himself from some of the students at Central and thus be less likely to be in a position

of committing a criminal offense. It was only after his arrest and conviction, however,

that she became concerned about his friends at Central. Thus, Jeff's move to ACS was a

reaction to his arrest, a month in a juvenile detention center, and a conviction of

charges on robbery and assisting in the theft of a vehicle.

Jeff's encounter with the criminal justice system became a catalyst for a dramatic change in how he viewed school. Jeff was so badly shaken by the experience that he tried to dramatically alter the direction of his life. He was so scared by the ordeal, and even more scared by the thought of actually receiving a prison sentence. Jeff told me that he did not commit the crimes for which he pleaded guilty. He described how he made the decision to plead guilty to the charges of armed robbery and assisting in the theft of a vehicle:

> I got on armed robbery, assisted stolen car. 'Cause they said well here's the deal, well my lawyer told me, "you can agree that you did such and such, and you assisted in a stolen car and everything, and you can walk out today as a free man. Or you can go to juvenile, you know, keep going to court, keep going to court till they figure whether you are guilty or not. And then, that is not to say if you keep going to court that they are going to figure that you are not guilty. 'Cause you are still facing the chance, if they figure you are guilty, then you still go to prison."

Jeff was charged as a minor, because he was arrested by the police two days prior to his seventeenth birthday, and he was sent to a juvenile detention center. He spent a month in the center. The center held about 30 minors, fifteen boys and fifteen girls, with 27 of the 30 youngsters being people of color, and the majority being African-American.

Jeff recounted the night on which he was arrested and explained the judge's response to his charges:

> You know, to cut it all down, I was in this car, some people had got into trouble, so I went to jail also. Somebody else did, and they try to blame it on me . . . I guess the police officers, 'cause the guy that I got caught with, he was Mexican, and I guess the police officer said we probably know it was the black guy you know, if you tell us such and such, he probably, you know. I was just riding and stuff, and all this other stuff . . . What it was, they had robbed somebody and stolen a car. So, when I went to court, the judge was like confused, 'cause I don't have no record . . . That's another thing the judge said. He said "either it's the case, or my age, but I'm confused. Young man you went seventeen years, no trouble nothing bad or anything, and something as serious as this." 'Cause the things I was tried for I could have got life in prison . . . then they put it on my juvenile record. He said, "when you walk out of this court room, you are an adult now and anytime you get into any more trouble, you are going straight to jail. And if it is anything serious, you are going to prison." He said, "merry Christmas," and I was like merry Christmas to you too.

The incident shook the foundations of Jeff's existence and deepened his sense that the criminal justice system does not seem serve the interests of African-Americans. "We probably know it is the black guy," he surmised the police officers claimed. Such a statement provides a glimpse of how Jeff as an African-American man may attach racial meanings to societal institutions, and the extent to which police enforcement and the criminal justice system can work in opposition to the interests and rights of African-Americans.

As Jeff concluded the above account to me, he revealed how jubilant he was to be out of the juvenile center. Once he returned home, his parents encouraged him to enroll at the local Christian school. Even though the move represented a financial burden for them, they said they were prepared to make the sacrifice. School thus suddenly began to play a central role in Jeff's life:

JP: What kind of role does the school play in your life really? Is it a big
        part, or is it something you have to do?
Jeff: It's a big part now.
JP: It wasn't before though?
Jeff: No, 'cause you know you get the attitude that [the teachers] don't care,
        they are just in it for the money . . . What made me take that turn was
        juvenile. Like I was telling Mr. Chisholm (a teacher) today, you go
        for so many years, not worried about getting locked up or anything,
        being the goodest guy I could, one hundred percent American, and then
        you know, just recently, everything starts running down, get locked
        up. There goes my freedom right there. And for me, if you wanna
        hurt me, take away my freedom.

Although Jeff claimed that teachers "don't care," school became more central in his life as a consequence of his experience of the "hurt" emerging from his encounter with the criminal justice system, an encounter which he believed he did not deserve, given his stance as an "American." This seems ironic. Jeff was disconnected from school, considered himself law-abiding, yet it was school that he turned to and embraced in opposition to the criminal justice system. Going to school symbolically represented a desperate attempt to retain his "freedom" and seemed to become a counterpoint to going to jail, which viciously stripped him of his freedom. However, Jeff did not turn to any school. He elected to move to a private school with a good "reputation" and dominated by

white middle-class students rather than returning to his old school. School thus emerged as playing a contradictory role in his life. For a time he felt disconnected from school yet it was a predominantly white and middle-class school that emerged as his salvation in attempting to build his dignity and pride.

I will now turn to an examination of Jeff's relationship with school prior to his conviction. As previously noted, Jeff's relationship with school prior to his move to ACS was very tenuous. He sporadically attended school, and when he attended he found his work disengaging. Across the 1991-92 school year, he had skipped so many classes that he did not receive the necessary credits from courses to be considered a junior at Central. Consequently his return to Central High School in the 1992-93 academic year saw him recategorized as a sophomore and repeating many of the courses for which he was enrolled the previous year at the school. Jeff provided two reasons for his disengagement and poor attendance at Central. First, he felt that his teachers did not care, and second, he was experiencing "family problems." Jeff linked his disengagement from Central to both internal processes within the school and to the difficulties he was experiencing outside of school. Outside of school, he was having altercations with his parents that affected his desire to go to school:

> . . . from my behalf, when I was having confusion with my Mom and everything, getting out of the house. I was like what was the point of going to school. You know you cannot wear the same clothes to school every day and stuff.

Jeff's disputes with his parents often resulted in his parents evicting him from his home or him leaving voluntarily. Across the 1992 year, he left his home approximately five times.

In the midst of his disengagement with school and quarrels with his parents, Jeff also fathered a baby girl, Cheranne, who was born in August 1992. Sharon, the mother of the baby girl and Jeff's current girlfriend, was fifteen years old and an honors student at Central High School. During her pregnancy and after the birth of Cheranne, her attendance at Central also became sporadic. "She got pregnant and

everything, and I was happy and everything, we was trying to keep it undercover." In

their attempt to keep Sharon's pregnancy "undercover," Jeff and Sharon spent a lot of

time away from school at Sharon's home. Sharon's mother was unaware of this because

she worked during the daytime. Thus Jeff stayed away from school not only as a

consequence of the altercations with his family but also because of his desire to be with

his girlfriend during her pregnancy. After Cheranne was born, Jeff continued to attend

school sporadically.

Jeff began to think differently about the consequence of the birth of Cheranne

following his catastrophic encounter with the criminal justice system. Cheranne

became a meaningful reason to attend school, seek the high school credential, and seek

entrance to a college.

> . . . [Cheranne] kinds of helps me, because she makes me want her to be proud of
> me and pass something. "My Dad went to such and such school such and such
> college." I wanna give her a good life. I wanna have something in my past that
> she can be proud of.

Jeff cited the birth of his daughter as a reason to want to finish school; he wanted to

accomplish something that Cheranne would be proud of. Although Cheranne was born in

August 1992, it was only in December 1992, after his experience in the juvenile

detention center, that the high school diploma became important to him in relation to

his young daughter. "Basically right now I'm concerned about my work. Getting a nice

job and taking care of my daughter," he said. Previously, Cheranne was a reason to

stay away from school; she then became one of the reasons to stay in school. Most

important about his experience with the criminal justice system was that the

encounter saw him developing a different relationship with school, which

simultaneously saw him reconsidering other spheres of his life. He moved from almost

rejecting school to zealously embracing school.

Consequently, the move to ACS in itself represented his new relationship with

school. It not only represented the potential of acquiring a symbol of achievement but

the possibility of attending college as an option after high school graduation. Though

Jeff talked about a goal of attending college, he had not acquired the resources or had access to resources that would enable him to develop a sense of life beyond the high school diploma. In essence, the diploma represented a reward, not for just staying at school, but for staying out of jail. It seems that acquiring the high school diploma became the most available symbol to develop his pride, reflect his potential to succeed, and seek social recognition. It was through attending a school that was attended almost exclusively by white middle-class students, and not staying at Central, that he felt he could reach a position that others could be "proud" of because he would graduate from high school.

Jeff struggled as a young African-American man to gain the diploma which not only represented potential economic and social mobility, but more profoundly the accomplishment of a personal goal. Paradoxically school, an institution he almost rejected, became the very source and symbol of his current aspirations. Jeff's changed relationship with school needs to be located within the context of his experiences as an African-American man. He felt victimized as an African-American man, and jolted by his reverberating experience with the criminal justice system. The diploma represented an acceptable accomplishment, in opposition to what incarceration may represent. To gain recognition and redemption, he embraced not only a dominant symbol of success, the high school diploma, in opposition to the criminal justice system, but embraced a white middle-class private school as a vehicle for such recognition.

DWAYNE REYNOLDS: "BE NO STATISTIC"

Dwayne Reynolds was a sixteen year-old who spent most of his early years living in inner-city Detroit. When he was thirteen years old, Dwayne became a ward of the court. Since then he had lived in various juvenile placement centers and foster homes outside of his familiar Detroit neighborhood.

> I'm a recently from Detroit . . . I was on the run from a placement there . . .
> [it's] like a facility for boys that get in trouble. I ran from there, so I had a
> warrant out for my arrest . . . I got picked up with drugs and AWOL from the
> placement. So then I went to the youth home, then I went to a holding facility,
> then I went to placement, then I came here. That's adds up to two years or
> somethin'.

During the 1992-3 school year he was moved to Allerton to stay with new foster

parents and enrolled as a junior at Central High School in Allerton. The move to

Allerton was not easy for Dwayne. Although he lived in Allerton, he still considered

Detroit his home and a place where he would rather be.

At the beginning of our first conversation Dwayne adamantly announced "you

know, I just want to make it through school." Not making it through school, he

claimed, may result in him being a "statistic." Dwayne wanted to go to school, because

going to school and acquiring the high school diploma symbolized being successful as

opposed to being a statistic. Dwayne did not receive high grades, but this did not appear

to concern him. A deeper concern was maintaining the courage to stay in school. So

success seemed more about making it through school than scoring high grades in the

process. At one point he said he went to school

> . . . so I can be someone successful. 'Cause the odds are already against me,
> statistics. Plus, the things that I've been through and the people I hung around
> with, selling drugs and all that, getting into, other people and stuff. It's on my
> record, so I want to be someone successful in, you know, I want to be no
> statistic or whatever. You already know all the statistics out there, high crime
> areas in inner cities.

Dwayne's primary reason for attending school was to acquire the high school diploma.

On one level, his desire to graduate from high school represented actualizing economic

security. On another, it represented a symbol of achievement in his fight against "the

odds." For Dwayne the odds against him included his record for selling drugs and also

represented the hardships faced by African-American males from the inner city. "A

lot of things I did was wrong, some of the time I didn't understand some of the things I

did was wrong . . . that time there was no way out," he said.

Acquiring the diploma represented a fight against the constraints of the context he encountered as an African-American boy growing up in Detroit that limits the life chances of African-Americans. Dwayne saw the high school diploma as a ticket to success. A particular form of success. Success did not primarily mean economic and social mobility. Rather, most fundamentally it meant *not* being characterized as a victim of crime and poverty. Being a statistic meant being considered unacknowledged by others and viewed as a nameless person. "That's what society label you, just like they label you like nothing but a damn number. We ain't nothin but a number, out here in the streets you ain't nothin but a number," he stated with intense anger and resentment. The odds were not merely statistical accounts of Dwayne's experiences, they were *lived* experiences he encountered as he grew up in Detroit. He described these experiences in Detroit as a manifestation of racial injustice.

> it's not right to treat a person 'cause of the color the their skin. If they was in
> our shoes, and we was like had control of the country was over to us, then see
> how it feels. But then I guess they do us as niggers. We low down, we this, we
> that, and all of the things they're saying around. Out there and suffer. But we
> living through war, everyday we living in hell, taking a chance at getting shot,
> taking a chance, and they want to blame the drugs.

Dwayne talked articulately about his life in inner city Detroit prior to moving to Allerton. He spoke with anger about the stranglehold that life in the "ghetto" had upon him and how people in the inner city were "living through war, everyday we living in hell, taking a chance of getting shot." He painted a somber and depressing picture of his life growing up in inner city Detroit, and talked about how the inner city is "set up" so the "black male" from Detroit is "not going to make it."

> Like when you grow up in the ghetto, they are like slums, basically set up for to
> keep a black person down. And when you grow up in that, you see things like
> that, and you be around it, it's just like you're going to be into it. 'Cause the
> steps already stand up so high, that you know, you ain't gonna get no black male
> in inner city, crime city, like Detroit where I'm from, he's not going to make
> it. No. And that's how it is. You know you are going to start getting in trouble,
> hanging out with the fellas, smoking bud, 'cause it's set up to hold us black
> people down.

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Believing he might not "make it" as a consequence of living in inner city Detroit, the move to Allerton represented a chance to acquire the diploma. He described the multiple problems he encountered when living in Detroit.

> You know why I got involved in that stuff, 'cause I had problems and things. It was difficult to deal with them in the environment, the situation I was born into. You know, people I was hangin' around with, the neighborhood I was in, like when I was at home in Detroit with the guys. Plus, I had family problems, it was hard to deal with, so I took that route. And basically I used that I guess as a scapegoat, and I started doing what I wanted to do, hanging out, smoking weed, drinking beer and all that.

Dwayne acknowledged he became involved in crime and drugs because of family problems that forced him out of his home. His friends were also his connection to drugs and alcohol. These friends were very important to Dwayne. The friendships he formed in his neighborhoods were Dwayne's solace:

> My boys, they be like my brothers, NFL, Niggers For Life. When we do this and that, we go down together. . . They gave me love, they were there for me.

So moving to Allerton became an opportunity to be away from the problems he encountered in Detroit. But by moving away from the problems, Dwayne also moved away from his family and friends, particularly friends he cared about and who cared about him. Although he attempted to embrace life in Allerton and acquire the high school diploma, he yearned to be around his friends in Detroit. Despite wanting to avoid the problems in Detroit, Dwayne felt more connected to Detroit and his friends he was "hangin' around with" than with people in Allerton. He didn't trust people in Allerton. The pull of Detroit saw Dwayne run away from his foster home in March 1993 and return to Detroit. From March onwards, he continued to stay in Detroit despite his foster parents' attempts to persuade him to return.

The conflict between being in Allerton and wanting to live in Detroit was at the heart of many of my conversations with Dwayne. Notwithstanding, Dwayne continually argued that he wanted to complete high school in Allerton. But this was not an easy commitment for him to live by. On the immediate level, moving to Allerton meant that he had to choose between his way of being in the inner city Detroit and his new ways of

being in Allerton. By attending school in Allerton he believed that he could acquire the high school diploma and thereby provide economic support for his family. He felt a responsibility to support his younger brothers and sisters and his drug-dependent mother, who at the time was a welfare recipient.

Dwayne talked about the high school credential in two ways. He talked about the high school credential as being "something to show," and also talked about it being a vehicle to college study. But it was the first meaning that Dwayne constantly talked about, not the second meaning. Without the diploma, Dwayne believed that he would have little chance of gaining employment, as he shared with me during the following interaction:

JP: Have you ever thought about leaving school?
Dwayne: Not really.
JP: Why not?
Dwayne: Ain't gonna make it.
JP: So by graduating from high school, how's that going to help you?
Dwayne: Help you going to college, have something to show, all them things.

While acquiring the high school diploma represented access to college for Dwayne, he never talked about attending college himself. As noted, his responses seemed almost rehearsed with little indication that he had knowledge of how to pursue such a path.

Essentially, without the high school diploma Dwayne believed he "ain't gonna make it." Making it for Dwayne appeared to mean having a certain degree of financial security. The diploma became a potential vehicle to such ends, but a vehicle to a job that did not necessarily require a college credential. In part, the diploma represented a connection to employment.

Another significance of the high school diploma was that it represented a symbol of achievement. With limited access to embrace dominant symbols of recognition, Dwayne's focus on the high school diploma as a form of achievement is noteworthy. The high school diploma seemed to be an avenue for acquiring such recognition. Thus, the high school diploma emerged not only as an opportunity to potentially acquire economic

security for himself and for his immediate family, but was also a way of receiving an acceptable form of social recognition, "something to show."

Dwayne's quest to acquire the high school diploma was not easy for him to live out. This was reflected in an internal struggle he waged, a struggle he characterized as working on being a "better person," that he learned while in placement. "[T]hey had me grow them ways," he said. He talked with anguish about his struggle to develop new values and beliefs.

Dwayne: But since I'm at the placement, they had me grow them ways or whatever. You know, I still have those same things, you know, streets, because that's what I was born into. At home, I be with the fellas and it helped me to slow down, think more whatever, and try to make better decisions. It's hard, it ain't easy, I know that what I'm saying. But I just try to make it. There is still things I need to work on.

JP: What would you like to work on?

Dwayne: (Pause) I'd like to work on being a better person or whatever.

JP: What does it mean to be a better person?

Dwayne: I guess, you know, change some of the values I have.

Dwayne tried to take on new values and beliefs dynamically shaped by a different set of rewards and symbols of achievement than he previously valued. While these values seem to represent middle-class values of success and achievement in school, it is difficult to unravel the new ways and values he struggled to acquire. He was encouraged to "make better decisions." But he does not embrace such a set of values with ease, nor with total commitment.[8] His anger about his experiences is most apparent in the following: " It's hard, once that's what you know, you growin' up in a placement, going to jail, it's not teaching you nothin'. That's punishment. That just makes you madder." For Dwayne, the high school diploma represented a desire to live a different kind of life. The high school diploma also represented an achievement which he believed his brothers and sisters may follow:

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[8] I often questioned how much his responses were a manifestation of me being a white male, and his sense of what he thought he was expected to say, given I was a white male. He told me that he liked talking with me because no one really paid any attention to what he had to say, and that he trusted me. But there is still no telling to what degree he spoke about the high school diploma in ways that seemed almost rehearsed.

Successful in my mind is to finish school to go to college. Be something up here *[points to head]*. Passing on to my little sons and daughters, and be a role model for them and passing on. I don't want my little brothers and sisters, I don't want them to be bad.

Despite Dwayne not being an active student at school, acquiring the high school diploma became a symbol that represented his attempt to develop new ways of being; ways of being that previously did not include a wholehearted commitment to staying in school and hence acquiring the diploma. But on one level staying out of jail was a victory, a sense of success to Dwayne. He told me that he wanted to be successful "'Cause I got fear. They know I might take the wrong move or the wrong step, but I try to not let that bother me. I try to keep goin'. That's what I hope I do." The diploma became a symbol to "show" that he can be successful, that he kept "goin'," and it represented the possibility of have a good paying job. "I want to be successful, have a nice paying job, playing basketball, have a nice family."

Despite the image of success Dwayne painted, he was scathing about the African-American middle class.

> . . . guess some of them forget where they came from. If I ever made it rich, you've always got to remember where you came from, how you grew up. That's how you grew up man. That's the lifestyle. They've got money into their head, they think they are better than us.

Dwayne, like Jeff, was very vague about his intentions for college study, and even more vague about the entrance requirements to attend college. He had not spoken to a school counselor about his future job prospects after acquiring the high school diploma, let alone talked with someone about study at a tertiary educational institution. He did not know of anyone attending college and was unaware of how to access such information. Dwayne told me that he wanted to be an engineer or own his own business on completing high school, and that he would learn about either of these options "by going to school, finishing school, and college." While the acquisition of the high school diploma seemed to represent a job generally, rather than a particular career path or

occupation, Dwayne had little knowledge of these paths. And with a low grade point average he seemed unlikely to gain admission to college.

Over the past few years, Dwayne's relationship with school had been unstable. During his years at middle school, he said he "used to skip and stuff." I asked him why he used to skip, he told me, "I was stupid, tied to other things." At one time, he could not attend school because there was a warrant out for his arrest. Of late, staying in school was a way of staying out of trouble with the police. But this didn't mean that he found school attractive or that there was something to entice him into school. In our conversations Dwayne talked very little about what he learned or did in school. At one point he said, "Sometimes, I got short patience anyhow, it just be getting on my nerves and stuff. I just don't like it." Of his previous teachers he said, "A lot of them, attention might not gonna be right . . ." This comment potentially suggests he did not receive the kinds of attention that he sought in schools. Dwayne was adamant, though, that it was not just his encounters in school that were influential in his truancy, there were other explanations as well:

> . . . don't know if they all got to do so much at school, like some things happened in the family, maybe affecting you in school, and like getting locked up and stuff like that. It affects you and a lot of things on your mind.

Dwayne's attempts to shape his material and social world were in part embodied in the symbolism of the high school diploma. The process of acquiring the diploma, and the actual acquisition of the diploma, represented his attempt to live a life away from crime, away from gangs, and to be employed in a job. But Dwayne did not embrace such a world with ease and instead constantly battled to live a life away from his experiences in Detroit. At the same time, however, he wanted to be connected to the people from his world in Detroit. His will to run away from his foster home in Allerton and return to Detroit, in a sense saw him rejecting the possibility of acquiring the high school diploma, a symbol of achievement that he seemingly wanted. I later learned that Dwayne was arrested in August 1993 for selling drugs and was awaiting trial.

For Dwayne, his world *was* the people in Detroit, people whom he knew and cared about. The struggle to acquire the high school credential then seemed to leave him having to choose between living an alienating life in Allerton and acquiring the high school diploma, or living in inner city Detroit with his friends and family but with little chance of making it. As Dwayne said, African-American males from Detroit are not going to make it. " 'Cause the steps already stand up so high, that you know, you ain't gonna get no black male in inner city, crime city, like Detroit where I'm from, he's not going to make it. No. And that's how it is." Ironically, even though he wanted to stay in Allerton, he was uncertain about where the diploma would take him. But this choice potentially seemed to provide a greater opportunity for him than if he stayed in Detroit. Dwayne seemed faced with an impossible choice. In the end, the separation from his friends in Detroit combined with the degree of alienation he felt in Allerton saw him returning to Detroit, never to return to Allerton or to a high school.

RASHAUD DUPONT: "A GUARANTEED FUTURE"

Dwayne starkly contrasted with Rashaud Dupont, who attended Cedarville High School, located in a middle-class neighborhood. Although these two young men were similar in age, Rashaud being fifteen and Dwayne sixteen years old, and both were African-American men, Rashaud's life experiences greatly differed from Dwayne's encounters in the world. These differences include the neighborhoods they had lived in, their home environments, the curriculum and pedagogy encountered at the schools they attended, the hopes and ambitions they pursued, and the forms of cultural capital they had access to. Rashaud had lived in Cedarville since he was six years old. His mother moved to Allerton from Mississippi in her early 20s, and then moved to Cedarville where Rashaud attended elementary, middle, and high school. Cedarville was a decidedly affluent area with a predominantly stable, white, middle-class population. At one point Rashaud described Cedarville High School as a school with "rich white

kids." "It's like *90210* with a little bit of color," he laughed as he described his school as similar to the weekly television drama about the lives of wealthy teenagers living in Beverly Hills. "They try to make it deep and interesting, I mean how deep and how many social problems can you have, when you have a white girl who has had a nose job, and drives a BMW?" he commented.

Despite Rashaud's scathing critique of Cedarville High School, he admitted that he wouldn't attend another school: "I don't like it but I wouldn't want to go anywhere else," he said. What he didn't like about the school was the "social environment" but he did like the "learning environment." For Rashaud, part of the social environment he detested was being put on a "pedestal" by white people at the school. "Whatever you do is considered special," he said. At the same time, he talked about the cliques of groups at the school.

> At Cedarville, the cliques dominate so much that nobody really knows somebody.
> I know a lot of people by name, I can tell you just about everybody's name at
> Cedarville High School. It seems like the cliques are so tight that no one from
> somewhere else can get into one. The reason why I hang out where I hang out is
> anybody can talk to anybody.

Rashaud told me that he spent his social time at school in an area frequented by most of the African-American students and some Latino students attending the school. Thus, despite the apparent acceptance and respect of African-American people in the school there was still strict segregation between the white and African-American students. It was this aspect of school that Rashaud did not like. Rashaud's peer group was almost exclusively African-American because he "can talk to anybody" in this group. While this seemed a choice to Rashaud, it seems as though the choice was constructed in reaction to the ways of being of the white students at school. Rashaud admitted, however, he wouldn't go to school anywhere else. It is within the context of simultaneously criticizing and embracing Cedarville High School that I want to situate Rashaud's meanings of the high school diploma.

Rashaud had few people at school he would call friends. He did not intimately socialize outside of school with many of the students from Cedarville High. While he criticized many of the students who attended the school, mostly the wealthy white students, he simultaneously shared the career and material aspirations of most of his peers. Given that 85% of Cedarville High students went to college, it is not surprising that he constructed ideas and ambitions that seemed in keeping with the ideas, beliefs, and values that dominated experiences at school and aspirations beyond school. Notwithstanding the shared values, beliefs, and aspirations of life in and beyond school, Rashaud was marginalized from the dominant student culture at school and found it difficult to connect with most of the students.

Despite the apparent segregation of African-American students from white students, Rashaud shared with the white middle class students access to ideas and information that enabled him to develop particular goals. For instance, he had considerable information about the requirements to pursue college-level study and indicated that grades were a significant indicator of the college he would attend. Entrance depended upon "how my test scores and grades come out, that probably will tell me where I would like to go and where they would accept me." Further, Rashaud interestingly drew a distinction between getting out of high school and getting into college.

> To get into college, you have to take the PACT or ACT. Those are the ones to get in. To get out of high school, you have to take three years of science, I think four years of mathematics, two years of history or world studies, fine arts, two years of physical education, one semester of swimming.

Rashaud shared with me a folder that his school distributed to all the students. The folder contained documents that carefully outlined requirements to acquire a high school diploma. He was considering a career in the sciences, possibly a chemical engineer. "Engineering, or sciences, or something like that, I kind of excel in sciences," he suggested. He was adamant that he would attend the University of Michigan and not other institutions in Michigan such as Eastern Michigan University,

Wayne State, or Michigan State University. Rashaud nevertheless was cautious about his future, and suggested that entrance to the University of Michigan was dependent upon his grades and test scores. Other young men in the study, besides Shawn, had not developed such a firm knowledge of the credential accumulation path as Rashaud.

Rashaud, like Jeff and Dwayne, wanted the high school diploma. The diploma for Jeff and Dwayne represented the accomplishment of a personal goal and potential employment. For Rashaud it seemed much more than an end in itself; it seemed a springboard to a future career plan based on the acquisition of a college level credential. To Rashaud, the diploma represented social and economic mobility reflected in the job and the money he may earn. Rashaud wanted to enter a profession that would make him wealthy, "make money, make lots of money." The high school diploma represented,

> Getting paid, a job to me, or a future, a guaranteed future just about. Not money back, but a 90 day guarantee.

The consequence of getting a high school diploma was centered around his belief that the high school diploma would lead to a well-paid job. "[T]o me it's the dollar, the better I do, the better I will do later on in life." Intertwined with Rashaud's quest to acquire the high school diploma was a goal of accumulation of wealth for personal gain. He linked accumulation of money to personal power. "I think money is power. So, the more money that I have, the more power that I have."

Rashaud said that grades were the biggest challenge that he faced in his quest for the diploma. "Grades, that's what's on my mind, the biggest. I don't give a rip about anything else," he said. And Rashaud worked hard to achieve his high grades. On average he spent three hours a day completing his homework.

> It helps to spend a couple of hours, maybe three hours every day. It seems like with me, I don't know why, the part of my day where I do homework, I can't remember. It's just like I hope I did it. And you come back and get your 95 or 100%, whatever on it. You've been programmed for so long to come home and then do your homework or whatever.

In fact, Rashaud canceled a number of meetings we had arranged due to his commitment to work on a school project or some homework. Much of his after-school activities centered on completing homework tasks. He talked about homework more than any other young man that I interviewed. Intrigued with his strong determination and his response to my question about the biggest challenge he faced, I asked him why grades were important to him. "For me it's an ego thing, I like doing well. I always like doing well. When I do well, I like to show off a lot," he told me.

Rashaud saw himself as a "role model" to other African-Americans. In particular, he wanted to be seen as a "role model" for younger members of his mother's extended family. The idea of being a good role model developed from observing his uncles and his grandfather in Mississippi. Rashaud spent most of his summers in Mississippi with members of his mother's family. He said family members served as his "good" role models and "I think that is how I should behave." Following their example, he believed he should serve as a "role model" for the younger members of his extended family, believing his cousins would be able to match his accomplishments. Rashaud seemed to operate within a paradigm where all students have the same opportunity to succeed. He did not indicate that he thought he had a better chance than other African-Americans to achieve his goals.

> Myself, I think what I do comes first. And seeing that I have to be an example, that's the right outlook. I think I should look at myself first, and what am I going to do. If I'm going to be able to do anything, I think anybody should be able to do it. If I am going to get all A's, I think that just about anybody should be able to do it, that's how I feel. 'Cause if I do it then I think that everyone else should do it. That's why I don't drink, because if I do it, then I think that everyone else might do it. I think of myself more as a role model.

Rashaud appeared to have great confidence in himself and his achievements. His above-mentioned comments not only reveal his sense of duty to his family as a "role model," but also his sense of his connection to the African-American community.

On another occasion he told me grades were one of the most important aspects of school to him.

> Basically 'cause I've got to uphold an image, with myself, my mom and people in Cedarville . . . disproving something. That not all black kids are just a bunch of dumb kids that like to play sports. And what I'm trying to do is, if I can play sports, have fun, and get good grades at the same time, maybe somebody else will try to do the same thing.

Rashaud's goal of achieving good grades and upholding "an image," was not just an image to be imitated by his immediate family or peers, but also the broader African-American community. He constructed an identity and used the grading system not only to "show off," but also to challenge stereotypes that exist about African-American achievement and abilities. His audience was both the African-American community, where he wanted to be a role model, and the white community, where he wanted to challenge stereotypes about African-Americans.

Rashaud received high grades for all his classes and deemed these high grades important to gaining access to college. During his senior year, he hoped to attend classes in math or science at a nearby university, because "it helps you get your foot in the door to get into college."

Rashaud presented himself as a self-assured, goal-oriented person. While Jeff and Dwayne talked about their goals, they did not speak with the same knowledge as Rashaud of what it would take to achieve the goal of acquiring a "guaranteed future." He did not see any barriers that would prevent him from achieving his goal. When asked whether he saw any particular barriers that could hinder African-Americans in their access to opportunities, he replied, "Outside of academics, there may be some that I haven't encountered yet. Inside the Cedarville public school system, and where I choose to go to college, there shouldn't be any problems for me." Rashaud's experiences and encounters as an young African-American man in Cedarville, while somewhat alienating for him, helped him develop views about mobility and advancement that seemed unattainable for someone like Dwayne from Detroit. Rashaud did not acknowledge such differential access. His experiences of racism and classism seemed

different from Dwayne and Jeff. Therefore, he seemed to hold different ideas of the barriers that could temper his ambitions and goals beyond high school.

Rashaud's encounters in the world and his experiences in the Cedarville public school system convinced him that he would be able to achieve the goal of going to college without much hindrance. Given that 85% of the students went on to college, and that Rashaud had a track record of high attainment in his advanced placement courses, it seemed probable that he would go on to a four year college. Rashaud was firmly located in middle-class life through his experiences in his neighborhood and school. His mother was enrolled in a Ph.D. program and worked as an educational professional for a statewide organization. Rashaud made seemingly smooth connections between the diploma and his long-term aspirations, because of his academic achievements and his immersion in a middle-class school and neighborhood. The experiences saw him constructing a picture of the world whereby he predicted his success story becoming inspirational for others. He viewed himself serving as a role model. His notions were based on his experiences and his encounters. They ignored differences across race and race-class boundaries. Rashaud's attempt to hold himself up as a role model, however, failed to take into account the personal cost of attempting to achieve in a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood and school. His image of success and becoming successful was constructed through using a lens of middle-class success and social mobility to define a path of success for the rest of the African-American community.

Rashaud painted a complex picture of his relationship with school. He argued that he would not attend another school, despite feeling disconnected from the dominant social life at the school. Rashaud's strong commitment to acquiring the high school diploma and his aspirations for economic and social mobility were central to the significant role that school played in his life. He seemed prepared to tolerate alienating interpersonal relationships and was compensated by a hope of attaining his social and economic goals.

SHAWN BRAXTON: "IT'S MORE LIKE A START NOW"

Shawn Braxton, like Rashaud Dupont, attended Cedarville High School and lived in Cedarville. Shawn was an eleventh grade student at the high school, having transferred during his ninth grade year from a predominantly African-American school located in the outskirts of Detroit. Like Rashaud, Shawn was aware of the social class composition of the students who attended his school. He suggested "a lot of other schools have recognized us as a bunch of snotty-nosed kids." Shawn, like Rashaud, was committed towards a particular career path. Unlike Rashaud, Shawn had been living in the Cedarville area for only two years. His parents were divorced, and he lived with his older brother and his father in Cedarville. Shawn told me that he found it difficult to adapt to the environment in Cedarville. His father encouraged him to move to Cedarville because the school was "better" than his previous high school and would provide him better opportunities to pursue his goals beyond high school. His father, an education professional, moved to Cedarville because of a job transfer.

In essence, Shawn's move to Cedarville, encouraged by his mother and father, represented the belief that a diploma from Cedarville would carry more social and economic weight than a diploma from his previous school. He was one of the few young men to acknowledge that not all diplomas carry equal weight. Shawn did not talk about the high school diploma as a symbol of success or achievement; rather, he viewed the high school diploma as a vehicle to employment via a college credential. The high school diploma seemed to serve a functional role in his life as a springboard to acquiring a tertiary-level credential. "I realize that it's that they are hiring the person with the most experiences, the most education learned," he reflected. He felt that he would get a better education at Cedarville High School than he did in Detroit, and that after graduation,

> . . . in Detroit, it would be probably be harder to find a job . . . one of the reasons is that there are less jobs. I'm thinking about the level of education there. . . I think employers will look at it, you know the person coming out of Cedarville first than he would coming from Detroit.

Shawn like Rashaud anticipated going to college after graduating from high school. In fact, he had already considered a number of options and was convinced that he would study histology. He talked about the prospect of getting a wrestling scholarship to go to college. Shawn's wrestling coach at school indicated that he had a strong possibility of receiving a scholarship. The prospect of receiving a scholarship, however, was not the sole determinant of whether Shawn would go to college. "I plan to [go] with or without a scholarship," Shawn asserted. During his eleventh grade year, his grade point average was about 2.5. Nevertheless, Shawn believed he had a good chance of gaining acceptance to a local college. He did not indicate that his grade point average would be problematic in gaining access to a college, although that may be the case when considering current college entrance requirements.

Unlike Dwayne and Jeff, Shawn did not see the high school diploma as a significant achievement in its own right. For Shawn, the high school diploma was "more like a start now." Most of my conversations with Shawn were about the various options at the college level that he had considered pursuing once he graduated from high school. He seemed convinced he would go to college whether he received a scholarship. This stance suggests that the employment he sought required a college level credential.

His ambitions also were firmly rooted and connected to his family's orientation towards education. He openly admitted that "I think if I didn't have my Dad making me, I probably wouldn't go" to school. Yielding to this pressure from his father, Shawn went to school and also actively surveyed the many resources at school that would inform him of requirements and possibilities for high school graduation and college entrance. Also, Shawn received support and information and ideas from the career center he attended daily. Over the year, he spoke to counselors, and various speakers who came into his school to talk about a range of career options. All the options Shawn listed involved going to college. At the time of this study, he was interested in becoming a histologist "because that was the highest paying." Shawn had a great interest in the

sciences, receiving B grades at school in both math and science; he openly admitted that

he did not like English and history, for which he routinely received a C and a B

respectively.

Shawn attended a local career center where he spent each morning in classes,

before returning to Cedarville High School in the afternoon. The career center was

located about ten miles away from his high school. Shawn believed his involvement in

the program at the career center allowed him to gain skills that would serve as a

foundation for a future program at college level.

> It was designed for people who weren't planning to go to college. Wanted to
> learn a trade, get a job after high school. The program I'm in is a great start to
> get into college.

While many of Shawn's peers did not intend to go to college after high school and viewed

the opportunities at the career center as a vehicle to employment, Shawn saw the

opportunities differently. He saw the skills he learned at the career center as

providing an opportunity to take a job after high school graduation that would enable

him to support himself while he studied at a college. Thus, if he did not receive a

wrestling scholarship, his alternative would be to work in a laboratory at a local

hospital, more than likely Allerton General Hospital, where he would work as a

laboratory technician and study part time at a local college.

Through viewing the high school diploma as a "start now," Shawn made a direct

connection between the high school credential and the acquisition of another credential.

To Shawn the high school diploma, "just means that to me I've just finished high school,

it wouldn't be a big achievement that I would cherish or anything, I'm done." The high

school diploma becomes a vehicle to reach further levels in the credentialing process

where the higher the level of credential attained, the better the social and economic

status the job would wield. His view of the high school diploma representing "more

like a start now," suggests that he didn't see the diploma as a significant achievement.

Shawn said the high school diploma "could say that this person is smart or whatever,"

but he did not sound convinced that this was the case, because, as noted earlier, he commented that, "I mean, it really can't say too much because a person can graduate through high school with all D's . . ." So, Shawn suggested the social and economic weight of the diploma varies across institutions and among individuals from the same school.

Shawn talked about school as something he had to do. He did not speak much about his need to achieve good grades, nor did he speak much about enjoying school. His attitude to school work was most evident when he talked with me about his various career options. I asked him whether he had considered going into a medical field. He told me,

> One guy I talked to, he said why don't you go ahead and be a doctor? Because if anyone discovered the cure for AIDS, the doctor would be the one getting all the credit for it. But I don't really like school all that much, and six years of school doesn't seem like me.

For Shawn acquiring the credential meant gaining access to a well-paid job. It seemed as though it was a given to him that he would receive the diploma.

Shawn's comments suggest that he believed he would be afforded the opportunities that would allow him to pursue a credential beyond the high school diploma. He also indicated that not all credentials have the same social and economic weight, and there were differences in the value of credentials acquired within and across schools. Armed with this knowledge, Shawn moved to Cedarville and carved out a path for his future which firmly rested upon his acquisition of the high school diploma and the acquisition of another credential at the college level.

ZAKEEV WASHINGTON: "TICKET TO COLLEGE"

Zakeev Washington attended Western High School in Allerton which had an African-American student population of approximately 30%, and a white student population of approximately 58%. Zakeev transferred to the school at the beginning of the school year because his mother decided to move to another neighborhood in Allerton.

He previously attended Central High School, the school which Dwayne Reynolds and Marcus Williams attended, and which Jeff Davidson attended before he transferred to Allerton Christian School. Zakeev preferred aspects of Western to Central but really missed the people of Central. At Western he preferred the form of pedagogy which he described as "quicker." He ascribed the difference between the pedagogies of the two schools to the high proportion of white students attending Western. He considered the school a "majority white" school.

> Zakeev: . . . I'd rather be at Central. To me, school wise, not the people, Western teaches you more. And the reason I think that, is that it's majority white. That's what I'm saying, it's majority. And they're quick.
> JP: Who, the students or the teachers?
> Zakeev: The teachers, they go through things like that. I'm thinking, see, soon as it's majority white, you start teaching people quicker and putting it in their minds . . . In my history class, I'm doing a test almost every three days. Like at Central, it would be every other week. It was weird to me, as soon as I got there, it was quick, and teachers were teaching like they were supposed to be teaching. They were teaching at a speed, you know, we were supposed to be at. At Central, they were teaching at sixth grade level, not their teaching but their speed.

Although Zakeev preferred the pedagogy of Western, he often complained how he had few friends at Western. He preferred the "social" aspect of Central High School where he was connected to more people at school. But Zakeev was tied to Western because he lived in the school's catchment area.

Zakeev was strongly committed to acquiring the high school diploma. After high school graduation, Zakeev planned to attend college. He intended to attend first Allerton Community College, followed by the University of Michigan. Zakeev wanted to be "an orthodontist, have lots of money." He decided on the possibility of an orthodontist "because my teeth aren't so good, like I can see. I'd like to work on other people's teeth because mine aren't so great to begin with. And that's the reason I want to work there." Although Zakeev established a goal of acquiring the high school diploma, he ascribed minimal importance to acquiring the credential. He spoke of the acquisition of the high school diploma in ways similar to Shawn. Zakeev saw the high school diploma as a

"ticket to college." "I think it's like a ticket. College is really what you need, diploma not really much anyway. Ticket to college," Zakeev told me. Zakeev seemed to place less importance upon the actual acquisition of the high school diploma compared to Jeff or Dwayne, and developed a stance similar to Shawn and Rashaud. Zakeev situated the acquisition of the high school credential within the context of acquiring a college credential. He seemed to believe that the acquisition of the diploma was within his reach, and thus the diploma took on a lesser significance in comparison to the college diploma he aspired to attain.

Although Zakeev seemingly crafted a clear vision for himself along a particular credential accumulation path, just like Jeff and Dwayne he admitted he was unsure about the requirements to attend college. However, unlike Jeff and Dwayne he was aware of a difference between meeting requirements to graduate from high school and meeting the requirements to gain college entrance. He criticized the kind of information that school counselors gave him about graduations requirements.

> . . . mostly the counselors are really doing nothin'. What is required to graduate, what is required to graduate? I was like, I'm not interested in that. Like what is required to go to college? . . . They kept telling you what is required to graduate . . . Graduating ain't nothin' if you ain't going to college. They won't tell you that.

Zakeev wanted to know more about college entrance, but felt that the information was withheld from him by his school counselors.

Zakeev's comments suggest that he held particular ideas about how he would utilize the high school credential as a tool for social and economic advancement. Although the diploma did represent a significant achievement in its own right, its central significance was that it symbolized a ticket to higher social and economic status, probably a college level credential. While Zakeev aspired to gain a college level credential, he did not envision a smooth path in attaining such a goal. He suggested that he might encounter difficulty in securing entrance to a university. For example, one of the barriers that may prevent him from attending a university was his grade point

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average. At the time, his cumulative grade point average was 2.3. He told me that the implications of getting such a grade point average would mean that "I'd have to go to a community college." For Zakeev, the community college became a springboard to a university and not a terminal degree in itself.

Zakeev's quest to go to college needs to be located within the context of relationship at home, particularly in the context of his relationship with his mother and his brothers and sister. Zakeev had two brothers and one sister. His sister was a sophomore at a university in Ohio, while his 22 year old brother was serving a sentence in jail. Zakeev's younger brother attended middle school. Zakeev described his mother as one of the most important people in his life. He said that he tried to get good grades "to prove my Mom. Because when I get bad grades, I just feel so bad, I like to prove to my Mom." My discussion with her also revealed the importance and stress she placed on the acquisition of the high school diploma. His mother held a very strong belief that education is the key to economic security and social advancement. Zakeev likewise embraced such a perspective.

Zakeev, like Shawn, talked about the parental pressure to go to school. Zakeev, unlike Shawn, however, did not talk about not going to school if his mother didn't "make" him go. Interestingly, my question to each of the participants was 'why do you get up and go to school every day?' In part, Shawn's and Zakeev's responses to the question included the word 'make,' which could mean there was some form of parental authority that each of their parents wielded over their sons. Zakeev situated such parental influence within a context of broader political and economic realities. He constructed the alternatives if he decided not to attend school. For him, the alternative of dropping out of school was to be unemployed and to stay at home. Interestingly, the theme of the law and the criminal justice system also entered his conversation. This particular theme connects to the experiences Dwayne and Jeff spoke about earlier in my discussion. Zakeev told me,

What makes them go to school is their mothers . . . She doesn't want me sitting on the corner. What are you goin' to do if you are not in school? What else you got to do? . . . if you can't stay in school, there's nothin', unless you break the law or sit around and be lazy. It's not like you're dropping out to get a job or anything. You're dropping out just to be lazy. And do nothin'.

An interesting aspect of Zakeev's statement is his belief that staying in school potentially represented active participation in social life, the opposite of "doing nothin'." Zakeev had virtually no friends outside of school, so school became a central place for him to form social relationships. It is within the context of his being unconnected to others in his neighborhood that school played a significant role in his life. The high unemployment rate also influenced Zakeev's belief that a diploma might increase his chances to be employed.

Although Zakeev relied upon school to form friendships, constantly moving around Allerton made it difficult for him to develop sustained friendships. Paradoxically, it was the moving around that made him rely upon relationships in school to develop friendships, a place where he admitted he found it difficult to connect with others. Zakeev attended school in numerous settings across the Allerton area that include two high schools, one middle school, and five elementary schools. His mother had moved many times. For example, during 1992 he lived in three different houses and transferred to Western high school in September of 1992. He claimed that moving around left him with having to constantly make new friends. Hence, for Zakeev, going to school was important, not just because he did not want to be "lazy," but so he could meet people.

Zakeev argued, however, that just because he went to school did not mean that he "likes" everything in school. "I don't like everything. I hate that I have to do these courses that I have nothing to do with, and they show nothing on me." Although Zakeev disliked almost all of his classes, he did look forward to his band class where he played the saxophone. Many times when I visited Zakeev at home, he was practicing his saxophone, and took great joy in performing for me. It was one of the things that he

really enjoyed about school. Despite Zakeev being generally unenthusiastic about activities in school, the fact remains that he did go to school regularly and he stayed in school. So the commitment to acquiring the high school diploma represents a paradox for Zakeev as it does for most of these young men; he placed little value on the process of acquiring the high school diploma yet greatly emphasized the attainment of a high school diploma.

Despite his not liking "everything" in school, Zakeev did not absolutely reject the content of his classes of school. He developed a justification for learning at school that simultaneously dismissed the content and acknowledged that such knowledge had some intrinsic value to him.

> If I want to change something I got to go to school. I got to learn everything I've got to learn. White, black, whatever. I kind of know the dates, that's something. I would rather know the white knowledge than knowing no way at all. And if you don't know it that way, how can you change it?

Zakeev developed a rationale for going to school that included embracing knowledge he described as "white knowledge" and wanting to change "it." He never really clarified what he wanted to change, and never really talked about wanting to change a particular aspect of school per se. Nonetheless, he painted a complex picture of both learning a content that "shows nothing on" him, yet he suggested that knowing white knowledge was better than "knowing no way at all." This theme of both embracing and critiquing the content and form of school will be explored in the following chapter. He recalled a conversation with a friend at school:

> I was asking this girl . . . " You think you will get a good job without diploma?" And she was like, "yeah, you can get a good job without your diploma." I was like, "you get out of high school, you think you can get a good job? There's a lot of folks, how many people do you think are going to make it to Hollywood?"

Zakeev's comment suggests a belief that acquisition of the diploma would lead to employment, and there would be little chance of economic success without the diploma. Failing to acquire the diploma seemed to limit the chances of acquiring a job; the chance of 'making it' is diminished. On another occasion, he said he wanted to acquire the high

school diploma because "I don't want to be on the welfare line." So acquiring the

diploma represented a greater potential to acquire a job than without the diploma.

Notwithstanding, he argued that it was difficult for an African-American to acquire a

job even with the credential in hand. He puzzled about the nature of the credentialing

process in the United States:

> What's so strange about America, there are people who have got Master's degree, still can't get a job. You've got to search for jobs. You have to sweat for jobs . . . There's not very much opportunity in this period now . . . White people have got a better chance of getting it. Because we have to play their game. And all they have to do is act natural . . .

Zakeev spoke of the privilege and power that is afforded to white people in the quest to

get a job. This view markedly contrasts with the perspectives of Jeff, Rashaud, and

Shawn who did not bring into the conversation the racial barriers that may confront

them on the labor market. For Zakeev, acquiring a job was intertwined with learning

to play the rules of "their game."

In a sea of complex and seemingly contradictory explanations and justifications

for going to school, and setting a goal for acquiring the high school diploma, Zakeev

continued to go to school, and remained in school. Zakeev appeared perhaps the most

socially isolated young man out of the six men in this study. School was a place where

he could develop friendships, yet he admitted that he had few friends at school. Zakeev

was considering going to college after completing high school, yet criticized the fact

that he hadn't been informed about college entrance requirements. He also criticized

the racial nature of the school curriculum that "shows nothin' on" him. He developed a

position whereby he argued that it was better to know the "white knowledge" than

"knowing no way at all." This suggests a tension of both embracing and critiquing the

content and form of school Zakeev. His case reveals the complexities involved in going

to school as an young African-American man: wanting to acquire the high school

diploma, yet resenting what he had to learn to acquire the diploma.

MARCUS WILLIAMS: "I JUST WANNA MAKE SOMETHIN' OUT OF MYSELF"

Of all the young men in this study, Marcus Williams was perhaps the most critical about the nature of the school. In particular, he was critical about the racist nature of the content of aspects of schooling. For example, he criticized the racist nature of the curriculum and pervasive racism in many student-teacher relationships. Despite such criticism, Marcus went to school daily and was strongly committed to acquiring the high school diploma.

Marcus was seventeen years old and attended the tenth grade of Central High School. He often revealed how he felt too old for his grade level, and should be graduating in 1993. Marcus was tested as dyslexic, and retained for a year in sixth grade. He was also held back a grade when he arrived in Allerton in Grade 3. As a consequence of his diagnosed dyslexia, Marcus convinced himself that it was difficult for him to recall information he learned at school. Despite the diagnosed dyslexia and feeling older than his peers, Marcus developed the courage to go to school.

He went to school because he felt as though he wanted "to make something out of himself," although he admitted that school was "not a big part of his day." School became almost a ritual that he had to endure.

> Because I don't really acknowledge it really, it just something I have to do . . .
> Just to survive, just have to do it, just to survive. Because basically what I
> feel is this. 'Cause what I've been learning now I'm understanding what they're
> doing, they're really taking us back. So basically I don't have a feel for school.
> I won't drop out . . . I have to do it, I wanna to get my education, you know I want
> to hurry up and get out of here.

He spoke of school in very much the same way as Zakeev Washington. Like Zakeev, going to school and acquiring the high school diploma for Marcus was necessary in order to "survive." His view seemed rooted in his sense of economic survival.

Marcus had lived in Allerton for the past eight years, having previously lived in Port Edward, a medium-sized town with a predominately African-American, poor population. The town had been badly hit by structural changes in the economy with many residents being unemployed for lengthy periods of time. Marcus's mother moved

from Port Edward to Allerton to find a job and because she thought the education system

in Allerton was of a higher standard.

> Marcus: . . . And down there it's real bad . . . You've got black on black crime, you've got killing one another down there.
> JP: Really, what's going on in their lives?
> Marcus: The major one thing, is that you can get a bunch of money in practically an hour. More than a thousand dollars in practically an hour. And the way white folks got it today, black folks can't get no jobs. And so they get forced into that. And the way I was brought up. I won't touch that with a ten foot pole. My grandmother made sure . . . She brought us up not to do that, you know and I consider myself to be a strong brother because the environment I grew up in, I didn't come out like those other people, on drugs, those dope addicts and selling the stuff. That's how my family is, none of us sell drugs.

His quest to achieve the high school diploma was shaped by a number of forces. For

instance, life in Port Edward shaped how Marcus viewed the world, particularly his

understanding of the impact of unemployment and poverty in the lives of people.

Essentially, he wanted a diploma because it represented a potential job.

Fundamentally, Marcus' ambition to acquire the high school diploma was not linked to

getting a higher level credential. His mother, and grandparents, whom he had much

respect for, shared his belief in the value of an education as a tool for economic

advancement. Also, acquiring the high school diploma was one way of declaring a

commitment to not getting involved in drug use and trading in drugs.

An aspect of school that was attractive to Marcus was the strong social network

of friends attending Central. Notwithstanding friends at school being important to

Marcus, his routinized attendance at school was primarily motivated by his wish to

acquire the high school diploma.

> One of the reasons I go to school, I just want that diploma. Because basically to me, they ain't there to teach, they're just there to get their pay check at the end of the week. They ain't teachin' you nothin'. 'Cause if they was teachin' you somethin', they would be teaching you somethin' about your black African culture, instead of teaching you white is superior. Because that is all they are teaching you, white is so superior, they dominate everything.

Marcus was scathing about the content of school. He felt as though he was not learning anything of significance to him as an African-American. Particularly Marcus criticized the Eurocentric perspective that dominated the curriculum.

Marcus' desire to acquire the high school diploma appeared contradictory. He dismissed the nature of the school curriculum, yet it was the very curriculum that he had to endure in order to acquire the high school diploma. His framework for critique of school was influenced by numerous African-Americans thinkers, particularly Farrakhan and Malcolm X. Of the six young African-American men in this study, Marcus was perhaps the most vocal about the complexities of being an African-American attending a public school. "Like they have an African-American class at school and I heard there's a white lady teaching the class too. I said how can a white lady tell us about our own culture? She don't know nothin' about us," he argued.

While Marcus focused on acquiring the high school diploma as a ticket to employment, he also talked about going to college, but as something in passing. If he went to college, he would take cooking classes "for real expert cooks." It is perhaps the goal of employment and the value his mother placed on education, that were influential forces in Marcus attending school. He attended school "Because of the way my Mom made us feel [it's] important to go to school. Beat my tail if I don't. I don't mess around with her. I may be bigger than she is, but I'm scared of the woman." But Marcus was even critical of his mother's sense of why he should attend school. He said that his mother told him to go to school because he had "to learn." But Marcus questions this belief: "Learn what? They ain't teaching us nothin'. The stuff I learned, I learned on my own," he disclosed with aggravation.

> They just want, all the teachers there, is to get their pay check at the end of the week and to be in class to give you that old stuff that you heard before, that's it. Give you a bunch of dittos and papers and all that stuff. They won't sit down and discuss stuff with you and everything.

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Marcus suggested that much of the work at school was repetitious and that there was very little interaction among the teachers and students, and most of the work that they engaged in was through worksheets.

Marcus presented few options he intended to pursue once he acquired the high school diploma. At one time, he considered being a lawyer "but I'd be putting my brothers in jail. Ugh, ugh. Even if they did do something wrong, I'd just feel bad," he argued. His primary commitment after school was to enter the food service industry as a chef. He also said he would like to own his own restaurant.

> I love cooking, that's it, that's my hobby. That's what I want to make a career out of . . . Basically because I'm good at it, and I love doing it . . . See I want to be my own chef, so like if, basically like a caterer. So I can raise my own time, do what I want to do. Lord knows we need more black businesses around here.

Marcus's quest of owning his own business was motivated by the fact that he thought there needs to be more black owned businesses. [9] In part this goal was influenced by his experiences at work, which Marcus claimed was fraught with racism. Particularly, he spoke of how the management unfairly treated him compared to his white co-workers and how they were reluctant to hire African-American people to wait tables. At another job Marcus held, he complained of the manager's criteria for hiring and the kinds of jobs each person was allotted. Marcus alleged that race was a significant factor in determining the kind of jobs each worker was allocated.

> They have no black waitresses. And they will not hire none either . . . You know, I've got a lot of friends that would like to get into it, that would like to be a waitress. And, they're so scared of black folks, they think were stealing their tip. I said if I was stealing their tips they wouldn't know about it, believe me . . . they have all the black folks in the back where you can't be seen, or you're bussing, doing dirty jobs, cleaning off tables for somebody. That's basically what it is. You've got one black host waiter. So, I keep asking for a position change.

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[9] Farrakhan also argues for the needs for black business expansion. Farrakhan argues that such expansion is a vehicle for "black enhancement and black expansion" (West, 1993c, p. 214).

Marcus's critique of the racist nature of the hiring practices at work was part of the critique that he developed about his experiences in school with teachers, in his critique about the content of school and other arenas of social life.

In the same way as his racial critique of hiring practices at work were connected to his views of school, his relationship with his parents had a bearing on how he approached school. Often he engaged in verbal wrangles with his parents, particularly about the control his step-father attempted to wield over Marcus. From April until October 1993, he left home because felt he could not tolerate the hostility between himself and his step-father. During this period, he stayed with many friends for about two months; thereafter he moved into an apartment with his 21 year-old cousin, who was receiving social assistance and struggling financially to make ends meet. Marcus used his income from his evening and weekend job to pay for a portion of the household expenses. Over this six month period, Marcus did not receive any support, emotional or financial, from his parents. In fact, he had only spoken with his mother a couple of times during this period.

Marcus's need to work was intensified when he decided to move out of his parents' home. He was desperate to seize his independence from his parents and was also committed to showing them that he could be successful in staying in school. Realizing his job at the fast-food restaurant provided him with insufficient income to support himself, he tried to get a better paid job, but was unsuccessful.

> I asked for a different position, they know I've got an apartment. I barely had enough money to pay rent this month. 'Cause my cousin paid for half of it. Luckily his check came. He ain't got no job neither, so he gettin' unemployment. He had the money, I had a little bit to put down on it. I had only about $70 to put down on.

Despite the difficulties with his parents, and his need to work to pay for his rent and food, Marcus continued to go to school, and attended school every day without fail.

> I'm not going there so they can educate me, I educate my own self. I read books for myself. They teach me the wrong thing . . . they don't really care about

education. To me, because of how they got the system there, they just want you to get grades, and get the hell out of their class. That's what it is. Because they just give you grades. I know because I haven't learned nothing from that, nothing that I ain't heard before, because I've been hearing the same stuff for years and years.

Although Marcus asserted grades were insignificant, they did play a role in his day-to-day relationships, particularly in his fragile relationships with his parents. Going to school, and getting good grades, was one of the ways Marcus tried to prove himself to his parents. "To me, I'm trying to prove something to my parents that I can come home with a 3.0 and keep it up. And that's one of the reasons why" he went to school. Grades were tied in to Marcus's relationship with his parents, and his desire to be recognized by his parents. Grades seemed the most available tool to gain such recognition.

He viewed grades as a way of proving to his parents that he could achieve in school despite his not being at home as regularly as he used to be.

Marcus:	My parents gonna think I can't do it. They think I gonna slack off because I ain't in the house now. I wasn't slacking off, I used to be so nervous that trying not to do stuff wrong and I always do and they was always on me and I was forever on punishment. I stay on the punishment for the whole year.
JP:	Like what is the punishment?
Marcus:	I can't go outside or something, I had to stay in the house.
JP:	For doing what?
Marcus:	Nothin'. It's just stupid stuff, if I didn't clean something. It don't necessary have to be because of my grades. It's because I didn't do something around the house. To me that's stupid. Because I say if I bring home good grades, because one semester I brought home a 3.6. And, I was like four As, a C and a G. And em, you know, I had got in trouble too 'cause I didn't clean up something. I said, yahoo, you be yelling at me about my grades, then when I get some good ones they all act like they're unhappy about them. And they just look at me, and they just yell at me 'bout something else. And I'm like, hey, I'm proud that I got good grades.

Marcus clearly used his grades as a way to seek approval from his parents. In fact in many conversations he complained how he did not get much attention from his parents. Attaining good grades was one way in which he could command the attention of his parents. But as he noted, such attempts were not always met with the enthusiasm he anticipated. Thus, despite Marcus not living at home for a while, school, or rather his

performance in school, served as a bridge to connect with his mother and to gain her approval.

So, the picture becomes more complex. Marcus did not value the content of school. Yet he did like being able to meet his friends. He did not find the work engaging in classes, yet he tried to get good grades, especially to please his parents. At no time did Marcus talk about the importance of attaining good grades for college entrance. In fact, as I have noted, Marcus did not really talk about a college he wanted to attend. He talked about learning to be a chef, but not about learning in any formal institution.

Marcus developed a contradictory position towards school in his quest to acquire the high school diploma. He was not learning anything of significance to him as an African-American attending school, and argued that the teachers were disinterested and were teaching him "white is superior." Yet it was grades from his classes that he used to strengthen his tenuous relationship with his parents. All the while he was committed to going to school. Despite these contradictory positions, he mustered the courage to go to school daily, and he really wanted to "make something out of [him]self." Making something out of himself did not mean acquiring a considerable sum of money, or reaching a certain status position. Rather, he wanted to prove his capabilities and independence to his parents through achievement in school. In addition, he wanted to get a job in the food service industry or own a black business so he could support and serve his community. Marcus had an unusual commitment to his African-American community. The next chapter will explore his critique of school more thoroughly.

SYMBOLS, MEANINGS, AND SUCCESS

The high school diploma emerges as playing a somewhat different role in each of these young men's lives. I am not arguing that the meanings they constructed were solely of their own making. As they each experienced the social world and inhabited

different schools and neighborhoods, and encountered different economic, social, and cultural conditions, the significance of the diploma and the ways they came to view the high school diploma varied. For all these young men, the diploma represented a *form* of social and economic mobility. However, they did not all set the same kinds of goals, nor did ideas of social and economic mobility enter the conversation with the same intensity or commitment. Through their experiences they embraced and rejected different elements of their social world.

Connected to such mobility were dominant images and ideas about what it means to be a successful man, with these images and ideas dominant in society reflecting the experiences of white middle-class men. Also connected to these images are what Connell (1993a) described as buying into "a different construction of masculinity, in which the notion of long-term career is central" with different themes of "rationality and responsibility rather than pride and aggressiveness"
(p. 199) interwoven through their career paths.

From their accounts, it appears that the act of making meaning of the high school diploma was never complete and constantly in a state of change. There were underlying beliefs, however, about what the diploma can say about them, and what it is a tool of. Their social location influenced how they could use the diploma as a tool for social and economic advancement. Their social location also significantly influenced the ways in which they each came to view and think about the high school diploma. Two themes emerge around the significance of the high school diploma: (1) as a symbol of personal achievement; (2) as a ticket to economic success.

Symbol of achievement

Dwayne and Jeff each were committed to acquiring the high school diploma because they believed that it represented an important personal achievement. For Dwayne, it was "somethin' to show" while for Jeff it was "kind of like a reward." This

is not to say that they do not tie the diploma to economic world, but the central

significance of the diploma was that it symbolized a form of achievement. For these two

young men, the diploma and its significance in their lives took on a particular form in

part because of their encounters with the criminal justice system. The diploma

became a vehicle to assert their version of masculinity as successful in the world, but

the success they constructed represented images that were more limiting than the

other young men. Their version seemed markedly different to Shawn's and Rashaud's

versions. Their race, gender, and social class experiences were significant in how

these choices emerge as important to them.

After Jeff's encounter with the criminal justice system, he drastically altered

his relationship with school and turned to embraced school. Not any school, but a white

middle-class school. Going to school became one way of redeeming himself, in the eyes

of his parents, and others in the community. His entanglement with the criminal

justice system stripped him of the potential to develop an acceptable form of

masculinist success that attending school seemed to provide for him. The high school

diploma then became a reward to Jeff, a reward for completing school -- regardless of

what his experiences in school were.

Similarly, Dwayne's experience with the criminal justice system, combined

with the harsh life experiences he encountered in inner city Detroit, saw him using the

acquisition of the high school diploma as a tool for recognition. With little access to

dominant symbols of success, the high school diploma became an available tool to prove

that he was not a statistic of the inner city. He saw the high school diploma not solely

as a vehicle for potential economic security and advancement, but as a tool to show he

was not a victim of poverty and crime from the inner city.

These two young men, suffering the wrath of a society that penalizes young

black men, tried to craft images of success through the diploma. They rejected

hegemonic ideas about black men and embraced the diploma as a vehicle to success.

Interestingly, the diploma can be seen as supporting privilege in that it is part of a

credential accumulating path where white, middle-class men are most rewarded [10] and

many African-American men such as these two are not similarly rewarded. Though

their stances may be similar, there were differences in how they embraced and

rejected versions of subordinated masculinities -- versions of African-American

masculinities -- with Jeff "acting white" in opposition to these images and ways of

being, while Dwayne deeply valued the ways of being of his male African-American

peers in Detroit.

Ticket to economic success

Jeff's and Dwayne's approach contrasts with Marcus, Rashaud, Shawn and

Zakeev, who each primarily argued that the diploma by itself had limited social or

economic value. For these four young men, the diploma became a tool for economic and

social advancement through the acquisition of a college credential. It became a vehicle

for them to assert pride in their racial identities, but was also an image that reflected

masculinist success and social class mobility through material rewards and status the

credential could reap. Granted, to some degree, the diploma also represented economic

advancement to Jeff and Dwayne. Further, Marcus, Rashaud, Shawn, and Zakeev each

talked about plans to go to college. Marcus was more hesitant about going to college,

however, than Rashaud, Shawn, and Zakeev. For these three, the diploma was a tool for

the acquisition of a college level credential. College was the next step in the credential

acquiring process. Acquiring the high school credential became a strategy these three

young men adopted to ensure their successful admittance to a college. They seemed to

embrace meritocratic ideology that rests on individualism and competition. However,

despite Marcus, Rashaud, Shawn and Zakeev talking about going to college, it was only

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[10] See Mickelson and Smith (1992) where they argue a persistence in educational inequality for members of subordinated groups. Also see Mickelson, Smith, and Oliver (1993) for a good discussion about how African American candidates are excluded from a pool of "qualified" candidates in the hiring of academic faculty through seemingly "neutral" criteria.

the two middle-class young men, Rashaud and Shawn, and not the four other young men, who were working class and underclass, who had information about what it took to gain entrance into college.

At the same time, the high school diploma represented a level and form of achievement valued by their immediate family members. Through acquiring the diploma they would embark on a path that for many young men symbolized success and status. However, the intermingling of class and race privileges or penalties in their lives may see their goals and opportunities hindered. For instance, although Zakeev talked about going to school and getting good grades to go to college, there was little evidence in my conversations with him that he had thought about a particular path he wanted to pursue beyond college, nor was he provided with information about how to gain access to college. Recalling his outrage noted earlier in this chapter, he said "they kept telling you what is required to graduate . . . Graduating ain't nothin' if you ain't going to college. They won't tell you that." This raises questions about his opportunities to learn about college admission, and his schooling experiences that saw him receiving a 2.3 grade point average.

While these young men all talked about the diploma as a vehicle to economic success, it was only Marcus and Zakeev who also explicitly talked about the *process* of acquiring the high school diploma. They were perhaps the most open about how they viewed school and the content of school. They each pointed to the racist nature of the curriculum and criticized student-teacher relations and the pedagogy of their experience at school. This is not to say that these themes were not in some way prevalent in the minds of the other participants in this study. Instead, it is that these two talked specifically about this feature of schooling. These were the issues they brought to the fore in our conversations. For Marcus and Zakeev, acquiring the high school diploma became a contradictory goal. They rejected the content of schooling but engaged in the process of acquiring grades, completing tasks in order to acquire the

credential. They did not value the process of acquiring diploma, but they valued the diploma as a tool for social and economic advancement. I will discuss the contradictory nature of their view of schooling and the high school diploma in the following chapter.

Most of the young men, to varying degrees, had witnessed and felt the onslaught against the black male in US society. Their differing experiences of racism, classism, and sexism emerged from the different neighborhoods they lived in, the different schools they each attended, and the kinds of interactions they experienced with different groups at school, out of school in their community, and in their family. Therefore, acquiring the college diploma signified different levels of economic security and economic success to them. The diploma took on different meanings according to the relative privilege and access to resources. Economic security for some young men was essentially defined as bringing in enough income to support themselves. For others, it represented a firm location in middle class life and status.

Achievement Ideology

Each of the young men implicitly or explicitly suggested that if he did well and worked hard in school, he would receive the high school diploma which in turn would lead them to a good paying job. The extent to which they each embraced meritocratic ideology, however, varied across these young men. This variation was manifest in each of their lives, in what they said about going to school, how they talked about their future career ambitions upon finishing school. This is an important point. Many authors have recognized the importance that achievement ideology plays in the lives of school-going students. In the main this ideology has been represented as serving to reinforce social inequalities among groups in society. Some authors have focused on the differential ways in which the ideology plays out in schooling across students' relative track positions in school (Oakes, 1985), or on comparing social classes (Bowles and Gintis, 1976) or across race-class groups (MacLeod, 1987), and others

compare students who stay in schools and those who drop out (Fine, 1991). However, few writers have focused on within and across social class-race groups in relation to young African-American men committed to attending and completing school.

An exception has been MacLeod's (1987) study that focused on the ways in which African-American, the "Brothers," and white, "Hallway Hangers," students respectively embraced and rejected achievement ideology. He asserted that the Hallway Hangers rejected achievement ideology while the "Brothers" accepted achievement ideology. MacLeod claimed that the "Brothers" embraced achievement ideology because "poor blacks have racial discrimination to which they can point to as a cause of their family's poverty" (p. 129). On the other hand, the "Hallway Hangers" believed that accepting "the achievement ideology is to admit that their parents are lazy or stupid." (p. 130). MacLeod suggested that the Brothers believed the "achievement ideology to be an accurate depiction of the opportunity structure as it exists in the United States today because they perceive the racial situation to be substantially different for them than it was for their parents" (p. 130). The stance of the "Brothers" towards achievement ideology contrasts with the views of the six young men in this study.

Although all the six young men seemed to accept achievement ideology, at the same time, they did not all believe that the ideology accurately depicted the opportunity structure. Granted, the ideology was deeply embedded in their sense of the value of the high school diploma in their lives, and the significance of the high school diploma in the eyes of many of the important people in each of their lives. The achievement ideology did underlie much of what they said about the significance of going to school, their approaches to school and to school learning, and their hopes and ambitions beyond acquiring the high school diploma. At the same time, however, Dwayne, Marcus, and Zakeev were weary of the racial barriers that lay in their way as they attempted to enter the world of work. This did not seem the case for the two middle-class young men, or Jeff, of the working-class.

Dwayne, from the underclass, was the most hesitant about his future in that he thought that "the odds" were against him, given his upbringing and experiences in Detroit. And Marcus talked about racism generally in society and in his workplace at the fast-food restaurant. Also, as noted, Zakeev commented that "there's not very much opportunity in this period now . . . White people have got a better chance of getting it [a job]." For these three young men, their view of achievement ideology was also tainted with beliefs about how their racial location might hinder their advancement. Their views differed markedly from Jeff, Shawn, and Rashaud who did not hint at the possibility of barriers that may lie in their way as they attempted to accomplish their goals beyond school.

Achievement ideology and the ways in which these young men rejected and embraced dominant ideas and processes about success, achievement and mobility can been seen as significant in the making of social class differences. However, as noted, meritocratic ideology seems to benefit white middle-class men more than any other group in ways that not only are maintained through racial and social class orders, but also through gender relations. And though the ideology can be rooted in class-based versions of success, the ideology simultaneously seems to reflect masculinist versions of success and achievement that involve intense competition and individualism. The ways in which these young men responded to and were involved in the process of schooling as African-American men could be considered as an important strand of their masculinities -- the ways in which they "did" gender as African-American men in relation to schooling. While masculinist ideology may seem to serve all these young men, their racialized experiences, and in some cases, their social class experiences, might serve to situate these young men in subordinate locations within a gender order; an order in which working-class and middle-class African-American masculinities may reap considerably less privilege than that of white middle-class masculinities. Thus, while meritocratic ideology may be deeply rooted in masculinist ideology, the

interaction of social practice and institutional barriers sees these young men

potentially denied the privileges that are accessible to many middle-class white men.

Hence, while Rashaud may be afforded more access to privileges and options than

Dwayne, it is open to question whether he was afforded the same privileges and options

as many white male students at his school.

Explaining the similarities and differences

From the discussion thus far, it is clear there were patterns of similarity and

difference in how these young men came to talk about and view the high school diploma

in their lives. In a sea of complex relationships with others, they developed different

sets of meanings about the high school diploma. As noted, there were also differences

within social class groups. This is an important point, and although it maybe an

obvious one, it speaks to how meanings of the diploma are socially constructed and how

these meanings emerge from their differing class and gender experiences, and also

their experiences in a racial hierarchy. At the same time, their meanings shape these

experiences. For example, if we compare what Dwayne and Rashaud wanted to

accomplish with the diploma, their images of success through acquiring the symbol of

the diploma were different. To Dwayne, of the underclass, acquiring the diploma

represented a form of success, whereas to Rashaud, a middle-class young African-

American man, it seemed a trivial accomplishment and merely a stepping stone to his

college degree. Not only did they have differing social class, they also encountered

differing racialized and gendered experiences as black men in the neighborhoods they

lived in. This difference was evident in how they described their experiences in and

out of school, their opportunities to succeed, and the barriers they saw in their way.

Rashaud did not see any barriers to achieving his goals, whereas Dwayne did. Further,

they each were exposed differently to hegemonic and subordinated images of

masculinities. And different images of masculinities were sanctioned through their

interactions with others. Dwayne encountered the comradeship and the activities of his

peer group in Detroit, which surely influenced his version of success and masculinity.

These activities and connections based on particular ways of being and acting were far

removed from Rashaud's connections with his friends. His daily activities included

going to movies or doing homework, and he spent little of his time hanging around with

peer groups in his neighborhood. Hegemonic images of subordinate masculinities were

not part of his daily encounters in the same way as they were for Dwayne. In addition,

their differing access to resources was significant in how they saw themselves. This

difference in their ideas of images of others, and their differential access to resources

in part influenced how they viewed the diploma in their lives, and how they thought the

meaning of the high school diploma said something to others about who they are.

Delving into this variation further we learned that Rashaud believed that if he

could be successful, then others could be too. Rashaud saw himself in the process of

becoming successful. At the same time, Dwayne talked about success, but the limits of

success seemed narrower than Rashaud's version. Dwayne wanted success sooner than

Rashaud. Rashaud was prepared to wait longer until he received a college degree.

Dwayne talked about the negative impact that daily experiences of living in inner city

Detroit had upon the hope and expectations of inner city youth. Dwayne saw the high

school diploma as a chance to become successful. The difference between these two

young men is that Rashaud *believed* he was on the path to success, while Dwayne *hoped*

to enter the path of being successful. Dwayne was perhaps the most deeply affected by

institutional racism and classism that pervades his life in Detroit. And he *was* aware

of this. He did not unwittingly blame himself for the decisions or choices he made.

Rather he focused on explaining the impact of the environment upon his choices in

Detroit.

Notwithstanding the variation among these young men, the high school diploma

also was unanimously perceived as a symbol of potential mobility and potential

economic success. On a general level, there is a pattern across these six young men about the connection between the high school diploma and the world of work. The connection between the high school diploma and the job-acquiring process has been noted by numerous writers (for example, see, Collins, 1979; Labaree, 1988). Not only was the high school diploma viewed as a ticket to employment, it was also viewed as a symbol of economic security and success. Rashaud, middle class and attending school in a white middle class neighborhood, was perhaps the most convinced of this connection, it represented a "a guaranteed future," he told me.

In essence, the high school diploma symbolized success. While these young men had similar values and beliefs about the high school diploma, they differed in the kinds of opportunities they received to acquire the high school diploma, they also differed in the form and content of the support they receive at home and in their community. Thus their orientation towards the high school diploma is where the similarities across these young men ends.

Such a difference suggests that these young men's explanations of why they went to school, and the meaning of the high school diploma, were shaped by the institutional and cultural arrangements in society. Interaction of culture and structure in their lives contributed towards how they saw themselves in the world, in relation to others, and how they viewed their potential in relation to others. Their experiences differed as young African-American men in a social world where class location shapes and is shaped by access to rewards, privileges and cultural and material resources. The class location seemed inextricably and dynamically bound to their experiences of racism, and the images of what it meant to be successful men. These young men's day-to-day explanations of their experiences with others, however, suggest that the social construction of the meaning of the high school diploma was influenced by more than experiences and location within a social class hierarchy as Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest. Their experiences appeared to be shaped not only by their relative position in

the social class hierarchy, but also through the interlocking connections between the race, gender, and class structures and practices of domination and oppression (Collins, 1990). This theme of examining the interplay of race, class, and gender structures and cultures of domination and oppression in the context of each of these young men lives will be discussed in chapter 7.

Although much of this discussion has been about accepting the diploma as a vehicle to economic and social advancement, a number of questions arise that need further consideration. An important question is one about the relationship of meanings of the diploma to these young men's emerging social identities. Embedded in the question about who these men were in the process of becoming are also questions about the social cost of their commitments. What is it that these young men gained and gave up in order to acquire the diploma? In order to better understand some of these questions, the next chapter will focus on the process of schooling as a way to understand their experiences in classrooms. Subsequent chapters will further consider the process of identity formation.

Chapter 4

ACCOMMODATION AND CRITIQUE OF LIFE IN CLASSROOMS

This chapter focuses on aspects of the process of schooling encountered by the six young African-American men. In particular, I explore the ways in which they both accommodated and critiqued the process of schooling. Most prominent in their talk about schooling and their experiences as young African-American men were issues about the relationships they encountered. Here, their encounters with teachers, peers, curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms revealed that going to school was considerably complex as they went about acquiring the high school diploma. Through the schooling process, they also learned about what was valued by their teachers and peers in school, what was important to themselves, and who they were as young African-American men. For some of the young men, issues of conflict between themselves and their teachers was one of the strands that seeped into their conversations about schooling. Issues of lack of engagement and connection to curriculum was another. Schools therefore were not only places where they acquired the high school diploma, they were also places where in part these young men developed their identity and culture emerging from their complex and contradictory experiences of social relationships and knowledge.

As Connell et al. (1982) argued,

> Schooling is a powerful institution through which people and their relationships are produced. That is not a matter of choice; schools *do* that, one way or another. The choices are about *how* they do it. Schools have the capacity to shape the way they do that work and determine which social interests will be advanced by their laborers (p. 209).

Thus, examining the complexity of going to school begs an investigation of these young men's perceptions and experiences of schooling. While they went to school to acquire the high school diploma, this was only part of their story. Their relationship to schooling, and the role of schooling in their identity formation process, seem important as they developed meanings about the high school diploma and school. In the post-field analysis, I also learned that schools became places where they both challenged and confirmed the ongoing images they constructed of themselves and others as classed African-American men. These images in the making are important in understanding their perceptions of their experiences of school and the high school diploma.

As they shared their stories of their experiences in classroom and schools, it became clear that the task of acquiring the high school diploma was complex and not straightforward or smooth. They did not go to school in ways that consistently represented their needs, interests and aspirations. Schooling saw them pursuing their potentials [11] that were often constrained by barriers emerging from encounters and interactions in school. For example, at times they were confronted with individual and institutional racism, or seemingly denied opportunities to develop their voice through mainly authoritarian and traditional pedagogy. Their experiences in school and classroom contexts were ones of challenges, contradictions, and accommodations. They simultaneously accommodated and critiqued aspects of schooling. Such contradictory strands of their lives in school will be the focus of the chapter.

The notions of accommodation and critique are developed from critical education theory (see, Anyon, 1984; Apple, 1982; Connell et al., 1982; Freire, 1974; Weiler, 1988). Here, I use *accommodation* to mean to tolerate, and/or consciously and sometimes unconsciously accept the dominant structure and culture of schooling.

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[11] I use the notions of *potentials* and *constraints* from the work of Connell et. al. (1982). The notions are helpful in attempting to capture the opportunities, barriers, and penalties embedded in the dynamic and complex daily interactions and relationships these young men encountered in school over time.

Critique I use to frame their talk as young African-American men about relationships, ideas, processes, and issues which challenged or brought into question the multiple interests, purposes, and consequences of schooling.

In this chapter I argue that the contradictory tension between their critique and accommodation of schooling manifested itself differently in the lives of these young men. This suggests that not only did they experience schooling in different ways, but that their participation in schooling had differing consequences.

This chapter will focus on those experiences and aspects of classroom life they talked about. [12] First, I provide a brief discussion about how they talked about classroom life, followed by an analysis of the aspects of school they critiqued. From there, I will examine the complex ways in which they approached school that reveal a tension between accommodation and critique.

TALK ABOUT CLASSROOM LIFE

Talk about school experiences involved two sets of relationships, one that centered on their encounters in the classroom, and the other that focused on their relationships with students outside the classroom -- in the hallways, at lunch time, in between classes, and on the school bus. Thus, school represented, on the one hand, issues connected to their experiences of different aspects of classroom life and, on the other, issues connected to interaction with students. They talked about their relationships with the teachers and students they associated with, or students they rarely talked with, but talked about. Their relationships with other students at school will be discussed in the following chapter.

In the main, their talk about classrooms, the homework and tests they were assigned, and their level of engagement or enthusiasm in classrooms seemed also to be

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[12] This talk was obviously influenced by the relationships I established with each of the young men. The fact that I am a foreign white middle-class male associated with a university, the nature of the questions I asked, and how they perceived me and interpreted my questions seemed influential here.

about their perceptions of their relationships and encounters with their teachers. Such talk about teachers focused on teachers' personalities, attitudes, and the responsiveness of their pedagogy to students. They provided seemingly vague accounts of life in classrooms that revealed much about the aspects of school and classroom life that were important or unimportant to them or the aspects of school that stood at the forefront of their thinking. It seemed that the daily grind of going to school was less connected to their interest in the subject areas taught than by a desire to meet and socialize with friends and a long-term goal of high school graduation. Their accounts of classroom life also revealed their connection, disengagement, and degree of alienation from certain processes within school and provides us with glimpses of their social identities in the making.

While conversations about classroom life seemed to vary across the young men according to the particular school and classes they attended, there were discussions that were common across the young men. For instance talk about curriculum invariably was framed by a discussion of how the teachers taught a subject area, that is, the process, with little attention given to the substance -- the topics, issues, or ideas they learned or were exposed to in classrooms. Farrell (1994) noted similar patterns of talk in his study of "successful" young men and women of color, attending schools in New York. He wrote: "Conspicuous by its relative absence in the dialogues between the students is mention of academic courses and course content . . . When there is talk of subject matter, it was always in the context of the teachers who taught it" (p. 81). In my study, however, there was one exception: most of them did talk about the history curriculum they encountered and the inattention of the history curriculum to the history and experiences of African-Americans in the Unites States.

In sum, there were the similarities in the themes that dominated their discussions about classroom life. Notwithstanding, talk about relationships, curriculum, teachers, and pedagogy varied among the six men through how much

description they offered about their experiences in the classroom, the kind of critique they offered, and the aspects of classroom life they accommodated. Despite their critiques, they attended school daily and completed homework assignments and projects set by their teachers, and they strived to attain a passing grade for their tests and examinations. Grades were important to these young men, and completing the assigned work became a vehicle to the acquisition of a passing grade. Nevertheless, they did not just accommodate all their teachers' demands, nor did they encounter life in classrooms without passing criticism. I will discuss this uneasy tension between accommodating and critiquing their encounters in classrooms towards the end of the chapter. I will now turn to the spheres of life in classrooms they critiqued.

CRITIQUE OF SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LIFE

Being young African-American men and going to school was not smooth or uncomplicated for any of the young men. Complexities emerged that revealed their differences and similarities in their experiences in and out of school. One similarity is the racism encountered by all the young men. However, they viewed and talked about racism differently. Zakeev and Marcus seemed most insightful about the racism they encountered, while Rashaud and Shawn were critical, but less critical, of how they viewed themselves in relation to their school. And their experiences in and out school, on one level, seemed different to either Zakeev's or Marcus' experiences at school, who passionately critiqued the racism they confronted at school. Rashaud and Shawn both argued that they would not attend another school because they believed the credential acquired from Cedarville High School had more value than the diploma from another school in the area. Not only was their critique of schooling different from Zakeev and Marcus, their experiences as young African-American men did not enrage them or fuel their anger in the same way as Marcus or Zakeev. During the post-field analysis, I began to learn that the critique of all six was as much influenced by their views of

themselves as by their experiences, which in turn challenged or confirmed their images of themselves in relation to the institution of school. Notwithstanding, these six young African-American men had something in common: they managed not only to go to school but to stay in school. Further they were committed to being successful as African-Americans and saw their potential success as a challenge to ideas and images about African-American youth. It is within this context of staying in school, their commitment to being successful, and their desire to challenge dominant images of African-American youth that I turn to a discussion of their critique of life in classrooms.

"Teaching us to kiss white folks' butt"

Of these six young men, Marcus was perhaps the most critical of schooling. In particular, he spoke disparagingly about the racist nature of the education system in the United States. His perspective as a young African-American man reflected the racist nature and content of the education process he experienced in high school. It also reflected the complexity of being in school as a highly conscious young African-American man:

> To me how I feel about the education system, I mean they don't have the locks on our hands and feet no more, but they've got it on our brain. They've got the locks on our brains now . . . They just try to clog our memory, you know trying to express how powerful white folk are.

Marcus here addressed the oppressive nature of the education system for him and other African-Americans. His analysis suggests the constrained freedom wielded by African-Americans goes beyond physical control to consider ideological control -- dominant or emphasized values, beliefs, ideas, and images. The education system did not allowed him access to intellectual freedom he so urgently sought. Marcus often referred to school as a place of white domination and control, where the teachers are seen as instruments of such control. His criticism of the process of his schooling clearly attended to the racial nature of the culture and structure of schools.

> I don't really agree with the stuff they teach us all. I just do it to get my grade, because the stuff they're teaching us at school, they ain't teaching us, because basically what they are teaching us at school is what the white folks want us to know, basically. They are not teaching us what we need to know as Black people. They're teaching us to kiss white folks' butt. That what it is. Kiss their butt.

Marcus had a particularly broad notion of what counted as education in schools. He argued that the kind of knowledge he had access to, as an African-American, taught him to "kiss white folks' butt." Marcus's stance towards school revealed his abhorrence for the racism interwoven in the overt and covert curriculum where he learned about African-American subordination to whites. The knowledge he encountered at school represented "teaching you white is superior."

> Because basically to me, they ain't there to teach, they're just there to get their pay check at the end of the week. They ain't teachin' you nothin'. 'Cause if they was teaching' you somethin', they would be teaching you somethin' about your Black African culture, instead of teaching you white is superior. Because that is all they are teaching you, white is so superior, they dominate everything.

> Marcus readily identified himself as an African-American, and linked his

experience and the experiences of other African-Americans at school to the broader oppression of African-Americans in U.S. society. Marcus not only criticized the culture of schools but critiqued the very role of the institution itself. His critique suggests that power manifest and wielded through the institution of schooling is significant in the maintenance of the social location of African-Americans in a hierarchy of racialized social relations. Among the six young men in my study, he was the strongest critic of the racist nature of schooling, but certainly not the only one. The theme of racism in schools and society were, to some extent, addressed by all the young men. Their discussions about the history curriculum represented the most common strand of their experiences of racism in school that they talked about.

"Why can't we learn about our history?"

The history curriculum these young men encountered in school was the most notable subject of critique of classroom life among them. Particularly, they talked

about the ways in which the school curriculum and their teachers gave little or no attention to African-American history. Jeff was the exception. He stood alone in his silence about his perceptions of the history curriculum at school.

Dwayne, Marcus, and Zakeev in separate conversations spoke about societal domination by white people and their relationship of control over the curriculum:

Marcus: . . . that's all you hear is about in history, how white folks overpowered, where are the Black folks in all this . . . this is something that I want to express I will, I don't really care if they get offended by it, really. Because if the truth hurts.

Dwayne: It is basically about America, white people. I feel it is not right whatever, we built this country, we worked as slaves . . .

Zakeev: Because the white people, they don't want us to find out . . . they're hiding it, and it's white people wanting to hide that part . . . It's important to me because first of all we were here without our will. Second of all, we are here now, we are part of history, we should have some part of say about something, and we got to learn something about what happened to us. If you say it the way the white man say it, if I'm the plantation owner, then of course I'm going to say they was happy. 'Cause I was happy. They say they was dancing and stuff. You've got to do the part about how you would feel if you was chained to a boat. Doing that stuff, carried to a foreign land without your will . . . You're supposed to do this, and if you don't, you get beaten.

These three young men criticized the minimal way in which African-American history was conceived whereby the perspectives of the curriculum represented a white perspective of history and perpetuated white interests. Dwayne felt it was "not right" because African-Americans are as much part of this country as any other racialized group. Zakeev not only criticized the minimal attention given to African-Americans in his history curriculum; he also criticized the perspectives that were offered about African-Americans.

Marcus passionately argued that the omission of African-Americans and the perspectives of the history curriculum reveals how white people wield control in the US. Marcus elaborated on his point through an example from his history class about the study of Christopher Columbus:

Like Christopher Columbus discovered America. Christopher Columbus didn't discover America. He didn't know in the world where he was going. How can

they say that he discovered America? . . . Why do we want to hear about Christopher Columbus? What about our people, they act like we wasn't even there . . . America was already discovered. He was lost, he didn't know in the world where he was at. That's all we hear about, Alexander the Great and all that. I don't want to hear about that man. I want to hear about my Black people. How white folks doing everything, that's crazy. Like I said, they taking so much credit for what Black folks did back in them days.

Marcus once again argued that the history curriculum offered him little as an African-American. Through linking his perceptions of the history curriculum to his critique of the racial nature of schooling, it becomes clear that such instances reinforced Marcus's belief that school and going to school meant learning about the dominance of white people in society.

These three young men were not the only ones who critiqued the history curriculum. Shawn, for example, examined his school's text book to consider the extent to which African-American history was part of the curriculum:

Me and a couple of my friends, we go through our history book, and see how many chapters they have on Marcus Garvey, and how many they have on Theodore Roosevelt . . . [there was] One and half paragraphs on Marcus Garvey, and then a chapter and a half on Theodore Roosevelt . . .

Marcus echoed Shawn's observations of the limited amount of curriculum material attending to African-Americans. "Oh, there's just one chapter about W.E.B. Du Bois," Marcus commented. The omission noted by Marcus and Shawn strikes at the heart of the maintenance of racism and the pervasiveness of racism not only in individual relationships but the institution of school itself. Despite Shawn's criticism of the textbook, however, he acknowledged that his teachers gave some attention to African-American history. Shawn, unlike Marcus, had a history teacher who provided material beyond the text book. He distinguished between the content of the textbooks and the content of the lessons:

But the books and the teachers are two different things. Now he [the teacher] does go into the detail about Black history, Black achievement. We do a lot of activities for Black History Month . . . a celebration of all the Black achievements that they don't know about. Rather than things about where did folks go, family and so forth.

The teacher, while attending to African-American history, tended to confine such discussion of topics and issues connected to Black history and achievement to Black History Month. But for Marcus, attention to African-American history during Black History Month seemed inadequate:

> . . . just like you've got Black History Month, every year. Black History Month should be every year, it should be all year round. It's not just a day, a week, a month. To me, that don't make no sense.

Despite Marcus' criticism of Black History Month and his history teacher's inattentiveness to African-American history, he did not ascribe such omissions to a conspiracy theory. Rather, he viewed the problem historically, and analyzed the cultural contexts which most of his teachers experienced. He said, ". . . that's how they been taught, so they teaching us to do the same thing, that's how I see it."

Zakeev didn't accept the omission of African-Americans history from his curriculum. At the beginning of his semester at his new school, he challenged his history teacher about the omission of African-American history from the curriculum:

> I was like "why don't we study Africa?" And I asked him that, I was mad . . . He told me, "it's just not in my curriculum." I was like, I was asking, I said "we're part of history, why can't we learn about our history?" . . . It was about the time he was telling us about the curriculum, it was the beginning of term. I was interested in what we was going to learn. I get interested in history now . . . And they're saying something about Abraham Lincoln, saying he was a hero about slavery. He didn't really want to do that. Abraham Lincoln did not care about the slaves . . .

Not only was Zakeev critical of the fact that the teachers focused on white history and history he deemed relevant to white people, but he also criticized the ways in which history was interpreted. So, the fact that Abraham Lincoln was discussed was one aspect of his criticism, the other aspect of his criticism was that the book's portrayal of Abraham Lincoln's is but one perspective of his role in history. Zakeev's criticism brings to the fore an important aspect of the history curriculum that is often omitted in discussions about reform of curriculum. He demanded a more inclusive focus of topics relating to African-Americans and that multiple perspectives of topics be part of the curriculum. Zakeev's criticism didn't just rest with comments to me during this

study. He was adamant about his critical appraisal, and said "I'm going to write a letter to the Board (of Education) one time. I'm going to do that."

Having African-American history being included into the curriculum is one thing. Another is how we teach, for example, slavery as a curriculum topic and issue. At one point, Shawn criticized the way in which slavery was taught in school and the ways in which white students reacted to him as an African-American in the classroom.

> . . . Another thing that gets to me, is we're in history talking about slavery or whatever, and the other people are looking at you, or whatever, and then a white person might talk about slavery and how hard it was, and Black people might be offended. What do you know about Black history?

Shawn's concern was not just about what he was taught, but also about the opportunities for learning -- it was about how the teacher conceptualized the relationship between herself, learners, and knowledge. However, his critique was also about how students can affect each others' learning. White students' reactions to the content potentially offended African-American students in the classroom. Shawn didn't like his history classrooms; his grades certainly reflected his lack of connection to the content. He consistently received a D for history. "Ever since the seventh grade I've had trouble with history, out of all the classes . . . Maybe because a lot of it is boring," he noted.

Shawn's concern about his engagement in history, and how his teachers conceptualized the relationship between subject matter and the racial and ethnic experiences of students in the classroom, and how students' interacted with one another in such contexts, is a significant point that clearly needs further investigation. His point, however, does not detract from the larger concern of all these young men about their exclusion from their history curriculum. While attempts have been made to address the inadequate attention to racial minority perspectives in curriculum, particularly the history curriculum dominant in their schools, invariably such reforms emerge as an 'add-on' approach to reform of the history curriculum. In many

instances, providing and shaping curriculum that attends to the experiences of racial minority groups is not seen as a fundamental human right.

These young men in varying degrees desired a more inclusive curriculum, not only of curriculum topics and issues but of perspectives of these topics and issues. This exclusion of African-American topics, issues, and perspectives can be considered as a form of racism and the ways in which African-American history is addressed reflects sets of values, beliefs, and ideas that may unintentionally reify social relations of race (See, Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Troyna and Hatcher, 1992; Sarup, 1991). The omission clearly impacted the way they approached history. But their critique, particularly Zakeev's challenge to his teacher, suggest that these students did not accept such omissions with ease. The acts of challenge and critique serve to remind us that they did not uncritically accept or accommodate the dominant discourse and structures in school but actively analyzed and challenged such structures and cultures. Such curricular omissions and exclusionary perspectives suggest that the racism they encountered was more than acts of individual racism, it represented acts of institutional racism in that it was not individual teachers but a range of collective experiences across the institution of schooling that were similar.

From their accounts, racism seemed the major challenge they faced in school. The racism they experienced seemed more than acts of individual prejudice, but in addition, institutional racism, that emerged from both the structure and culture of school. Their talk about the Eurocentric constructs embedded in the history curriculum reveal a pattern across the young men that suggests their experiences were not isolated incidents. The dominance of Eurocentric history curriculum across their schools points to how power and privilege is wielded and racialized privilege is sustained through schooling.

This discussion about history curriculum provides a glimpse of the young men's experiences in classrooms. Significant to their conversations were the relationships

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they encountered not just in history classrooms but other classrooms as well. In order

to further consider their relationships with others in classrooms, I will discuss the

pedagogy the young men encountered. The following discussion about pedagogy and

relationships with teachers perhaps illuminates the understanding and respect afforded

these young men by their teachers. More centrally, the discussion of the pedagogy

these young men encountered at their different schools sheds light upon the *ways* in

which they encountered and experienced knowledge in their classrooms, and provides

further evidence for understanding race, gender, and social class in the lives of these

young men.

Pedagogical encounters in classrooms

Teachers' pedagogy and interest in their subject seemed influential in the

formation of the young men's ideas and conceptions of the subject-matter of the class

and their attitude and approach towards a class. On the one hand, Rashaud, Shawn, and

Jeff, who attended a middle-class private parochial school, each talked about the

interesting ways in which teachers taught their subjects and promoted student

involvement. On the other hand, Dwayne, Marcus, and Zakeev each talked about the

procedural ways in which they learned and participated in classrooms. Their

contrasting accounts of their experiences seemed to mirror the discussions of Anyon

(1981) and Oakes (1985) where students from different social class locations

experienced and encountered knowledge in different ways depending on their location in

an academic or vocational track within a school, or the dominant social class interests

of the school. The accounts also reflect the work of Kessler et al. (1985) who suggest

that different forms of curricula and school organization separate out different forms

of masculinity within the same school. Different kinds of experiences provided

different kinds of opportunities in classrooms for masculinities to be enacted and

negotiated. "Teaching inevitably involves emotional relationships. How these issues

are handled thus depends on the construction of masculinity and femininity in the teachers' own lives" (Kessler et al., 1985, p. 43) and also how they are constructed in the lives of students. The different experiences of the young men in my study raises questions about the relationship between experiences of curriculum and pedagogy and their social identities, namely their emerging race, class, and gender identities.

As I explore and contrast these young men's experiences of pedagogy and their teachers, I want to note that not one of the young men spoke about their relationships with students in their classrooms. When they spoke about relationships with others in the classroom, they only talked about their teachers and not the students in their classrooms.

Marcus criticized much of the pedagogy he encountered at school. For him, life in classrooms entailed completing and doing assignments. His experience in algebra described below, for example, was mirrored in almost all of his classes across the year.

> Marcus: Then after lunch I've got algebra . . . all they do is give us all the assignments, read all the directions, and that's it. That's basically how the class goes. We do that for the rest of the hour.
> JP: So, do they explain anything?
> Marcus: "Read directions."
> JP: Really, in the book?
> Marcus: Mmhumm.
> JP: The teacher doesn't teach or what?
> Marcus: Ugh, ugh. *(Laughs)*. Don't make me no do nothin'. I get an A off anywise.

Although Marcus claimed the teacher "don't make me do nothin'," the teacher did instruct Marcus to complete worksheets assigned in order to receive a grade. His algebra teacher seemed to lead a very teacher-centered class with few opportunities for engagement. Notwithstanding, Marcus suggested little effort was needed in algebra and he was able to achieve an A for the course. Thus, his grade became the main focus of the course and not what he learned. More significantly, Marcus's perspectives of his algebra class suggests a limited access and conception of mathematical domains of knowledge. It raises questions of not only how he came to know and understand

mathematical concepts and ideas, but also what counted as mathematical knowledge to

Marcus.

Algebra was not the only classroom where Marcus encountered apparent

teacher-centered pedagogy. The description of the pedagogy in his biology classroom

was similar.

> . . . biology. Which I can't stand that class. It's maybe 'cause of the lady. 'Cause
> I want to do some kinds of experiments or somethin' and she don't do none. She
> do like, she did one, that's it. 'Cause how she do, she gives so much paper,
> paperwork. 'Cause when we first got in the class, she gave us a thick packet.
> Thick 'ole packet, telling what we had to do by ourselves. I was like, come on.
> She talks like it don't look like a lot but you know, this, and this, and this. "You
> know, how to do it." Then we just had to go through it. Plus she gave us that,
> the next day she gave us some more assignments. 'Cause she just pile
> assignments on assignment on assignment. And we got to be giving in
> [assignments] all the time. I have more work from her class than I got from
> any other class.

It was not only Marcus' experiences in biology and in algebra that consisted of

completing many worksheets and assignments. His American history class in the

spring reflected similar experiences:

> Marcus: . . . See to me he [American history teacher] don't teach nothin', he
> don't explain nothin' to me. Give you the packet, give you the
> worksheet, "go ahead it's in the book." The only thing he explains is
> the review for the test. He will go over it twice and still read it just
> as fast as he did the first time. Where somebody can't catch up.
> JP: What are you learning about there?
> Marcus: Nothin', we're learning all about white folk, and how they dominate
> everything. I think we've got off a chapter about when the Charleston
> dance came, when they were doing that. We just got off a chapter
> about that.

Marcus's encounters of mathematics, biology, and history suggest a pattern of little

student engagement in these subject areas. Perhaps it is not surprising that Marcus

talked little about what he learned in his classes and focused more on the work he was

assigned, because being in these classes essentially entailed completing worksheets and

taking tests.

Both Zakeev and Dwayne characterized the pedagogy of their classes at Central

in ways similar to Marcus. But when Zakeev moved to Western he noticed a difference

in the teaching because it was "quicker." Here, the pace at which teachers moved

through material was faster than at Central. He ascribed the differences not to

individual teachers, but to the predominance of white students attending the school.

Hence, for Zakeev, the large proportion of white students at the school became a central

factor in his assertion about the pace of the teaching.

> Western teaches you more . . . The teachers, they go through things like that.
> I'm thinking, I see, soon as it's majority white, you start teaching people
> quicker and putting it in their minds, I should be able to keep up with
> something. In my history class, I'm doing a test almost every three days. Like
> at Central it would be every other week. It was weird to me. As soon as I got
> there, it was quick, and teachers were teaching like they were supposed to be
> teaching. They were teaching at a speed, you know we were supposed to be at.
> At Central, they were teaching at sixth grade level, not their teaching but their
> speed.

But when I asked Zakeev to talk about what the teachers did in his classroom, the

pedagogy did not seem much different than the pedagogy he encountered at Central. For

example in biology:

> JP: You were talking about biology, what does the teacher do?
> Zakeev: He loves to talk.
> JP: So is there participation?
> Zakeev: Yeah, no. Well, he gets into it sometimes: "Yeah, okay give me an
>   answer."

There seemed little interaction between the teacher and students. Despite the

difference in pace, student participation in his biology, history, and mathematics

classes at Western echoed many of Zakeev's experiences at Central.

In contrast to Marcus and Zakeev, Shawn and Rashaud liked the "teaching

methods" at their school, Cedarville, and also enjoyed the numerous discussions that

predominated classroom life. Both suggested they rarely used a textbook, and class

discussions were very common and the norm in most of their classes. At one point

Shawn said, "as matter of fact, except for courses like math and the career center, we

rarely use text books . . . I find it easier to grasp information easier like that . . . we

have access to a lot more video equipment. We can always run down to the library."

Although Shawn preferred his learning experiences at Cedarville, he bemoaned

the fact that there were not good relationships between teachers and students at

Cedarville. At his old school in the Detroit suburbs, the teachers "[tried] to get to know you," whereas at Cedarville he claimed that teachers and administrators "don't try to get to know you." Rashaud, however, differed with Shawn on this point and liked most of his teachers at Cedarville. He said that "They like to teach. They like to be around kids . . . it's just their mindset." So while they both appreciated the pedagogy they encountered, they differed on how they saw relationships with teachers.

Jeff argued the pedagogy he encountered at Allerton Christian school was "better" than his previous school, Central. There is no telling really what was better, or whether he encountered knowledge differently than his previous school. What was substantially different at his school was the predominance of white students in his classes, and also his views of schooling, which changed as he went to ACS and emerged from his decision to work hard in school and acquire the high school diploma. Jeff's story is an interesting one, because he lived in the same neighborhood as Dwayne and Marcus, a predominantly working-class neighborhood, yet he attended a decidedly middle-class private school and developed a different approach and view of schooling.

From these various accounts it seems there was a difference in how these young men participated in the production of knowledge in classrooms, with Rashaud and Shawn having attended a middle-class school encountering more student-centered and engaging experiences in their classrooms compared to the other young men. Dwayne, Marcus, and Zakeev suggested a pattern of participation in school similar on one level to the white working-class males and females in Weis' (1990) study, where she argued the students were "involved in the *form* of schooling, but not its substance" (p. 30). Different for these three young men were their experiences of racism woven through the fabric of their experiences of schooling.

While noting these six young men all encountered racism at school, their experiences of curriculum and pedagogy writ large differed markedly. Social class appears to be a powerful explainer of the difference. The difference raises questions

about what and how they learned, and how the knowledge they had access to influenced

how they saw themselves in relation to others in the development of their identities as

African American young men. The difference also suggests that through the silencing

and marginalization of some perspectives, and the privileging and centering of others,

they learned through their experiences of knowledge about racial relations of power.

Amidst their learning about the privileging of Eurocentric perspectives of knowledge

were differences in how they experienced knowledge, with the two middle-class young

men arguing that discussion was integral to their learning.

For each of these young men, however, learning in classrooms was not only

about *what* they learned, it was also about *how* the teachers related to them as

students, as African-American students. I will now turn to an examination of the

relationships some of these young men encountered with their teachers, as these the

relationships seemed instrumental in how they viewed school, teachers, and learning

in their classrooms.

Relationships with teachers

Amidst the discussions about curriculum and pedagogy, these young men

naturally talked about relationships with their teachers. While relationships with

their teachers were inextricably linked to the subject area and the pedagogy they

encountered, for the purposes of the discussion, I separate this sphere of classroom

life to better understand the kinds of relationships they encountered with their

teachers and the kinds of relationships they sought from their teachers.

Dwayne, Zakeev and Marcus offered similar responses when I asked them about

good teachers they had encountered at school:

    Dwayne: Mr. Barrett, he taught me how to read good.
         JP: Was he a Black or white person?
    Dwayne: Black person.
         JP: Was that like second grade or fourth grade?
    Dwayne: Fourth grade.

Zakeev: My sixth grade teacher, Ms Henley. She was the type who was strong, and told you why you missing something and get you along to do what you were supposed to do.

JP: Tell me was she white or Black?

Zakeev: She was Black.

Marcus: Err, I had one at Westview Middle School. Ms Henley.

JP: What was good about her?

Marcus: She was Black. And another one is 'cause you can really understand what she talks about 'cause she really broke it down.

Dwayne could not really add to his list. Marcus added his choir teacher of the fall semester, who was African-American: "She sees the shirt I had *Black Oath* . . . she really liked that." Zakeev also mentioned his band teacher, an African-American man. It is significant that the first teachers they identified were teachers they encountered in elementary school or early middle school and that, after additional probes, they identified these teachers as African-American. Also, it is significant that these young men found it difficult to come up with more than a couple of names. Part of their frame of a good teacher for these three young men was influenced by their connections and relationships with teachers in classrooms. It seemed that the teachers they most connected to were African-American teachers. The lack of connection they currently encountered in high school no doubt had bearing upon how they approached the classes. But what does it mean to be connected with a teacher?

I asked Marcus what the African-American teachers were like at school and he said, "I don't really know, because I've never had a Black teacher. In the middle school I went to I had one, I liked the way she taught." For Marcus, the notion of a "good" teacher was not only about the racial identity of his teacher but also "how they treat you . . . how they accept you." His point is significant because he, together with Dwayne and Zakeev, did not seem connected to their teachers in high school. Zakeev elaborated on this point further by arguing that teacher's relationship with students also included providing opportunities for students to shape the curriculum and conversations in his classroom:

> The wrong people are going into the teaching profession and that is affecting our lives . . . A good person would be a person that pushed someone to succeed . . . should say . . . what's boring for you in this class or something. They need to ask the people in the class what they like about the class, what's wrong, what's boring, or what's making you not interested?

Zakeev wanted to participate more in class. He wanted opportunities to provide feedback about his interest in the issues and ideas under discussion.

Dwayne, Marcus and Zakeev's relationships and connections with teachers markedly contrasted with Shawn, Jeff and Rashaud. For Jeff, his best teachers were his current teachers at ACS, where he liked the teachers and the teaching. While Shawn liked the teaching at Cedarville, he was not particularly enamored with the relationships he developed with the teachers there. "That's one thing I'm happy about here. I don't have the teachers that have me read the book, and answer the questions. I have a lot of enthusiastic teachers," he said. However, he preferred his teachers at his previous school, a predominantly African-American school, where the teachers tried "to get to know you." So while Shawn liked the teaching but not was connected to the teachers at Cedarville, Rashaud, on the other hand, both liked his teachers and the teaching. He developed a list of numerous "good" teachers with ease, where racial identity did not seem a consideration to him.

Compared to the other young men, Rashaud was not as critical of his teachers nor of his relationships with his teachers. On talking about their relationships with teachers, I asked the young men to talk about their perspectives of a "good" teacher. Rashaud's sense of a good teacher seemed to emerge from his experiences of teachers at the schools he had attended.

> A good teacher that I had at school, Mr. Whitiker and Ms. Jansen at elementary school, I had, let's see, Mr. Schinker, Ms. Hoffman, and Ms. Skula at middle school. In high school, Mr. Burris, a basketball coach, he was just a good figure, a role model, Mr. Turner, couldn't tell you that many 'cause I haven't finished [school].

I asked Rashaud what about these teachers was 'good':

> A good teacher is somebody who lets you, who makes you learn, you don't have to fight all these people off and keep away from the bad stuff and spread through

the bull, it's not like to have to sit there and you try to discover it for yourself .
. . last year with Mr. Eisner's class, I think out of the whole year, no one
skipped the class, no one did. And when they did miss something, they came back
almost the next day, they wanted to come to this class . . . It's not how they
behave, it's just their mindset, they like to teach. They like to be around kids.

His response starkly contrasted with Marcus, Dwayne and Zakeev, who not only found

it difficult to think about teachers who stood out to them, but struggled to disclose more

than one name.

Thus, for Rashaud, a good teacher was someone who provided opportunities for

students to be engaged in their learning, not only to participate in the classroom, but

also feel as though they were somehow involved in their own learning. Interestingly,

his focus seemed more on the process of what he was learning in the classroom, rather

than the content, which both Zakeev and Marcus criticized. This is not to say that all

relationships with teachers that Rashaud experienced were to his liking. Rashaud also

had relationships with teachers that he described as "bad." For example, he criticized

his teacher at middle school, Mr. Rutherford, who provided few opportunities for

students to develop their own personalities. "I think he wanted a bunch of Rutherford

clones," Rashaud said. His point suggests an important thread that runs through all the

views of these young men: their views of teachers were connected to their notions of

who they were as students.

The variation in experiences of pedagogy and relationships with teachers across

the young men raises questions about how they came to see themselves as students and

how they viewed knowledge and learning. It seems that issues of engagement and

opportunities for connection, nurturance, and support from their teachers were

significant to their emerging identities as young African-American men that continued

to be shaped and reshaped as they interacted in classrooms. The form and content of

what they learned was simultaneously influential in the shaping of their classed and

raced identities. Such processes, however, were also about their gendered identities.

The kinds of relationships they experienced with teacher and other students suggest the

prevalence of certain forms of interactions over others ones that they preferred.
Marcus's and Zakeev's desire for connected and nurturing relationships were at odds
with the unconnected and alienated relationships they experienced with teachers and
other students. At the same time, the opportunities for discussion in classrooms that
Rashaud and Shawn encountered suggest that the potential for connected relationships
was stronger than in the case of the other four. The kinds of relationships they all
experienced would have bearing upon the forms of masculinity they lived out in
classrooms. The ways in which these young men accessed knowledge, the forms of
communication, and the relationships with teachers and students each were at play in
how the young men responded to schooling and the versions of masculinity they lived
out in classrooms.

In order to consider further the connection between social identity, knowledge
and the role and relationships with teachers, I will turn to Marcus' relationship with
his history teacher. His story of his relationship with his history teacher, Mr. Hill,
illuminates well how race representation in the classroom provides opportunities for
students both to challenge and confirm who they were and wanted to be as young
African-American men. In addition, as the story unfolds, I argue that the interaction
was not just about race but that a subtext of gender was also embedded in the
interaction.

"Makes the Black people in my class mad"

Marcus was not just critical about what teachers taught and how they taught, he
was also angry about the ways in which teachers related to him as an African-American
man. Marcus was much more deeply angered and emotional about his treatment as an
African-American than any of the other young men. In one story, Marcus revealed his
anger through telling me about the comments his history teacher, Mr. Hill, a white
man, made about African-American men during a lesson. Marcus talked about the
remarks during a lunch time conversation with one of his friends, Tyrone McKay:

Tyrone:	He talks about how most Black males die between the ages of 19 and 25 or something.
JP:	He talks about that?
Tyrone:	Yeah, he told us like, I'm not trying to be a racist. He says most Black males, most crimes and stuff. And I be ready to go off. I know he's trying to do that on purpose, makes me mad, makes the Black people in my class mad.
Marcus:	. . . Oh yeah, he was trying to compare him to us, how he grew up and we go on as Black people ...
Tyrone:	Welfare and all that other stuff, how he was on welfare, and how he thinks he grew up with Blacks and stuff, and how Blacks should have no right to be the way they are and stuff. I was like right, he doesn't know what's going on with all the Blacks around this world and stuff.
Marcus:	OK, get this, he was talking about, okay, I never grew up with a silver spoon in my mouth. And I grew up poor and everything. And I say okay. If you grew up where I lived at, being Black, growing' up in the neighborhood that I lived at...
Tyrone:	Wouldn't have made it.
Marcus:	The kind of fact that he's white and he's got it easy anyway, 'cause he's going to get a job before the brother will, flat out, that's just how it is. It don't matter if he's poor ...
Tyrone:	Or stupid ...
Marcus:	He's goin' to get a job faster than the brother would, that's the comment that I had on it. And he's always tryin' to get on. He always says 'us'. He never say, he never includes us.
Tyrone:	He says you guys, you Blacks or whatever ...
Marcus:	He never includes himself. . .

From the above interaction, it is clear that Marcus and Tyrone were critical of the ways in which Mr. Hill portrayed African-Americans and also the ways in which he spoke to African-American students in the class. These two young men were incensed when they told me the story. This was not merely a polite discussion about their history teacher. They were angry. Although they argued he misrepresented African-Americans, they still had to complete Mr. Hill's assignments in order to acquire the grade for the class. Being in the class meant they not only had to endure topics which they found uninteresting, but they also had to endure the explicit misrepresentations the teacher offered about African-American students. This story helps remind us of the power that a teacher wields over students, not just in the allocation of grades, but in the maintenance of racism in the United States through what and how they do and don't talk about students' lives and their collective histories.

But the story was not only about race and race representation, it was also about how the teacher defined a version of subordinated masculinity. Mr. Hill suggested that it was "Black *males*" (emphasis added) that were involved in crime. Further, Marcus suggested of Hill that "he was trying to compare him to us." Through Hill's version of his own and African-American masculinities he set apart African-American masculinity from white masculinity. Marcus and Tyrone, however, seemed to respond more to the racialized aspect of the image that Hill painted rather then the gendered meanings and images embedded in the teacher's talk. Notwithstanding the racialized response of Marcus and Tyrone, the teacher used and imposed his institutional authority to define a version of African-American masculinities.

As the two young men continued their account, they revealed their relationship was further antagonized by their teacher's continual criticism of their membership of an African-American youth organization, the *Alphas*.

> [The teacher] don't teach nothing, he don't really, Tyrone has this class too. But [the teacher] gets real personal like, he gets in your personal life. That's why I'm in punishment now, 'cause he get in my business . . . He'd told my Mom that the organization that I'm into, Alpha has some effect on my grade and all this and this and that . . . we don't do nothin' at school, all we go is have our gold sweats on. See he don't like that, he has a problem with us goin' around the hall all the time. Because one day he walks in the class, he says something to me. "Hey why do you wear that gold sweatshirt all the time?" This and this and that. I said "because I want to ". . . he don't know everything about it. All he think is, fraternity, that's what he thinking. It's not a fraternity, it's a brotherhood.

Marcus took the teacher's criticism of the *Alphas* as a criticism of his "personal life." For Marcus this organization had intense significance. As I discuss in a later chapter, this was an organization that was important to Marcus because it allowed him connection with other young African-American men. Whether the teacher's criticism was warranted was not of issue to Marcus. What was of significant was that the criticism drew a deeper wedge between Marcus and his teacher.

Marcus' story of his relationship with his history teacher provides a backdrop to his critique of the racism embedded in educational institutions. This story reveals how relationships with teachers can contribute or help shape his connections with

school and the interpretations and critiques he developed about schooling. The anger these two young men displayed also provides a window into thinking about how social processes in classrooms are significant in the formation of these two young men's social identities. As young African-American men they responded to the seemingly racist perspectives of their teacher, and their strong emotional response -- that of anger -- became the way they expressed themselves as African-American men. This form of expression could be seen as a strand of their version of their racialized masculinities.

Marcus not only criticized the kind of relationships he had with his teachers, he also criticized the decisions about who taught courses. For example, he criticized the fact a white woman taught "an African-American class at school."

> Like they have an African-American class at school and heard there's a white lady teaching the class too. I said how can a white lady tell us about our own culture. She don't know nothin' about us.

Marcus was angered by the appointment of a white teacher, because it contributed towards his belief that schools do not serve the interests of African-American students attending. Appointing a white person to teach the particular course reinforced his belief that schooling was about "trying to express how powerful white folk are." In his mind, he saw the appointment of a white teacher to an African-American course as part of the overall oppressive nature of the education system.

In summary, relationships with teachers were significant because they seemed to shape how the young men had access to knowledge through what the teachers implicitly and explicitly included and excluded in their curriculum. Further, the nature of engagement in classrooms, and representations in the curriculum, directly and indirectly interweaved their lives and the meanings they made of schooling.

Their critique of their experiences in classrooms with teachers, particularly about the racist representation of knowledge, in some way contributed towards the ongoing formation of their identity as African-American men. To some degree, all the

young men experienced implicit and explicit forms of racism in their daily life at school. However, they responded in different ways given the contexts and their experiences in and out of school. For example, dominant ideas about the portrayal of African-Americans angered them, but Marcus's and Zakeev's critiques addressed issues of relations of power between whites and African-Americans, whereas this was not the case for either of Rashaud or Shawn, the two middle-class young men. Marcus's and Zakeev's strong critique of the history curriculum both confirmed their exclusion as African-Americans from aspects of school life, but ironically provided them fuel to assert who they were in opposition to their white teachers and the Eurocentric curriculum. They seemed less resigned to the strands of racism in their lives than either Rashaud or Shawn. Social class differences in part may explain this contrast.

There seemed a strong link between their experiences and understandings of racism in schooling, and their experiences of racism in the larger societal context. Notwithstanding patterns of racism in the lives of the young men, amidst their complicated relationships in schools, they seized different opportunities to confirm and challenge images generally about young African-American men and set themselves apart from these dominant images. But how they critiqued school and what they critiqued was as much about who they were, and wanted to be, as about their experiences of schooling. The racism encountered by Dwayne, Jeff, Marcus, and Zakeev, in school and out of school, was much more overt and confrontational compared to the covert racism encountered by Rashaud and Shawn in and out of school.

The interplay of racialized, gendered, and classed experiences in and out of school in the lives of the young men seems to explain the different meanings developed by each of these young men. If we consider Rashaud's and Shawn's accounts of their lives at Cedarville and in their neighborhoods, there seemed a marked difference in what they talked about compared to the other young men. For instance, both Rashaud and Shawn provided cautious critiques of the history curriculum in classrooms yet

declared they had not encountered racism in their school, nor in their immediate neighborhood. Dwayne, Jeff, Marcus, and Zakeev, however, spoke of their encounters of racism not only in school but out of school, at work, through the criminal justice system, and in general conflicts in their neighborhoods. Here, race and social class interconnected in the lives of these young men in ways that their access to privilege varied according to their race-class location, which was shaped by strands of the culture and structure of race and class power and privilege.

Their race and social class experiences, however, were also interconnected with their versions of masculinities. They did not respond to schooling as African-Americans, but as African-American men. It is noteworthy that Marcus and Zakeev seemed much more confrontational and aggressive than Rashaud and Zakeev. Zakeev challenged his history teacher, and Marcus responded with anger when his history teacher attempted to define African-American masculinity. A comparison of the experiences of Marcus and Zakeev with those of Rashaud and Shawn suggests that processes within the classroom not only reflected their different classed experiences as African-Americans but simultaneously their different gendered experiences.

The intersection of race and social class, however, is more complex than meets the eye, as is evident in the stories of Jeff. Jeff, a working class young man, totally shaken by his experiences with the criminal justice system, moved from being almost pushed out of school to seemingly embracing both the form and content of schooling, thereby providing little critique of schooling.

It is Jeff's experiences that I will now turn to through raising questions about his engagement in classrooms and his connections to teachers. From his accounts it seems that his approach towards school and work in classrooms changed as he began to experience connected and caring relationships with teachers. His stories, however, do not suggest different experiences in how or what he learned in classrooms.

FROM REJECTION TO ACCOMMODATION

While many of these young men critiqued aspects of their experiences in classrooms, Jeff stood out as someone who moved from almost rejecting school to seemingly embracing every fiber of its existence. As noted in the previous chapter, understanding Jeff's current relationship with school needs to be contextualized within his encounters of the criminal justice system. Jeff didn't suddenly whimsically decide that going to school could reap rewards. Jeff decided that going to school was better than the prospect of going to jail, a very real experience for him. His changed approach to school was also influenced by the fact that he attended a different school.

Jeff really liked his new school. In particular, he liked the pedagogy of the classes at Allerton Christian School (ACS). Often, he contrasted the environment with his previous school. He viewed ACS different on a number of dimensions of schooling compared to Central:

> The teachers, the environment, your peers, the work, they expect a lot more out of you. The teachers are just with you a hundred percent. "Do you need this? Do you need that? Is everything OK?" . . . They encourage you to go by the Bible and everything. They are really nice.

Jeff embraced school more than any of the five other young men. He seemed to take delight in every aspect of school. In mathematics, for instance, he compared his experiences at the two schools:

> Well I didn't take algebra at Central, I took general math. 'Cause I was goofing around. But it's totally different 'cause there's a lot more kids, my teacher Mr. Murphy, he'd help me if you raise your hand, but usually he'd say "Well the assignment is on the board, go back and do something at his desk." So you're sitting there and writing and everything. So you get bored and stuff, so you start talking to your friends and stuff, or just daydream, or write a letter or something. But Algebra here [at ACS], if I don't understand it, I will ask, and he will say "Come here." And if it takes a whole hour, we'll work at it, you know. Sometimes I will do a little of it and everybody will start discussing stuff.

As Jeff described his experiences in math at ACS and Central, it became clear that he most appreciated the smaller classes and the contact with the teachers. His teachers were ready to assist students with their work.

What was not clear from his description, however, was whether he learned and encountered knowledge differently at ACS compared to Central. This distinction between engaging differently in subject-matter and interacting more with his teacher became more apparent in Jeff's comparison of his experiences in biology at the two schools.

JP: If you have to think about the differences between Allerton Christian and Central. You said it's a better learning environment. What do you mean by that?

Jeff: Better classes, they teach you more.

JP: How would you describe the teaching at Central?

Jeff: Biology, when I think of biology, biology is living. It means like the living life. At Central it's bookwork. You just read a book chapter, don't do no dissecting anything. At Allerton Christian, the only time he ever really sat at his desk is when he was doing slides. Wasn't really much, he was sitting at his desk, and we would say "Excuse me sir, where is such and such a slide?" And he would say "It's right here." "Thank you," and then you go back . . . Biology at Central, you just had to do chapter such and such, or if you've got a project, "I want you to make an atom, that's your homework, bring it in Friday." . . . Now it's fun, we've got lab partners . . . the teacher he will come by the desk, watch, take time, watch a person for five to ten minutes and if he see you struggling to do something, he will say "Do you need help with such and such?" Or, he might even come on over, and say "Let me show you how to do this."

From his accounts of biology and mathematics it was the connection and the rapport he developed with his teachers that were different for Jeff. Although the environment was different to him, I became unsure about how different the pedagogy or the curriculum was from his previous school. For instance, in English he described his teacher, Ms. Schultz, as

. . . wonderful. She's the type of teacher, she talks all hour, but you know you never get bored of her. You never like "Okay lady, shut up." When you're taking notes, she goes step by step with us.

Jeff never really talked about participating in classes in ways different from Central. What was different was his interest and how teachers attended to him. Regardless whether the pedagogy or curriculum was different, for Jeff the difference seemed vast, and maybe most significant was the difference in his relationships with teachers.

These relationships were important to Jeff because he argued that such relationships were non-existent with teachers at his previous school.

In addition, Jeff preferred the students at ACS. He did not encounter strong or good friendships with his peers at Central because "[a] lot of Black people like to tease me though sometimes, 'cause they say, I talk funny, talk too proper." They called him a "sell-out." For Jeff, talking "proper" meant talking like "white people." At ACS students did not tease him about the way he talked. His relationships with other students and particularly his identity in relation to other African-American and white students will be explored in the following chapter.

Jeff's apparent embrace of the very fabric of school also saw him turn to religion. After attending the school for almost a week, Jeff informed me that he had been "saved." Jeff said that his Bible teacher "encouraged me to get saved. And I'm kind of struggling to take away bad habits." Intrigued with his turn towards religion, I asked him if his family was religious. He laughed and said "no." As we talked more about his experiences at ACS, it became apparent that religion, and particularly Christianity, seeped into the lessons of his day. For example, in his Algebra class he told me,

> . . . We usually read a verse in Algebra. 'Cause the teacher is like that, which. He's really, really religious. So, we read a verse or two, maybe a chapter . . . Then we discuss everything . . . "Would you like to pray for such and such. What is going on in your life? Do you want to talk about it and everything?" So it's kind of like a team discussion and everything, so you know and then. We pray for those that are sick at school and everything.

Although Jeff was afforded opportunities to share aspects of his life with the class, only one person at the school knew he had recently fathered a child. He deliberately chose not to share this part of his life with other students or teachers at the school:

> I'm the type of person, I don't want people to know my business. Just like at Allerton Christian, nobody knows that I have a daughter. I think there might be one person that knows I have a daughter. And that's as far as it goes, nobody knows stuff about my life.

So Jeff's involvement in the school created an uneasy tension in his life. He attended a new school which he claimed served him well. But he did not have many friends outside of this new school, nor did he retain any friends from his previous school. In fact, he argued that students from his old school distanced themselves from him. It seemed that Jeff accommodated almost every aspect of the new school, regardless of who he had to be in order to continue attending the school. For example, attending school meant Jeff chose not to share with other students that he was the father of a child, and he embraced religion in ways he did not previously. He wanted to reclaim his pride, he wanted the high school diploma, and attending ACS became a vehicle to accomplish such goals. This embrace of school, however, raises questions about the cost to Jeff, socially and culturally, as he embarked on the path of acquiring the high school diploma from ACS. Jeff's case reminds us that there were cost involved in the choices that all the young men made.

ACCOMMODATION AND CRITIQUE

Through their characterization of school these young men implicitly distinguished between going to school and accommodating the content and process of school. Going to school meant aspiring to acquire the high school diploma. That did not necessarily mean they embraced all they learned, or connected to the teachers they encountered in their learning. As noted in the previous chapter, going to school was essentially motivated by the promise of a high school credential. This goal was important for these young African-American men, determined to struggle against the odds, challenge stereotypes about African-American participation in school and society, and seek a dominant symbol of success and achievement. Going to school was less influenced by their interest in the subject areas taught than by the desire to meet and socialize with friends, and the long-term goal of high school graduation. As already noted, Jeff was the exception here. Their accounts are in some way reminiscent of

Weis's (1990) study, *Working Class Without Work* , about white working class young

men and women and their experiences of school. Here she argued that "the *school itself*

encourages the emerging contradictory attitude towards school culture and knowledge

that is evidence among youth both by stressing the utility of schooling and by

distributing a form of knowledge that maintains order" (p. 92).

Going to school became a contradictory experience in the lives of these young

men. Although they varied in how they embraced school, and how they critiqued aspects

of school, simultaneously embracing and critiquing schooling emerged as central to

these young men's perspectives and encounters with school. For example, Marcus and

Zakeev each criticized the racist nature of the curriculum, yet each was committed to

taking tests, getting an acceptable grade, and acquiring the high school diploma. They

valued the attainment of the high school diploma but resented aspects of the content and

process of schooling in order to acquire the high school diploma. Dwayne talked about

school in a very procedural way. He complained that he received little attention from

his teachers, and that school "be boring," or "it's alright"; he commented with

seemingly little enthusiasm, suggesting a level of resignation rather than acceptance or

embracement of his experiences. Shawn hinted at a similar relationship with school

and classroom life. Although he encountered different experiences from Dwayne, he

was impatiently eager to graduate from school, and like Dwayne talked about his work

almost as drudgery in a seemingly mechanical way. Jeff and Rashaud perhaps embraced

school more than the other young men. Yet despite Rashaud's apparent engagement in

school and pursuit of high grades, he criticized the learning process in school, arguing

that "if school was about learning, you wouldn't need grades." Jeff was the lone person

to embrace school uncritically. He remained uncritical of his experiences at Allerton

Christian School, and reveled in every aspect of his experiences in classrooms and

school.

Perhaps most revealing about their views of school was their accounts of their experiences in classrooms. Many criticized the instruction they encountered. Some shared their struggles in their relationships with their teachers. A common thread among the young men was that the content of their classes at school seemed meaningless to them. Even though this may not have been as much the case for Jeff, I am convinced that attending school presented some currents of contradictions in his life. I will now turn to some significant stories that focus on the different ways in which these young men appear to simultaneously accommodate and critique school.

" 'How can I be racist and my daughter went to see Michael Jackson?' "

Although Marcus learned little of value to him as an African-American at school, it was not only the curriculum or the pedagogy from which he was alienated. It was also the particular kinds of relationships he encountered with teachers at his school. Marcus provided few positive comments about any of his teachers at school, besides his Social Studies teacher. Much of his time with me was spent berating certain teachers, talking about how prejudiced they were, and how they spoke about and referred to African-American students.

Marcus's relationship with his biology teacher, Ms. Huffington, perhaps captures the extent to which he was not only disempowered as a learner, but reinforced in his belief that his teachers were "teaching white is superior, they dominate everything."

From entering the biology class at the beginning of the semester Marcus admitted that he didn't like the class. From the start this class meant completing individual assignments with no opportunity to engage in experiments.

> They ain't teaching us and giving us homework on top of homework. They don't explain, they just give it to you and expect you to do it. You don't know what the world you are doing. That's how I feel in this biology class, I don't know what the world I'm, well I know what I'm doin', but I don't know the world what I'm doing because she don't explain it . . .

Marcus here provides us with a glimpse of his experiences in his biology class. It seemed that he understood what he had to do in this class in a technical and procedural sense, but did not really have the opportunity to grasp the substantive knowledge in his biology class. For Marcus, attending his biology class did not provide him an opportunity to engage and learn about biology. It seemed Ms. Huffington provided few opportunities to understand concepts and ideas in biology, leaving him feeling very unsure of the subject matter.

He also suggested that the teacher did not like him: "She don't like me, she's being trying to flunk me ever since I got in that class." He described the problem he had over his grade for his first assignment in the class:

> . . . Like yesterday, she told me, 'cause like I asked her a question, I said "I wanna know how did you grade this?" Because we had so much out of a hundred, and I got 60. I said "How in the world could I get 60 and there was only a possible ..." I got A's on all my papers, I only missed two, so that was like ten points off . . . Plus I turned it in late, so that's 30. I said, "30 from a 100 is not 60." I said "where's your mathematics?" And I was explaining this to her. It took about five minutes to talk to her, I'm like "Excuse me, can I talk to you?" And she was like, "Hang on," and kept going on talking to somebody. I just looked at her there, and finally she came over and said. She still didn't understand what I said, you know, she was thinking about someone else. I said yeah, yeah. She gave me the 70 . . . She went on and gave me the 70. She wasn't even listening to what I'm saying. That's how she is, she don't pay attention to you. She don't care what she doing, as long as she gets her work done. All she want is probably that pay check at the end of the week.

The problem with the biology teacher continued through the semester. On another occasion Marcus encountered difficulty with this teacher over a test grade. This time he failed to hand a test in on time because he was scheduled to speak with his new counselor and therefore was unavailable to take the particular biology test. He explained this encounter:

> . . . what happened, okay, I wasn't there for the test day, I had to take it the next day, so I was doing it, she gave it to me so I could do it during class, right. So I was doing it during class, and class was just about over, and she was passing out papers, and I accidentally mixed it up with my other papers, and stuck it in my folder and forgot I put it in there. And when she asked for it, and when I went to look for it, I told her I couldn't find it. So she told me, when I find it, turn it in. So, I took it upon my self, when I do find it, I turn it in. So, a week later when we was doin' that em, we had to clean out our folders and everything, and I was

separating papers and stuff, and I turned it in. And then she told me that she can't give me credit on it. And I said you told me that when I find it, turn it in.

Ms. Huffington didn't give him credit for the test. At the end of the semester he was told that he would get an E for the course. "If I had have had this test in, credited on my test, I probably would have had a D or something like that," he told me.

Marcus was dissatisfied with his test grades for the semester, particularly the E he was awarded, which represented a failing grade. Consequently, during one class session, Marcus decided to speak with his school counselor about this failing grade, and left the classroom before the biology session had ended. This move of taking the matter to his counselor angered his teacher. Apparently, as Marcus left the classroom, she called him a "Black fucking nigger."

> . . . she was mad at me because I told her I wanted to go and see my counselor. She didn't say it directly in my face. Some students in my class heard her say it, saying it towards me when I left the class. There was about two of them that heard because they were sitting right up on her.

Marcus was adamant he should not receive an E for the course, so he went to speak to his counselor about the problem of his grade. And in reliving the interaction with me it became evident that the problem of the failing grade was exacerbated by the teacher's apparent racist remarks about Marcus. Marcus later heard about the comments from his two friends in the class.

Marcus told me that he was unaware of the fact that he would receive an E for the term, and that if he was going to receive a failing grade, a procedure was in place for a letter to be sent home to parents informing them of such a possibility. Marcus explained his anger:

> . . . 'cause I don't think I was failing , because even if I is, they should have sent me a failure letter home. That's a requirement, you have to send a failure letter home. She sent everybody else who was a failing, a failure letter home. So that told me I wasn't failing, so I didn't think nothin' of it, 'cause I wasn't getting there. And then she comes off and gives me off an E.

Clearly, Marcus was unprepared to receive the E because he was not forewarned by a procedural letter. In response, Marcus went to speak with his counselor at school.

Although he was appointed a new counselor at the beginning of the year, he decided to go and speak to his old counselor because he found him more trustworthy and reliable.

> I told my counselor that, and he said "I will go and talk to her," and he ain't did a thing. He say the same line just to get me out of his face. I don't want to go to my new counselor, 'cause she ain't gonna do no better, because she just all for him.

Marcus also spoke with his mother not only about the failing grade, but also about Ms. Huffington's alleged racist remark. His mother responded by going to the school, approaching Marcus's biology teacher and the school principal, Mr. Warton. "My Mom went to her, said my son said this and that, and she [Ms. Huffington] said 'No I did not'. My Mom knew she was goin' to deny it. And she [his Mom] went and to see Warton." The principal assured Marcus's mother that he would speak with the students who overheard the remark. "We had a lot of people on our side. They only talked to one person. They didn't talk to the people that I said heard it," Marcus argued.

The teacher changed Marcus's grade to "a D, nothing high. My Mom said she should have changed it to a C," Marcus argued. He then relayed to me how the teacher justified the change in the grade:

> This what she said *(laughs)*. "Well Marcus, an E looks kinda bad, I know you don't deserve no grade like that, you know you've been working so hard." It was so crazy, I was falling off laughing. She put a little line in here, she changed my grade. "I thought you didn't deserve no E, so I moved your grade up to a D." I was like, yeah right. It was so funny, and then she told me, "how can I be racist and my daughter went to see Michael Jackson?" I said "So." I'm just looking up in the air, because she's tryin' to prove to me that's she's not racist.

This last comment reveals an aspect of the tension between Marcus and his biology teacher was one of a teacher and a student, and significantly, a relationship between a teacher who was a white woman and a student who was African-American man. It was an argument between a teacher, who had the power to assign grades, and hence pass or fail, and a student who was to receive the grade. But in Marcus's eyes this incident was not just about teacher authority and control, it was also about racism. Ms. Huffington's reported comment of "How can I be racist and my daughter went to see Michael

Jackson?" revealed her understanding of racism, and rather than pacifying Marcus, further agitated him.

This was a conflict over power, power to assign grades. As Marcus battled to get a passing grade, he saw himself not only challenging the individual teacher he was simultaneously challenging a racist system, which she represented. The significance of racialized meanings in his relationship with the teacher is apparent when he talked about how white students portrayed the teacher's attitude towards African-American students in his class. He said "even the white folks say she's prejudice, I was like goodness, this woman must be."

This conflict over the way she used her power to assign grades had implications for Marcus because it impacted his goal of acquiring the high school diploma. Complicating the tension was his perception that the authority figure was racist. Whether the teacher was or was not racist, for Marcus the interaction confirmed his view that she was racist. Other teachers in the building also have told me that this teacher was known to be racist in the school; but she remained in the school.

This problem, however, is greater than his individual experience. My reading and experiences reveal that his encounters with his biology teacher are not uncommon. It raises larger questions not only about individual racism, but also how Marcus saw school as a whole as racist, and this teacher was seen as part of that authority structure. This account also raises questions for me about connections between individual and institutional racism.

Despite his critical perspective of the racist nature of the institution of school, Marcus continued to attend school, even under difficult circumstances and hoped to graduate by 1995. Like other youngsters of his age, he had dreams of pursuing a career that would give him material rewards and success. He wanted a job, yet he readily admitted he "can't get a job."

Marcus occupied a contradictory position in relation to school. On the one hand, he openly challenged, dismissed and devalued the content and focus of the classes and, on the other, he highly valued the potential to graduate and acquire the high school diploma. He did not value the content of the classes he took, but sought the extrinsic value of the diploma earned by attending such classes, and getting good grades.

Marcus strongly argued that significant learning opportunities would represent learning something about himself as an African-American, where teachers would be responsible for "teaching you somethin' about your Black African culture." Such learned involved caring and connected relationships, where teachers understood him and his perspectives. For Marcus, the curriculum he encountered in school had little significance to him. Yet he admitted that he does the work required "to get [his] grade." So why did he continue to attend school? He said he attended school to acquire a diploma. With the diploma he intended to "get a job, but can't get a job." Marcus's quest to acquire a high school diploma reflects the complexity of not only what it represented to him, but also a complexity of the process he needed to undertake in order to acquire the diploma.

Marcus did not totally disregard what he learned in school. Rather, he was selective:

> But they teach me stuff, some of it I will comprehend, some of it I will keep in my mind, and throw it out, and educate myself. Because as you know, I'm in that group UNITE, and I get taught besides what they are teaching me at school, my Black way. How Black people came up and did so much.

One class where Marcus was fairly engaged, and he enjoyed above all the other classes, was the social studies class he took in the Fall semester of 1992. It was a global studies course that spent some time focusing on Africa. Marcus told me that he liked the class because

> It's just an active class, 'cause the teacher gives us the work, we talk about. It's just fun, it's just hard to explain. I just love being in the class. I just love being there . . . I can just flat out work in there. I don't know why. It's just the nature of the room.

Marcus enjoyed this class and often spoke to me about the class's discussion topics and the support and encouragement of the teacher. One of the central topics for the semester was the study of Africa. Each student was required to choose a country and prepare a project about that country. Marcus was very excited. Although he initially chose South Africa, he ended up studying Ethiopia. Despite a study of Ethiopia not being his first choice, Marcus immersed himself in the project. On the day of his presentation, he cooked Ethiopian food for his class members. Social studies was a class where he revealed an eagerness to learn and engage when presented with opportunities to learn about subject matter that was relevant and connected to his interests and educational pursuits. From his accounts of the class, however, it is unclear whether he participated in knowledge construction differently than in other classrooms.

Zakeev too also developed a contradictory and complex stance in relation to the process of acquiring a high school diploma. As noted in the previous chapter, Zakeev criticized the knowledge he encountered at school that "shows nothin' on" him. However, he generated a stance towards the knowledge he encountered in school where he argued it was better to know the "white knowledge" than "knowing no way at all." He argued that "if you don't know it that way, how can you change it?" Zakeev, while rejecting the knowledge he encountered in school because it shows nothin' on him," simultaneously developed a rationale for learning concepts and ideas in school subjects that reflect white power and privilege.

Thus, Marcus and Zakeev each developed critical stances in relation to school, teachers and their relationships with teachers. In fact, they each challenged their relationships with teachers: Zakeev challenged his history teacher about the content of the curriculum, while Marcus challenged his biology teacher about the grade she assigned him. But they continued to go to school. This raises questions about the complexity of their accommodation of schooling in their lives. It seems more that they

tolerated the institution not because they accepted ideas or the ways in which their schools function, but because of their overwhelming commitment to graduate from high school. Zakeev, like Marcus, was not just critical of the particular classes, he also noticed the structure of school and how it reflected white interests. In order to consider this point further I will turn to Zakeev's observations about the distribution of students in mathematics classes.

Mathematics: "That's where they, I think they discriminate"

On moving to his new school, Western, Zakeev requested to be placed in an algebra class but was placed in a general math class. Although he was unhappy about this, he was more unhappy about the way in which students were separated into two classes that seemed to be divided along racial lines. "They put all the white people in one class, and then they were going to say they were full, and pick all the black people out and put them at the end in the little classes," Zakeev said. Apparently there were too many students to be placed into one classroom, so the administration divided the students into two classes. Zakeev told me that these classes were the "middle classes."

JP:	What's the middle classes, I don't understand?
Zakeev:	Not the middle classes, the last resort. They kicked all the white people out.
JP:	You mean out of the enriched class.
Zakeev:	No, they have the regular math, and they got full. But I think they got full with white people and they kicked the white people out.
JP:	Where did the white people go?
Zakeev:	They got put in another classroom.
JP:	There's how many white people?
Zakeev:	There's three, and the rest are black. About fifteen people.
JP:	And that is strange, because the school is predominately white.
Zakeev:	Yeah.
JP:	They didn't say why?
Zakeev:	Yeah, they said the class is full.
JP:	And how many black people in the other class?
Zakeev:	Not many, two.

Zakeev constantly raised the issue of separation of African-American and white students, because he couldn't understand the coincidence of clusters of black people in

one class, and clusters of white people in another. "That's where they, I think they discriminate," he told me.

This case reveals the subtle, or in Zakeev's eyes, the not too subtle ways in which racism operated within his school. The fact that a predominance of African-American students was found in Zakeev's general algebra class, and a predominance of white students in another class, in a school with an African-American population of approximately thirty percent, and was not addressed as problematic, or one of concern, points to the ways in which racism in the eyes of Zakeev emerged and was sustained. Whether the allocation of students to the two classes was racist or not, through Zakeev's eyes, the decision was racist. It is through this incident that Zakeev was not only able to think about the predominance of African-Americans in his mathematics class, but he was also able to think about "discrimination" writ large. Such incidents may have filled Zakeev with despair, but ironically also may have helped him strengthen his identity as an African-American and the understandings he developed about race privilege and power. Notwithstanding, he tolerated such segregation, because of his commitment to disproving racist assumptions through graduating. Zakeev accepted the situation, but remained critical. His experiences of school reveal a tension between accommodation and critique, and contrasts with Dwayne's story and his relationship with school.

"Education means like gettin' all you can get from school"

As noted in the previous chapter, Dwayne went to school so that he could "be someone successful." The actual processes of getting the diploma, getting good grades, learning the content of classes to get the grades, and being able to talk about any of his school experience beyond break time, however, were not aspects that were predominant in his talk. Possibly he chose not to further discuss his experience because he felt intimidated by me as a researcher and knowing that I was a teacher, felt

as though he was being evaluated. Yet there seemed little to entice him to stay in school. At one point Dwayne told me that "as far as that school, Central, I guess it's alright. I be looking at it, like it be boring 'cause there don't really be nothin' to do," he said. The highlights of school for Dwayne were the opportunities to play sports and to see his friends. "I like sport, seeing my friends or whatever," he told me. After he arrived at school in the morning, he said that he spent his time

> basically, goin' around and say "Hi" to friends . . . And then after the bell rings, I just go, I guess go to class, then have gym. I have gym then have lunch, get like an hour from there. Go out to eat from school, talk to your friends . . . talk to a lot of girls . . . Just go fourth hour, fifth hour, sixth hour.

On a number of occasions I asked him to talk about his day at school. He listed the classes he attended almost as items on an itinerary, rather than places of learning, engagement or activity. He spoke very little about the content of classes, or about the students in the classes. In a few of the classes he mentioned the "work" he encountered in the class. For example, in English he learned words, in math he did "work and stuff," while in biology-science he did "experiments . . . worksheets, read, take tests and stuff." Gleaning from his accounts, much of Dwayne's work experience in school seemed to represent following teachers' directions and completing tasks. Although his accounts were not detailed, it is significant that the aspects of classroom life he chose to talk about centered on assignments or his regard for a teacher. As he did not describe the pedagogy or ideas he encountered in class, it is difficult to catch glimpses of what he was learning, or of the pedagogy he experienced in classrooms. Dwayne did not talk about what he learned in school, nor indicated whether he found the subject-matter to be interesting or engaging. Notwithstanding, going to school was important to him. It was "makin' it" through school and struggling to stay in school that seemed to become his priority. Schools seemed to have offered very little to Dwayne in his quest to achieve the high school diploma and thereby "be no statistic."

I asked Dwayne about his learning experiences generally at school:

> JP: Tell me, what you're learning in school or whether there are things
> that you'd like to be learning.
> Dwayne: What do you mean?
> JP: Okay, you're doing all these things at school, what would you like to
> be doing at school?
> Dwayne: Nothin' really, that's what school is for.
> JP: What's school for?
> Dwayne: To get an education.
> JP: So what do you think you are learning about at school?
> Dwayne: Huh?
> JP: Okay, you say you want to get an education, what's an education mean
> to you?
> Dwayne: Education means like gettin' all you can get from school.
> JP: Like what?
> Dwayne: You're learning everyday, you ain't gonna never stop learning.

Despite Dwayne claiming "you're learning everyday," he never articulated what he was learning nor elaborated about the meaning of education to him. In a sense, he provided certain responses that seemed to show what school and going to school represented to him as a symbol, but simultaneously revealed the content of schools had little significance to him. He was physically in school but he talked little about actually accessing all he can "get from school." Dwayne seemed to believe in school as a symbol of achievement, but did not seem connected to the curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms that were vehicles to such achievement.

For Dwayne, school tended to represent a process to endure in order to acquire a symbol of potential achievement, the high school diploma. His approach to school raises questions about how he valued and perceived the process of schooling, how he participated in the process, and the opportunities for engagement in school. Also, what did it mean for Dwayne to accommodate schooling? Did it mean to tolerate schooling with the hope of acquiring the high school diploma? But the hope of acquiring the high school diploma was not enough to keep Dwayne in school given that he really was not very connected to his classes at school, nor his teachers. As previously noted, Dwayne ran away from his foster home in February 1993 and did not return to Allerton. Ultimately, the question arises: did Dwayne chose to leave school or was he pushed out of school, through both his disengaging and "boring" experiences at Central, as well as

the pull of his friends in Detroit? School seemed to emerge as a place where Dwayne attempted to live out his goal of showing he was able to acquire the diploma, but it was also a difficult place for him to stay in.

It seemed that it was not only Central that was disengaging to Dwayne, he also mentioned that he found school "boring" when he attended school in Detroit. Thus, it is not surprising that when Dwayne talked about schooling he focused little on his experiences in classrooms and instead talked about his relationships. These relationships with other students may have been the sustaining factors that helped him continue to go to school. So questions about whether Dwayne was connected to school, whether he was learning, or whether Dwayne had opportunities to learn need to be situated within a sea of his multiple encounters with school, the history of the schools he attended, and the particular contexts in which he lived. It is these cumulative experiences that perhaps represent Dwayne's relationship with school.

Going to school represented a symbolic act for Dwayne. He simultaneously seemed disengaged from the content of his classes, which he argued was "boring," yet acknowledged the fact that he needed to endure the classes to acquire the high school diploma. While Marcus seemingly rejected most of the curriculum at school, yet continued to attend, Dwayne, on the other hand, provided little criticism of his encounters in classrooms. At the same time he offered little praise. He seemed almost anesthetized by school. He neither strongly rejected or criticized his encounters. Dwayne invested a lot in the act of attending school but it is unclear about the opportunities he was provided, or the learning opportunities he seized in the process of doing school.

"If school was about learning, you wouldn't need grades"

The topic of learning was something that weaved its way into all conversations with the young men. As in the case of Dwayne, most of these young men suggested they

were not involved in the process of learning. The knowledge they experienced in classrooms did not seem connected to their thinking or the challenges they sought. The curriculum encountered by many of these young men echoes the work of McNeil (1986) and, in the main, reflected a view of knowledge distribution that is highly routinized with few opportunities for students to engage in ideas and issues. But, as previously noted, there were differences both in what and how they experienced curriculum. Not all the young men seemed as disconnected from school as Dwayne.

Dwayne's experiences of school most starkly contrasts with Rashaud, who attended a predominantly white middle-class school. Not only was Rashaud in mostly advanced classes in his school, he was someone who achieved high grades in school. Despite his achievement in school, he hated the competition in school in that it tended to detract from a purpose of school, "to learn."

> If school wasn't such a competition, there would be no need for grades. If school was about learning, you wouldn't need grades. You can see it's competition, why do you need grades to learn?

Rashaud's insight suggests that while he embraced school and the high school credential as a vehicle for success and potential social and economic mobility and security, he was also critical of aspects of the process of schooling, particularly of the relationship between learning and the evaluation of learning through grades. In the previous chapter, I noted Rashaud's commitment to achieving good grades and being successful. "Grades, that's what's on my mind, the biggest. I don't give a rip about anything else," he said. This stance was ironic given his critical view of learning. He portrayed himself as a role model of success in school, to his family, and to African-Americans in the larger community, and spoke about challenging white Americans about stereotypes of African-Americans in society.

Despite this apparent acceptance of a symbol of school, Rashaud developed a sophisticated critique of the process of schooling. He compared going to school and being in school to the production of movies:

> To me school is kinda like a movie, the scripts are memorized, you do the performance, it comes out, audience will give you a rating, and you go on to your next thing, you go on and do your next movie. And that's elementary school, middle school and high school.

Rashaud's view of learning in school reflected a critique that centers on the process of knowledge acquisition and the relationship between knowledge acquisition and assessment. Each level of school became a place to memorize "scripts," that are graded, and was followed by a move to the next level of schooling. This scathing critique of the learning process in school starkly contrasts with the Rashaud characterized in the previous chapter. Hence, Rashaud simultaneously embraced the process of schooling to get ahead, yet waged a mindful critique of the system that evolved.

Rashaud was not the only person for whom grades were problematic. Marcus also criticized school, while he too mentioned the centrality of getting "good grades." Despite the focus on grades, this did not mean that he thought what he learned in school was valuable, or that he learned anything of importance to him as an African-American. He claimed the teachers did not care about education, and that much of his encounters in schools were repetitious.

> Central, they don't really care about education to me, because of how they got the system there. They just want you to get grades, and get the hell out of their class. That's what it is. Because they just give you grades. I know because I haven't learned nothing from that, nothing that I ain't heard before, because I've been hearing the same stuff for years and years . . . all the teachers there is to get their pay check at the end of the week and to be in class to give you that old stuff that you heard before, that's it. Give you a bunch of dittos and papers and all that stuff. They won't sit down and discuss stuff with you and everything.

For Marcus, learning was more than getting grades on a test, more than attending classes, it was being engaged. He wanted to be afforded the opportunity "to discuss stuff" that were important. The kind of education that he sought had to be acquired outside of the context of formal schooling.

> It's not a really major part of my day. Because I don't really acknowledge it really, it just something I have to do . . . Just to survive, just have to do it, just to survive. Because basically what I feel is this. 'Cause what I've been learning

now I'm understanding what they're doing, they're really taking us back. So basically I don't have a feel for school. I won't drop out.

Attending school then was part of Marcus's will to survive. His notion of "survival" links to issues raised in the previous chapter about his commitment to acquire the high school diploma. It also links to Dwayne's approach to school, where he seemed little engaged in the process, but went to school regardless. Marcus's statements about school provides a glimpse of the extent to which he and other young men in this study were alienated from the very process they need to engage with in order to acquire the high school diploma.

Staying in school was part of Marcus's survival strategy. He was determined he "won't drop out" of school. Although Marcus felt as though he was not learning, staying in school and attending classes saw him develop an approach towards school where he didn't "have a feel for school." Marcus not only critiqued the way in which he learned, he was also concerned about what he learned. Education, for Marcus, meant learning about himself, his culture and the experiences of African-American in the United States. Marcus discussed learning at school:

> . . . Learn what? They ain't teaching us nothin'. The stuff I learned, I learned on my own. Basically that's why, I can't really say . . .'Cause trying to get more people educated out of school, learn us what they teaching us, cause they aren't teaching us the right thing, learn on our own, try to educate yourself on your own. Get that knowledge for yourself, try to get tell other people. But that's basically what I want to do, we supposed to tell people about the thing, try and tell our brothers and sisters, explain things. We need to unite as one, you know.

Marcus was not only committed to engaging in education about African-Americans for his own ends, he was also committed to broadening the consciousness of the African-American community at large.

Marcus's stance towards schooling, as with the other young men, was complex and contradictory because he, like the others, did critique schooling yet continued to go to school. In some ways they all accepted and accommodated some of their teachers'

demands, and in other ways, it seemed they tolerated some aspects of schooling in order

to gain passing grades as a vehicle to the acquisition of the high school diploma.

Merely because they tolerated aspects of schooling -- teacher's assignments,

the form of classroom work, topics and ideas shaping the curriculum -- did not

automatically indicate their tacit approval. As Fuller (1980) argued, "It becomes

only too easy to assume that academic striving and achieving are synonymous with

subscribing (conforming) to these values, and to see school failure as necessarily

indicative of rejection of those same values" (p. 63). Fuller raises an important

point, as it became clear that these young men unevenly "subscribed" to academic

striving, and they often did so in opposition to other beliefs and values they held. Their

experiences in classrooms were contradictory and complex.

Weis (1990) elaborates on this point about the contradictory nature of lived

experiences in schools. She argues that "poor black students tend *not* to reject totally

school meanings and culture, and, at the same time, act as if they do." (p. 25). Ogbu

(1988) argued a similar point in his study of African-American high school youth in

Stockton, where he argues "Black youths do not consciously reject school meanings and

knowledge. In fact black youths say emphatically that schooling is important to them

and they want to get an education to escape from poverty and other problems in their

ghetto community. But although they verbalize a strong desire for education, they

behave in ways that will not necessarily lead to school success" (p. 170).

Both Weis and Ogbu point to the contradictory and paradoxical nature of

schooling for African-Americans. In my study, I argue the stories these young men

shared of their experiences in classrooms, and their views of classroom curriculum,

pedagogy and their relationships with teachers, were complex and contradictory.

Amidst these contradictory and complex accounts of schooling, however, their

participation in schooling had differing consequences for these young men. It is within

this context that I turn to a discussion of their perspectives of their experiences in

school and situate these stories within the context of their views of the high school diploma.

GRADUATION, ACCOMMODATION, AND CRITIQUE

In chapter three I argued that these young men's views about why they stay in school and the meanings they develop of the diploma were influenced by a range of events in their lives. Acquiring the high school diploma certainly was linked to their desire for economic and/or social rewards and, in some cases, mobility. This orientation, influenced by and influencing the various events and encounters in and out of school was but one of the strands in their lives to which each gave greater or lesser significance. Staying in school and acquiring the high school diploma was not a single phenomenon that signified their embrace or acceptance of dominant ideologies about success, mobility and advancement, or about the form and content of schooling. As Weis (1990) argued, "The diploma can be obtained whether one challenges and/or questions knowledge or not. In other words, one can be alienated and still obtain the short-term instrumental rewards of participating in high school" (p. 92). Notwithstanding, there is a distinction between obtaining the diploma, participating in the process to acquire the diploma, and the meanings associated with the diploma and schooling.

In the discussion thus far, I have argued that the meaning of the high school diploma is redefined through the process of acquiring the diploma, and the process itself is redefined as they experience other events and experiences inside and outside of school. The process of acquiring the high school diploma is complex. And the meanings these young men develop of the high school diploma were also complex. There was variation in how these young men experienced schooling, and there was variation in the meanings they developed about the high school diploma. The contradictory and complex interactions of critique and accommodation reflect not only their experiences of schooling, but also the meanings of schooling and the high school diploma in relation to

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their identities as young African-American men. In the context of their identities as young African-American men, I will turn to an exploration of the strands of the culture and structure of race and social class that intermingle in their lives.

Variations in patterns

The forms of critique and accommodation emerging from the lives of these young men seem connected to their encounters in school and their experiences of race and social class as young African-American men. Despite the strong pattern of critique of the history curriculum and pedagogy across the young men, there was some variation in the nature of their critique and accommodation. While they each developed critiques about their learning, they differed in how they approached school and responded to school, and in the kind of learning experiences they encountered. For example, Shawn and Rashaud attended the same middle-class school, but seemed to adopt different stances in relation to school and learning in school. In terms of engagement and connection in school Shawn seemed similar to Dwayne who also seemed anesthetized by school. Shawn seemed to go through the motions of going to school but exhibited little enthusiasm or fulfillment, a pattern similar to Dwayne and not Rashaud. Yet Shawn attended a very different school than Dwayne did and had very different experiences growing up. However, both seemed to endure school in similar ways. But differences emerged in what they learned, how they learned, and what they could do with the high school diploma once they graduated from high school. Given Shawn's social class location, he seemed to have more possibilities on hand compared to Dwayne. Thus, they may have viewed school in similar ways, but the consequences of their involvement in school suggested a vast difference.

At the same time, it is significant that Rashaud waged the most sophisticated critique of knowledge acquisition in school, yet it was he who seemed most engaged in school and was most poised to acquire the high school diploma and enter college.

Rashaud wanted to go to college and he went to school in ways that assured him of outstanding grades. His motivation for graduation and attending school was different from either Dwayne's or Jeff's motivation. They saw their success in school as confirmation that they were not representations of the dominant images of African-American men. Rashaud, however, wanted his success at school to signal him as a role model to his family and the larger African-American community. Rashaud's perspective speaks to the kind of educational experience he encountered, and the access to power and privilege he was afforded. Interestingly, he developed a critique that did not challenge the relationship between institutional power and privilege in broader society, but did challenge the hierarchical and meritocratic shape of schools, from which he seemed, compared to the other young men, most suitably poised to benefit.

In contrasting the talk about schooling of Dwayne, Jeff, Marcus and Rashaud, it seemed there were differences in how these young men intended to challenge dominant images of African-American men. Jeff and Dwayne believed that merely staying in school was a way to challenge such images. They wanted to challenge dominant images and messages about the over-population of jails by African-American men in order to prove they were not a "statistic" bound for jail. For Rashaud, academic success and not merely staying in school seemed most significant. He wanted to challenge emphasized images and ideas about African-American men and their role and participation in U.S. society and wanted to use his image as an academically successful student as a vehicle for such challenges. His stance was different to Marcus's. Marcus challenged the images and ideas about African-American men as he engaged in the process of schooling. Marcus's active critique was integral to his on-going experiences of schooling and his version of challenging such images whereas Rashaud saw his success as a symbol of the challenge.

On comparing Jeff to Marcus and Zakeev, who all lived in the same working-class neighborhood, questions emerge as to whether Jeff's diploma would afford him

more or the same opportunities as Zakeev and Marcus, despite his attending a private school. Jeff seemed very alone in his battle to acquire the high school diploma. He was alienated from his old friends from school, and developed few friendships at ACS. So, while it is unclear about what rewards Jeff will reap through acquiring a diploma from ACS, on the immediate level the personal and social consequences are terribly depressing.

From the various accounts of life in classrooms, it becomes apparent that the ways in which these young men talked about and experienced school was not just influenced by the kind of instruction and pedagogy they encountered. It was also shaped by the myriad prior experiences inside and outside of school. These experiences also shaped the ways in which they viewed school and the kind of opportunities and ideas they constructed about the importance of school, getting good grades, and the acquisition of the high school diploma.

Exploring intra-social class differences

Maybe most surprising among these six young men are not the differences across social class groups, but differences within social class groups. There seemed a difference between how Shawn and Rashaud talked about experiences in school and the consequences of their experiences. The same holds true for Jeff compared to Marcus and Zakeev. This point is significant when one considers, for example, MacLeod 's (1987) study where he noted congruency in aspirations, success and mobility of a working-class African-American peer group attending the same school. While my study is not about peer groups per se, there seemed little congruency among any groups of young men. On thinking about the working class young men, they did not seem to hold a view or hope that education would dramatically enable them to acquire economic success and mobility. MacLeod suggested that "the Brothers," an African-American working-class peer group, are "optimistic about their future employment" (p. 78).

In my study, the working class young men were very skeptical about their future on the labor market, where they believed African-Americans were at a disadvantage compared to white Americans. The middle-class young men, on the other hand, seemed fairly optimistic and talked little about any barriers that may impede their ambitions and goals.

These six young African-American men at once accommodated and criticized strands of the dominant norms, beliefs, and values about school. This is significant, because these young men contrast with the Brothers who "respect the standards, conventions, and judgments of the school" (p. 91). This cannot be said for all the six young men in this study. They critiqued some of the standards, conventions, and judgments of school. For example, Marcus explained the function of the hidden curriculum in school and challenged a teacher about a grade, and Zakeev critiqued his history curriculum and questioned the predominance of African-Americans in his mathematics class. They certainly did not suggest a fully-fledged respect for the standards, conventions, and judgments of their school. Thus, on considering the African-American participants of MacLeod's study and the views of the young men in this study, an apparent variation within social class groups seems to prevail. I am *not* arguing that there were not patterns of talk and beliefs across the young men. If any pattern emerged in common in the talk of these young men, it was a pattern of critique of racism.

Ogbu (1988) argued that racism cuts across class boundaries:

If, however, we take racial stratification seriously as a distinct type of stratification, we see that it generates its own oppositional process that cuts across class boundaries because it is tied to the minority-group members' sense of peoplehood or collective social identity. Thus the oppositional process may remain even after economic and other instrumental barriers have been removed. That is why some black students from middle- and upper class backgrounds may still express their opposition to "acting white" in school just as black students from working-class, lower-class, and underclass backgrounds may do.

While Ogbu raises a significant point about a pattern of "oppositional" responses to schooling by African-Americans from varying social class locations, there did seem vast differences in how racism manifested in the lives of these six young men, and how they responded to racism in their lives. There seemed significant differences between Dwayne, of underclass background, and the other working-class and middle-class young men. There also seemed differences between the middle class young men and others in this study. Three of the young men -- Dwayne, Marcus and Zakeev -- mentioned racism as a barrier to success. Racism was not as significant to Rashaud or Shawn.

The ways in which the young men responded to their teachers, participated in classrooms, were passive or confrontational with teachers reveal aspects of their social identities in the making. Their experiences of racism may have been different, but the kind of racism they experienced saw them responding differently. These responses seem to suggest not only aspects of their classed identities, or their racialized identities, but also their gendered identities. For example, Marcus's response to the grade his biology teacher allocated him and his history teacher's attempt to define a version of African-American masculinity, saw him aggressively and angrily asserting himself. The ways in which he responded certainly suggest aspects of his version of masculinity in the making. Such responses were not evident in Shawn's or Rashaud's accounts of schooling. Instead, in the main, they seemed to passively accept or tolerate most of their experiences in classrooms. Likewise, their responses could be viewed as aspects of their racial-masculine identities in the making.

From the discussion, it becomes evident that these young men did interrupt and respond to options and privileges, barriers and constraints in different ways. In this way, the interplay among race, class, and gender in their lives and how this interplay manifested in their experiences on a day -to-day basis becomes significant in understanding how they produced their social identities. Thus, the social practice of

these young men in a sense legitimate and also challenged social reproduction (relations of power and control). For example, Jeff's move to a private Christian school had the potential to provide him with access to knowledge and opportunities that may not have been accessible to him at Central. Jeff had virtually dropped out of school, and though it is unclear whether he would acquire the high school diploma from his new school, the knowledge and experience acquired through going to this new school had the potential to see him having different options than that acquired at his old school, Central. However, across the period of time that I knew Jeff, he did not seem to have any greater knowledge of life beyond high school graduation than Marcus or Zakeev. But for Jeff, the significance of going to the private school was seen by him as a move that would prevent him from becoming a high school drop out that in his eyes may lead him to further entanglement with the criminal justice system.

Connell et al. (1982) address the issue that "under-privilege" is not always perpetuated -- it is not as inevitable:

> the interaction among kids, parents, and teacher are constantly being renegotiated and reconstructed, at times quite dramatically mutated in crises of the pupil's school life . . . privilege is not always passed on and under-privilege is not always perpetuated (p. 188).

Here, I am arguing that these young men's lived experiences in and out of school led them to accommodate and critique aspects of school in ways that reflect and are rooted in institutional differences and opportunities. At the same time, these young men may have transformed their experiences in ways that actually challenged the barriers and constraints that seemingly lay in their paths, as in the case of Jeff. Such a view of the meanings they made of the high school diploma, and their experiences in school, suggests that social actors make choices, albeit constrained choices, and may act in ways that redefine the constraints and potentials; just as the constraints are redefined by others inside and outside schools. Thus constraints and potentials are defined and emerge dialectically. My intention is not to over-determine the views and choices of the young men. Rather I argue that these young men's perspectives in the making

emerged both as an accommodating response to constraints, and also as an oppositional or transformational response. For example, Marcus's and Zakeev's challenge of teachers represent them each developing stances about the value of the knowledge and experiences in school, yet at the same time they recognized that they needed this knowledge or grade to get ahead. This view of human agency acknowledges the interconnectedness of institutional and cultural practices, but challenges the degree of determinism or the level of predictability of experiences, consequences, and outcomes.

In making these claims about social class differences, I am arguing that there are constraints associated with the social class location and the culture of these young men's practice. As Connell at. al (1982) argue, the interaction is more complex than simple reproduction, "If 'reproduction' predominates in a given case, it is because that side of things has won out in a contest with other tendencies, not because it is guaranteed by some sociological law" (p. 190). As noted, not only were there differences across social class, there were also noteworthy differences within social class categories. Two of the working class young men were the strongest critics of schooling, namely Marcus and Zakeev. Yet Jeff, also of working-class background, not only accommodated school, but almost embraced school, providing little critique of his most recent experiences. At the same time, Jeff went to a private middle-class school, yet seemingly encountered curriculum and pedagogy in ways similar to Marcus and Zakeev, but because of the school Jeff attended may have greater access to knowledge and ideas about graduation and beyond that may not be as readily accessible to Marcus and Zakeev.

The ways in which social class divisions are made in relation to schooling is a complex and dynamic process. Connell et al. (1982) argued that "to understand the relation between social class and schooling we have to understand the ways in which the education system shaped, and is shaped by, the processes of class construction and division" (p. 189). Such an approach is helpful for conceptualizing class construction

and also in thinking about the interplay of race, gender and class in relation to schooling and other social institutions. For Jeff and Dwayne, for example, construction of their activity in school was related to their encounters with the criminal justice system. Jeff and Dwayne each moved to a school they thought was going to keep them out of jail. Yet it was these two young men who provided the narrowest critique of schooling and who were also poised to reap the least from acquiring the diploma.

Rashaud too provided a minimal critique of the racial structure of school, and the barriers that lay before him and other African-Americans. In fact he did not see any barriers. Is this just because of the school he attended? Or, compared to Dwayne or Marcus, did he have different experiences out of school that would provide different signals about school and life beyond school? Analyzing the form and content of his critique suggests a complex and contradictory stance. Rashaud criticized the ways in which the school promoted competition, yet it was the competition and doing well at school that Rashaud thrived on. And he was most poised to acquire the diploma and enter a high status university.

From this discussion I have tried to show variation across social class categories and within social class categories. The ways in which these young men made sense of their world, through critique, accommodation, legitimation, and negotiation of their experiences is a complex and contradictory process that becomes difficult to unravel. My account of these young men's experiences with school hopefully contributes to understandings about the dynamic and complex nature of the making of social identities in relation to schooling.

Schooling as a gendering process

While I have attended to dimensions of these young men's versions of their masculinities as a sub-text of some of the racialized interactions they encountered, clearly the different ways in which their social identities as men played out in their

racialized and classed experiences requires further investigation. Mac an Ghaill (1994b) and Connell (1993b) write about the connections between stratification of knowledge in school, teachers' relationship with students, career ambitions and expectations, and the ways in which students experience their emerging masculinities. Connell has noted that within the schooling process "some masculinities are formed by battering against the school's authority structure, others by smooth insertions into its academic pathways, others gain by a tortuous negotiation of possibilities" (p. 100). The examples of Rashaud and Shawn provide a hint of the complexity involved in exploring the masculinity formation process in relation to their experiences in classrooms. On the one hand, their masculinities seemed to represent a smooth insertion "into the academic pathways", at the same time, however, it seemed that such an insertion was also influenced by their own constructs of their masculinities as African-American men -- successful, ambitious and remaining connected to the African-American community -- and rejected dominant constructs of black masculinity.

In the case of Dwayne, Jeff, Marcus, and Zakeev, understanding their identities in the making in classrooms is equally complex. Some writers (for example, Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghaill, 1994b) have drawn a distinction between academic and vocational tracks in schools and make connections between forms of masculinity and knowledge experiences. In the cases of these young men it was difficult to make such distinctions. Dwayne did seemed involved in a vocational track at school, and the other young men were not in advanced placement classes. However, it was the glimpses of pedagogy, curriculum and relationships with student and teachers that provide evidence for understanding masculinities in the making in classrooms.

The pedagogy and curriculum Rashaud and Shawn experienced was different to the other young men. It seemed more discussion-oriented and student-centered than that the other young men experienced. The other four seemed to experience knowledge

and relationships in ways that seemed highly routinized with few opportunities for students to engage in ideas and issues. These different experiences would provide different opportunities to live out different kinds of masculinities. In the same way, their responses to the structure and processes could have also seen them participating in unintended ways. But these are only glimpses and do not allow an understudying of the actual processes they participated in and the forms of masculinity that were lived out in classrooms.

Marcus's and Zakeev's interactions with their teachers do provide us with a sense of how processes and content within classrooms influenced the ways in which these two interacted with their teachers. Their interactions with their teachers provide some hints of the ways in which masculinities were made through processes in classrooms. Marcus challenged the version of African-American masculinity his history teacher provided. His angry and confrontational response seemed to be an integral part of the version of masculinity he lived out in this classroom. In the same way, Marcus's challenge of his biology teacher certainly reflected a version of his masculinity as he battled to change his grade. Likewise, Zakeev's confidence and will to challenge his history teacher (in spite of the fact that he was new to the school) about the lack of attention to African-American history in the curriculum bears testimony to the idea that classrooms became sites for the making of their masculine identities. Their stances in relation to pedagogy and curriculum raise questions about how interaction in classrooms influenced them living out particular kinds of masculinities through challenging the power of a teacher or the content of the curriculum. In some senses, their stances in classrooms could be seen as being oppositional to the power of the teachers and are examples of their gendered, and hence masculine, identities as men. It seems important that further attention be given to the ways that young African-American men construct their racialized masculine identities in the context of knowledge production in classrooms.

In sum, staying in school and experiencing the process of schooling saw these young men develop similar and different meanings about schooling and the high school diploma. These meanings and experiences, shaped by their experiences in and out of school, were contradictory and complex. The young men both critiqued and accommodated aspects of life in classrooms and schools in ways that there were patterns of experiences that were common to some young men and not others. However, amidst the different meanings and experiences developed across social class lines, and within social class groups, the young men from working-class backgrounds experienced curriculum and pedagogy in ways vastly different to the middle-class young men. In spite of these differences, they all experienced either covert or overt forms of racism in their lives at school. These experiences not only contributed towards how they viewed school, but how they viewed themselves in relation to others. Experienced of racism, for example, influenced how Marcus and Zakeev viewed themselves as African-Americans in relation to their mainly white teachers. Their responses to racism and schooling contrasted with those of Rashaud and Shawn. The process of racial identity formation, Omi and Winant (1986) argue, is shaped by "[t]he ways in which we understand ourselves and interact with others, the structuring of our practical activity - work and family, as citizens as thinkers . . . these are all shaped by racial meanings and racial awareness" (p. 66-67). But the experiences of racism were also about how they saw themselves as African-American men. While race may have been central to their response, the sub-text of gender seemed intertwined with how they inhabited school as African-American men. Critiquing school, thus, was not just about their experiences, it also connected to a process of affirming who they were and wanted to be as young African-American men.

While the discussion has primarily focused on the dimensions of race and social class, this does not mean that gendering processes were not significant in their relationships in school. Rather race was a central category as they talked about life in classrooms, and social class became significant in my discussion because of their contrasting experiences. For example, two of the working-class young men, and Dwayne, of the underclass, brought issues of power relations to the fore. The middle-class young men did not. Thus, while their accounts of schooling may help me learn more about their racialized and classed experiences, they also helped me understand the ways in which race and social class shape gender relations. The analyses here then, are only partial, in that a consideration of the dynamic interaction of race, class and gender requires an investigation of other dimensions of their gendered identities. The following two chapters develop a more consistent, but still partial, analyses of race, class and gender in their lives where I will further consider the process of identity formation. In particular, I will focus on their relationships in families and with peers.

Chapter 5

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

The previous two chapters attended to the meanings and talk of the six young men about the high school diploma and their encounters in classrooms. Being in school, however, was much more than attending classes. It was also about connecting to people, particularly outside of classrooms. These relationships formed outside of the classroom, during lunch hour, on the school bus, and during the time before and after school seemed extremely important to the young men. But they were not the only relationships they experienced on a day-to-day basis. There were also relationships with family members and relationships with other youngsters from various sport, religious, and recreational organizations and activities. These relationships with others included a range of family members and peers. The young men's relationships with the various people in their lives will be the focus of this chapter.

Relationships they sought from their peers and the kinds of relationships they experienced became a significant theme in their conversations with me. There is no doubt that schooling played a significant role in the relationships these young men formed. By the same token, the relationships they formed outside of school, in their families, in their neighborhoods and in various organizations and networks, were equally important to them and the meanings they constructed. There were two kinds of relationships that seemed central to their lives: relationships with family members and relationships with friends.

As I unraveled their stories about friendships and relationships with family members, I became aware of the various layers and levels of intensity that interweaved their relationships and connections with others. During the post-field analysis, my questions were no longer about who they were friendly with; they became questions about which kinds of relationships were important to them, and why. What were the patterns of similarity and difference across their relationships in and out of school? Which relationships counted as friendships, and which didn't? What features of relationships did they value and seek? In considering responses to these questions in this chapter, I want to explain what these relationships tell us about these young men, and how they saw themselves. In essence, many of these questions are about the emerging identities of these young men, and are more than questions about *who* they connected to and why. They are also questions about *what* they talked about, what they valued, *how* they acted and interacted, and *why* they chose membership or connection with some people over others. In other words, they reflect decisions they made and experiences they had as they constructed their notions of who they were, and wanted to be. Here, I use the notion of identity formation to refer to the ways in which these young African-American men, collectively and individually, came to see themselves in relation to others, and the meanings they made of themselves and others and events in their relationships.[13] This framework of identity formation is not only about their racial identities as African-Americans. It is also about the various masculinities, and social class identities that were woven through the fabric of their lives.

Through talking with these young men, I came to think about the relationships they sought as *connections*. I use the notion as a frame to think about certain *kinds* of relationships they wanted and worked to build. A connected relationship was not just a relationship with anybody. First and foremost, a connected relationship for these young men was a person they could trust, and share their thoughts and their feelings with, and

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[13] Weis (1990) provides an outstanding account of the process of identity formation in her work *Working Class Without Work.*

most significantly with an African-American. Stern (1990) wrote about the importance of connection in young adolescent girls' relationships. She argued that as girls develop their sense of femininity their "relationships provide the support one needs to push one's own further development" (p. 85). There are parallels between the need for connection in the lives of young girls (see, Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer, 1990) and the desire for connection in these young African-American men's relationships. Connection seemed important to these young men's sense of masculinity. Ward (1990) argued that in the case of black adolescents, "Integration of the individual's personal identity with one's racial identity is a necessary and inevitable developmental task of growing up black in white America"(p. 218). For these six young African-American men, developing solid, trusting, caring and understanding relationships with others, particularly other young African-American men, seemed not only paramount but crucial in their lives. The kinds of relationships they sought and the kinds of relationships they experienced tell us a lot about these young men and their experiences as African-Americans.

It is within the context of understanding the kinds of connections, the nature of these connections they sought, and who the young men were becoming that I explore the relationships they built and maintained. I will consider three arenas in which they developed connections: (1) family; (2) schools; (3) networks outside of school and the family.

INTERACTIONS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

"My Mom" was maybe the most common response to my question asking these young men to name the important people in their life. This most probably doesn't surprise many readers, as mothers are often significant forces in the lives of children given that mothers are traditionally expected to assume the role as primary nurturers and care-providers of children. How and why mothers and families are

significant in the lives of students such as these young men has been an area of great debate. Collins (1990) problematizes the image of the "superstrong Black mother" (Staples, 1973), where "glorifying the strong Black mother represented Black men's attempts to replace negative white male interpretations with positive Black male one's" (Collins, 1990, p. 117). Such glorification, amidst the many "controlling images" about black motherhood, contribute towards the contradictions and complexities in the lives of African-American mothers and their sons. In relation to schooling, there have been few studies that explore identity formation within families and the embedded contradictions. Instead, much of the discussion within the education discourse community has focused on the relationships among families, schools, and students, and the values, beliefs, and ideas social actors bring and construct in the institutions of school and family.

Family and school

Connections between families and schools and the family's role in the success or failure of students attending school continue to be a significant issue. This debate has been significant in policies and practices that shape quests to provide educational opportunities and experiences that meet the needs and potentials of *all* Americans. Spearheading this debate was the Coleman Report (1966) that suggested family background was a determinant of school failure and success more than any other factor. However, Karabel and Halsey (1977) challenged Coleman's findings and suggested that "schools at least reinforce the inferior position of disadvantaged children with respect to educational opportunity" (p. 21). On the other hand, Jencks et al. (1972) suggested that schools are "marginal institutions" in their quest for a more egalitarian society and the economy, not schools nor families, may be the most central sphere that needs consideration. And Clark (1983) challenged findings that suggested social status was the most important determinant of school achievement. In

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his study of African-American families he argued that it was the "beliefs, values and cultural style" at home that was the significant difference in the lives of students and "not the family units' composition or social status" (p. 2). And so the debate continued.

Most studies, however, did not consider the dynamic institutional and cultural connections between schools and families, nor the multiple variations and historical situations of families through a frame of interlocking structures of race, class, and gender (see, Collins, 1994; Stack and Burton, 1994). In other words, most studies did not explain how the institutions of school and family interacted and influenced each other, nor the connections and contrasting experiences of the day-to-day experiences of racial minority families with schooling. Moreover, there are few studies that actually consider the nature and form of the relationships between parents and students, and consider these relationships in the context of students' lives and emerging identities.

Connell et al. (1982) provide an important contribution towards our understanding of the relationship between school and family and how processes within school and the family interact with one another. In their study of the relationships between school, family, and social class in Australia, they provided interesting insights about how social class and social division are "made." These authors challenged the functional explanations developed to explain the relationship of family background to school achievement. They examined the relationship between school and the family through a lens of material and cultural experiences of teachers, students, and parents and considered each of these groups' current and past relationships with schools. They argued that

> The family is what its members do, a constantly continuing and changing practice, and as children go to and through school, that practice is reorganized around schooling. For its part the organization of the school varies with the kind of families in its catchment and the nature of their collective practices (p. 78).

Connell et al. went "beyond the assumption" that families and school are independent spheres that contain separate processes. They argued that schools and families interact in ways that influence how each comes into being and continues to emerge, and that the social class experiences of parents and teachers played a significant role in how they viewed each other. Further, they argued that the issue was not solely one of how different parents viewed school, but how the parents came to view school in the ways they did, and how different actors within schools came to view different parents. More recently, Lareau (1990) has written a compelling study about the interconnection between social location, experience and family-school relationships. She argued that working-class families felt separated from the experiences in schools, while middle-class parents not only saw themselves as tied to their children's schooling, but also had ideas about their role in schooling, and the kinds of interventions they should make in their child's schooling.

Connell et al.'s (1982) and Lareau's (1990) explorations of the dynamic connection between school and family seem important in attempting to understand the school experiences of these six young African-American men. These writers moved beyond debates that "blamed" one institution or the other and instead tried to explain how the relationships between family and school come to be the way there are. Connell et al. and Lareau suggested that school experiences are influenced and constructed through orientations towards school produced by family members of the school students. For example, their experiences in school were influential in the kinds of relationships they encountered in and out of school and the relationships they sought. By the same token, schooling was significant in the relationships and activities encountered at home.

The various debates about how families interact with schools provides a context for my analysis of these young men's families. While I do not intend to explain the family's role in the achievement of these young men, I do want to provide a glimpse of

what it is that their families "do" and how activities and relationships in families were influential in shaping the participants' meanings and social identities. My approach builds upon analyses that argue families and school dynamically shape each other, and that each sphere has its own activities and interests that shape it. As much of this discussion thus far has focused on schooling, the following analysis will primarily center on the meanings the young men gave to "family."

Who counts as family?

There is no doubt that their families were important to these young men. However, it became clear that what counted as family was not the same, nor did the family unit signify all the people living in their household. While many readers may identify with their constructs, they may differ with the explanations for how and why their families come into being and function the way they do. Historically, families are often viewed through a narrow lens of Eurocentric constructs about responsibilities, role, and relationships in families (Collins, 1990). Many of these constructs have ignored the subjective conditions of families, particularly racial minority families in the U.S. context.

The terrain of the "American family" has been dramatically challenged in past years, where scholars, particularly feminist scholars, have questioned the myth of the American family, and have provided alternative viewpoints about the texture and structure of the family in relation to the social world. For example, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of one-parent households headed by women. Households headed by women are proportionally higher in the African-American community than in any other racial or ethnic community. Such changes in family structure can be seen as a consequence and interaction of structural and cultural forces in the social, political, and economic spheres of society, where, in the African-American community, "black female-headed households become the logical end product of a whole

series of social, political and economic forces" (Brewer, 1993, p. 375). Thus, it is
not unexpected that for these young African-American men there were differences in
their family households and roles that different family members played in their lives,
and their ideas about who counted as family members.

Most significant about the participants in this study is that they did not solely
consider the people living in the same households as their family. The following table
(TABLE 2) lists the people who shared the same household as they did at the time of the
study:

Table 2. *Household members*

Name	Household Members
Dwayne	foster mother and foster father; two foster brothers
Jeff	mother; step-father, sister, brother,
Marcus	mother, step-father, sister and brother
Rashaud	mother
Shawn	father and brother
Zakeev	mother and brother

For five of the young men, household consisted of biological family members, and
additionally, in the case of Marcus and Jeff, their stepfathers. Dwayne was the
exception because he stayed with a foster family. On examining their conception of
family, we see a conception that is much broader than the household members.
TABLE 3 lists the people they considered as family members that are additional to the
household members listed in TABLE 2.

Table 3. *Family members*

Name	"family" members
Dwayne	brothers, sisters, biological mother and father and maternal grandmother; Friends.
Jeff	Girlfriend, baby.
Marcus	Brother, cousin, biological father, maternal grandmother, maternal aunt.
Rashaud	Maternal grandfather, maternal aunt.
Shawn	mother, brother and sister
Zakeev	father, sister, aunt and uncle

An investigation of the "families" of all the young men saw them defining other biological connections who did not live in the household unit as "family." In some cases, they also define non-biological connections as family.[14] For example, Dwayne's family included his foster family, his biological brothers and sisters, and his biological mother, father and grandmother in Detroit. He also considered his neighborhood male friends as family -- they were his "brothers." Marcus too had a broad conception of family. It included his grandmother and biological father who lived in a neighboring town. He was very close to them and often used to spend time with them. He said he also was close to a maternal aunt who lived in the same town. They all, in particular ways, provided him guidance about situations he encountered in his day to day living -- for example, about the importance of not being involved in drugs, and the significance of going to school.

This brief examination of the nature and form of the participants' family units compared to their conceptions of family represents a significant point. These young men received support not only from the people who lived in their homes but also from other relatives and "family" members. The support was varied. It included support in

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[14] For an excellent discussion about "bloodmothers", "othermothers" and women-centered networks in the African-American community see Collins' (1990)   *Black Feminist Thought* where she discusses themes that characterize Black women's standpoint on Black motherhood and examines the relationships among African - American women, children, and the community.

the form of guidance about school and staying in school, and also included guidance on how to respond to drug problems and crime. These young men talked about the people whom they considered as family members with respect. The support they received from their "families" suggests that household structure alone is a narrow construct to examine students' support or to consider as a determinant of success or failure in school. A more appropriate framework needs to include the various support networks in the lives of the students. This is not to argue that the family household plays a less significant role. Rather, in order to understand the support and resources youngsters have access to, it is important to consider the various actors who contribute towards the students' well-being. Exploring such networks seems worthy of further investigation.

While these family networks were important to the young men across time, on a day-to-day level it was the members of their households with whom they had the most contact. Therefore, in the remainder of this section of the chapter I will consider the nature of the relationships these young men formed within households in order to understanding some, but not all, of the forms of support and connection they developed with family members.

The landscape of the families of these young men certainly reflected a range of patterns and kinds of relationships. The relationships were significant in the meanings they developed of family and were also significant in the meanings they developed of schooling. The relationships with household members, however, not only revealed the kinds of connections they had with the family members they lived with, but also provide insight into the ways in which structural and cultural practices were interwoven through the relationships, responsibilities, and roles they assumed at home. These interactions were significant to the meanings and images they developed of themselves as African-American men.

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As they talked about the family members they lived with, four of the young men cited their mothers as the most important person in their lives, one of them their father, and Jeff cited his girlfriend and baby. What was difficult to explore was the nature of the relationships they experienced with their mother or father, or their brothers and sisters. Four held back in talking about "personal" interactions at home, while Marcus and Jeff were extremely forthright. What they mostly talked about was what the household members "did," their roles and responsibilities, and the nature of these interactions. However, one significant pattern across the participants was the role of their parents in schooling.

School in relationships with family households

As the young men talked about their family households, and how they both resisted their parents and embraced their ideals and commitments, I began to learn about how they were supported in their lives, particularly in relation to school. In part, these were young men growing up, trying to assert their independence, be it through how they spent their recreational time or what they did at school. At the same time, their parents exerted strong control over how they spent their recreational time. There was something startling that struck me about all of the young men: they *all* religiously spent a couple of hours every weekday afternoon doing homework. When school featured in these young men's relationships with their parents, in most cases it was their mothers who ensured that they maintained their homework responsibilities. This was different, however, for Shawn because he lived with his father, and thus it was his father with whom he spoke about his daily school homework.

Completing homework assignments was part of their routine at home, and their parents made sure it was routinized. The support they received from the parents was generally one of policing their homework and providing rewards or punishments for

grades and performance in classes at school. Failing one test or not doing homework seemed to greatly influence the penalties and privileges these young men received at home: speaking with friends on the telephone, playing basketball at a local court, or going to social functions. On a day-to-day basis, it seemed that controlling homework was almost the only overt connection with school that their parents played in their lives. The content of what they learned did not seem to be part of the conversations or interactions between these parents and their sons. There was occasional talk about a teacher, or assignments, or conversations from a parent-teacher conference, but little beyond this. Schooling on one level shaped these young men's activities at home, and on another it influenced the patterns of interaction between mothers and their sons.

Notably, it was their mothers who mostly played a central role in the schooling. I am not implicitly arguing that they all did not have someone performing a father role in their lives. Most of them did. But it was their mothers who most frequently attended to their homework responsibilities, and with the exception of Shawn, it was their mothers who *always* attended the parent-teacher conferences. Thus, despite their differences in household units, and their differences in support they received from various family members, it was their mothers who served as the major players in their commitment to do homework, and to reinforce their quest to graduate from high school. As noted, Shawn was the exception here because he lived with his father, and his father played such a role in his life.

The participants, then, appeared to have a stronger educational relationship with their mothers that with their fathers. In part, the form and substance of the relationships were dynamically shaped by the structure and culture of the family and the different roles that their mothers and fathers assumed. Part of this was influenced by dominant ideas about the roles of mothers and fathers in family, but this was also influenced by other factors and forces in their lives. For instance, in the case of

Rashaud and Zakeev, both their fathers were absent from home and thus played a negligible role in influencing their son's relationship with school. This suggests an incredible responsibility placed upon the shoulders of their mothers, who were at once the sole or co-breadwinner and also the nurturers and caretakers of their children. However, where there was a mother and father present at home, as in the case of Dwayne, Jeff, and Marcus, it was still their mothers who assumed responsibility for ensuring the completion of homework tasks and preparing for tests.

The interplay of school and work in the lives of these young men influenced the kinds of household responsibilities they assumed and the relationships the developed. For instance, Marcus and Jeff assumed major responsibilities in the care of the younger siblings and they did this because their parents worked and they arrived home earlier than their parents. I will turn to a glimpse of the relationships between these young men and their siblings as this provides further examples of the kinds of roles and relationships that were in the making in their homes.

Relationships with brothers and sisters

While these young men may have had uneven relationships with either or both of their parents, many of them seemed to developed relationships as "protector" and "provider" in relation to their brothers and sisters. From their various narratives, it appeared that Marcus, Jeff, and Zakeev did not seem to engage in traditional forms of masculinities that may be associated with the roles and relationships of brothers and sons. This is not to argue that they did not perform what some may call exaggerated forms of hegemonic masculinity. Rather, they tended to embrace a broader form of masculinity. It was clear that they did establish strong relationships with their younger brothers and sisters, and were "expected" to be responsible for their welfare in the afternoons after school. Through these relationships they revealed the warmth and care they developed for their siblings. For example, Marcus was very involved in

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the care of his younger sister, ever since his four year old sister was a little baby. He said that "My Mom . . . taught me how to change the diapers, do (his sister's) hair. I know how to do her hair. Put clothes on her. I basically do that." His mother worked full-time and Marcus had to baby-sit most afternoons and on some evenings if his mother and step-father went out. To the present day he often helped his sister get dressed and did her hair for her. He accepted this responsibility as one of his duties at home. Likewise, Zakeev was responsible for his younger brother. Zakeev's mother was the sole breadwinner, and her job often saw her working till early evening. After school, Zakeev's brother had to accompany him wherever he went, be it to the basketball court or to the local library.

Jeff's mother worked evening shift, but there was a period of about three hours -- between his mother's job starting and his father returning home from work -- when he was held responsible for his younger brothers and sisters. Even though he did not seem close to either his mother or father, he did seem to be close to his sister. When we talked about his sister, he tended to talk about her in a loving and caring way. He said that he felt as though he was responsible for his sister for much of the time because both his mother and father were working: "So, actually I kind of raised my sister on my own. 'Cause my Dad was gone [to work], then my Mom would be leaving [for work]. It's just me and my sister staying at home by ourselves." He said he had cared for his sister in this way since he was eight years old, when he first moved to Allerton. For these three young men, the demands of their parents' workplace significantly influenced the kinds of role they enacted in their families. Because their parents worked, they were required to assume a role which has been traditionally assumed by mothers. This is not to argue that their mothers did not continue to assume certain roles and responsibilities in their families; rather, some of these responsibilities were shared by the older siblings.

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And even though Dwayne was no longer living with his young brother or sisters, he still felt a sense of responsibility towards them. His conversations with me showed a connection and care for his family. At one time he said that he wanted to acquire the high school diploma for them. He would move back to Detroit because, he said, "So I can be close to my family. What if I make it? If I make it, my family going to make it. Going to look out for them."

Interestingly, the three working-class young men were expected not only to be protector, but also nurturer and care-taker. The roles of Jeff, Marcus, and Zakeev in their families seem to challenge the traditional roles of young men as signified in hegemonic conceptions of the family role they played: Jeff, Marcus, and Zakeev all in a sense were required to assume some dimensions of parental role with their younger siblings. This was not a choice for them; they were expected to take this responsibility because all their mothers and fathers worked. The sharing of responsibilities in the home that the working-class young men talked about contrasted with the two middle-class young men. Neither Rashaud nor Shawn had to assume the same kind of responsibilities because they had no younger siblings at home. Shawn had younger brothers and sisters, but they stayed with his mother. Social class, then, was influential in the forms of masculinities they lives out.

Through examining the various meanings of family, the role of schooling in relationships, and their relationships with their siblings it is evident that structural and cultural practices dynamically interweave the activities and interests of their families in different ways. The activities also saw them "doing" masculinity in the home, where the activities, interests, and responsibilities in the family were as much shaped by interaction in the family as interests and activities in school or the workplace. Their lives were certainly shaped by the intermingling of cultural and structural forces. In order to further consider the nature of relationships within families, I will turn to an examination of the relationships Marcus and Jeff developed

with their parents. The other participants in the study did not talk about the nature of their relationships with their parents with the same depth as these two young men. Thus, I will focus particularly on the conflicts at home that Jeff and Marcus spoke about.

FAMILY CONFLICTS

Conflicts between Marcus and his parents and Jeff and his mother were discussed at length almost every time we met.[15] Jeff quite forthrightly said that "Me and my family aren't close." Here, he suggested his relationship with his mother and father was not strong. For Jeff the disputes were about his responsibilities in the house, such as cleaning his room. Despite the arguments, his parents did exhibit a sense of commitment to what happened to him. They were very supportive when he was arrested and spent time in a juvenile detention center. Their response was to support his return to school and send him to a private school. They did care what happened to Jeff. Marcus too had problems with a parent, his step-father. While Marcus's relationship with his mother remained strong, there were incredible tensions between Marcus and his step-father.

Understanding these conflicts is important not only for unraveling the relationships of Jeff and Marcus with family members, but to better understand the complexity of family life in the context of these young men's experiences. Many theories of the family have argued that families are a unit shaped by affection and kinship. However, as Baca Zinn (1991) has argued, "Rather than viewing the family as a unit shaped only by affection or kinship, we now know that families are settings in which people with different activities and interests often come into conflict with

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[15] It was as though they wanted me not only to hear them but to respond to them. I felt a social responsibility to respond to their concerns in meaningful and helpful ways. This was at times difficult, because I didn't know the relationships with their parents, nor did I have a full picture of their lives. Further, I was only peripherally involved in their lives for a relatively short period. But where I could I tried to be supportive, to listen, to care about how they were feeling, and help them think about different situations from various perspectives.

each other" (p. 121). And in the case of Marcus and Jeff, it was not only affection and kinship that dynamically shaped the family unit; conflict also significantly seemed an integral thread. These different activities and interests of their family members were dynamically shaped by the interaction of race, gender, and social class at the social and the structural levels (Dill, 1988; Glenn, 1987). Therefore, in order to better understand the conflict these young men talked about, we need to understand not only the nature of the conflict, but the ways in which family members went about their different roles not just within the family but in the workplace or school and in relation to other social institutions.

My analysis of the relationships that Marcus and Jeff had with their parents is therefore shaped in part by understanding that their interactions and experiences in families were dynamically shaped by their access to resources and experiences outside and inside the home. To acknowledge that there were conflicts in their household seems inadequate. Conflicts seem inevitable in human relationships. What is significant is the nature of the conflicts, and understanding the conflicts in the context of the situated experiences of family members.

Family as site of conflict and attachment

The problem Marcus most talked about was his relationship with his stepfather. He told me that he was angered with his stepfather's verbal and physical actions towards him, and he was resentful of his presence. But there were also disputes about how Marcus spent his recreation time outside of the house: "I was always in the house, I could never go out nowhere, I always had to stay home. I could never do all the stuff I wanted to do. That's why I used to get into trouble so much," he said. In fact, Marcus's relationship with his stepfather became so intolerable that he was forced to moved out of the house in May 1992. For the following six months, he

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stayed with his cousin in an apartment in a nearby neighborhood. Eventually, he

returned to his home with his mother and stepfather.

Marcus's mother tried to persuade him to return on numerous occasions. In

the following conversation, Marcus described his relationship with his step-father,

and the conversations with his mother about him moving out.

Marcus: . . . he [step-father] never did like me from the getgo. Because he always thought I was like my father because I look so much like him. Everybody else look like my mother, plus I'm the middle one, they treat me totally different than they treat (his older brother). He [step-father] thought I was no good, I'm going to end up in jail.

JP: Why did he say this?

Marcus: We never did get along, we was always at each other. You know, he always wanted me to be fighting him. He always wanted me to do that. To this day, I still owe him, but I won't do that. I still call over there to talk to my mother and stuff.

JP: What does she say about you moving out?

Marcus: Oh, she was all for it, because I told her. Because the night that it happened when I left for good. She called me. Because it was not the first time that I got kicked out of the house. Because I got kicked out of the house about four times.

JP: Oh really, by him?

Marcus: And I told her, and she always used the crying routine to make me feel sorry and all this, you know, to sucker me back. And knowing that we don't get along. So this time I wasn't going for it, for the fifth time. I told her, you know, "Mom you need to quit doing this. You know how you get to me. It ain't nothin' to do with you, it just him." I said, "I just want you to know that. I ain't got nothin' with you, I always loved you and everything Mom, you brought me up to be a real strong brother and everything, I ain't got nothin' against you and all this." You know, I explained to her and really broke it down that night, and she, after a while started calming down.

JP: He doesn't speak to you?

Marcus: He doesn't say nothin' to me. Not until I say somethin' to him. If I don't say somethin' to him, he ain't gonna say nothin' to me. Even if I do see him, and we by ourself, he ain't gonna say nothin' to me first, I have to say something to him.

Through the conversation Marcus revealed the strong bond between himself and his

mother. "You know how you get to me," he said to his mother. His mother too seemed

attached to Marcus. He commented that "she always used the crying routine to make

me feel sorry and all this, you know, to sucker me back." But Marcus seemed

prepared to sacrifice this bond in order to distance himself from his step-father. On

one level, the struggle seemed to be a struggle between Marcus and his step-father. On

another, the strife seemed a battle of competing masculinities in the context of his family.

It is clear that Marcus had a fragile relationship with his step-father, and that the lines of communication and connection seemed extremely tenuous. Marcus resented the authority that his step-father wielded as a parent in his family and resented the presence of his step-father in his and his mother's life. Marcus at times was grounded and chastised by his step-father for poor grades. At the same time, as Marcus attempted to challenge the authority of his step-father, his step-father too was "doing" masculinity as he asserted authority and power over Marcus as the father in his life. Further, Marcus argued that the problem was further exacerbated because this "father" was not his biological father, whom he missed:

> My own father, we get along real good . . . Cause I basically like him though. He kind of babies me more than anybody. 'Cause we [brothers and sister] all got different fathers. My older brother and me, we got the same father. My little brother, he got a different father, my little sister, she got a different father.

It seemed that it was the affection that Marcus's biological father gave him that he valued most in this relationship. This relationship contrasted with his relationship with his step-father which seemed distant.

Amidst Marcus's relationships with his mother, his step-father, and biological father, he was struggling to assert who he wanted to be. His step-father, for example, disapproved of Marcus' connection with his cousin and the Afrocentric reading group to which he belonged. In fact, Marcus's step-father barred him from attending any more group meetings because he disagreed with the substance of the conversations. Given that the reading group was a symbol of one of Marcus's passions, and the ideas and images he associated with the group strongly shaped his sense of his masculinity, the action exacerbated the tension between him and his step-father and potentially heightened his commitment to Afrocentricism. Life was difficult for Marcus, because amidst these relationships was a strained relationship with his brother. His brother was a high achiever, a first year university student studying architecture. As noted,

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Marcus felt as though he was constantly being compared to and contrasted with his brother. Despite this comparison, the power wielded by his stepfather, and Marcus leaving home, he continued to go to school. Not only did he continue to go to school, he was successful in attaining passing grades in all his subjects. He used the apparent success at school to demonstrate to his parents that he could live away from home and be successful. Schooling became a mechanism to prove his success.

Schooling was not the only mechanism that he used to assert his ability to thrive in the newfound independence from his parents. He was also proud of the ways in which he could take care of himself. During a conversation about African-American women, he told me:

> Like you know how they say women supposed to do women's jobs, I say "How can you say that? I do women's stuff. I sew, I iron." Ain't no one, frankly, I don't need no woman to take care of me, I can take care of myself. I can cook, sew, wash clothes, I can do all those things. I can do for myself.

Marcus's statement here revealed a sense he felt comfortable with what he saw as appropriating "women's jobs" to assert his independence. However, despite his newfound independence through supporting himself and continuing to do well in school, Marcus did return to his family's home. He could no longer afford the expense of living away from home. Notwithstanding, he maintained his distant relationship with his step-father and his connected relationship with his mother.

The conflicts at home reveal the struggles Marcus faced as he went to school and perhaps provide a glimpse of how the family can simultaneously be a site of conflict and attachment. He valued the connection and bond with his mother. In the above conversation he said to his mother, "You brought me up to be a real strong brother and everything." It was important to Marcus that he could prove to his mother that he could cope with the situation. This suggests the strength that the family provided, particularly his mother. His response to the conflicts was to "prove" himself to them, and thereby proving his sense of manhood. But his response was shaped by interactions between him and his parents. Thus, the family becomes a site which

dynamically shaped his identity. Such a process is complex and not as smooth or functional as portrayed by sex role theorists.[16] Here, Thorne (1993) argued that power is central to relationships among children, teachers, and parents, and that this by no means suggests that children or students are "passive or without agency" (p. 3). For Marcus, he at once asserted his masculinity through asserting his independence, resisting the authority of his stepfather, and appropriating certain domestic responsibilities associated with "women's work." These relationships, therefore, and the form, content and consequences of the relationships, were not just about power struggles between parents and their son, they were also about emerging social identities.

Distant but supportive relationship

Jeff, like Marcus, also experienced conflict with his parents. Jeff continually had ongoing squabbles with his mother. "Me and my mom aren't close," he once told me. He claimed he "got kicked out of the house about four times" by his mother during 1992. Jeff didn't call these problems conflicts, rather he called them "disagreements." He explained the conflict between him and his mother:

> She would go through my stuff, and she would go in my room and throw everything out, and throw it all on the floor and stuff. She told me to iron my clothes, and fold them up and put them in a drawer and hang them up. I did that, and occasionally she would come into my room and throw everything out of the drawer. I cannot stand that, I'm sorry . . . and I'm like come on, somebody's got to get out.

This conflict between Jeff and his mother had being going on for a few years. Jeff said that such conflict was "normal" for the black young men at his old school, Central.

Jeff: Basically, the black community, as far as I know, being at Central and everything, they really don't have no family relationship. Unless it's a girl. Girls, white girls like to stay with their family. The guys they are like into gangs.

JP: Why don't they have a family relationship?

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[16] For an excellent critique of sex role socialization views of gender identities see Connell (1987) and Thorne (1993).

Jeff:	Basically it has to do with the fathers . . . They don't spend time with their sons and stuff, so the son tends to go out with his friends and stuff, and then his friends get to doin' this and such and such. Haven't been brought up, his Dad hasn't took the time to tell him, well such and such, and this is the rules of the house.
JP:	You're father hasn't done that really?
Jeff:	No, my dad is kinda low key.
JP:	Because he's away (working) so much in Hatfield [60 miles away].
Jeff:	Yeah, he doesn't know what goes on in the house, 'cause when he's at home asleep, I'm at school, and then when he leaves to go to work, and then when I get out of school, he's at work, and when he's at home again, I'm in the bed.

Jeff suggested that one of the reasons why he felt disconnected from his home was because his father played a minimal role in the family. But his father worked in a factory almost 60 miles away from home, and thus left home early in the morning and returned well after 8pm. Jeff used the case of speeches given by African-American Emmy award winners to further argue his point:

> If you ever have to look at the Emmy Awards, you look at the black actors and stuff, they will say "I'd like to thank the people, I'd like to thank God most of all." And then they go into the producers and everything, and they also say "I'd like to thank my mother." You never hear them say "thank you, dad." The Dad's aren't there.

As Jeff's father worked the day shift and his mother the evening shift at an automobile plant, the intermingling of employment opportunities afforded Jeff's parents and the need for both parents to work reduced the time they could spend at home with their children. At the same time, Jeff once attended a school where he felt alienated. Thus, there seemed to be various influences upon the shape of Jeff's life, through his and his families activities, roles, and relationships at home, his relationship at school, and his parents' work activities.

At first I thought the conflict may have been a consequence of Jeff fathering a child and his mother being a little disappointed in him. At one point, Jeff said his mother thought he and Sharon "were spending so much time together. My Mom thought I was possessed with Sharon." But Jeff claimed that his relationship with Sharon or his fathering a child wasn't the central reason for the conflict:

JP:	Was the conflict over the thing with Sharon?

Jeff:	No, once it was. Another time it was because of whoopings.
JP:	They were hitting you?
Jeff:	Yeah.
JP:	Mother and father?
Jeff:	No, just my mother.

So the conflict was at one time because of Sharon, and another time because of the "whoopings." While Jeff provided these issues as points of conflict, and he also talked about how his mother responded, it was not really clear what the various "disagreements" were about.

He said, "From my behalf, when I was having confusion with my Mom and everything, getting thrown out of the house. I was like what was the point of going to school. You know you cannot wear the same clothes to school every day and stuff."

Jeff talked about one occasion when he was "thrown out" of the house.

JP:	So, what's the longest you've been out?
Jeff:	About a month.
JP:	And where would you go?
Jeff:	Sometimes I would stay with Sharon.
JP:	And what would her mother say? Would she mind?
Jeff:	Her mom kind of minds because of my mom, harassment. My mom was like *[to Sharon's mom]*, "I want him out on the streets, you let him stay there I'll prosecute you."
JP:	Why did she want you out on the street?
Jeff:	I don't know, I guess that's the type of person she is. She has a lot of her dad in her. I guess she meant it in a good way in her terms. But you're talking about winter time. One time I got kicked out with no shoes and shirt and stuff.
JP:	Where did you go?
Jeff:	I went to a friend's house and he gave me a pair of his shoes and stuff. One time I stayed with friend, and I stayed with him for a while. Eventually, you've got to leave, you don't want to wear out your welcome.
JP:	Your mother doesn't suddenly say "okay, Jeff is getting out today." Something happened, right?
Jeff:	Yeah, basically, we have a dispute or something. Like today I was playing my radio, getting ready for school, she's yelling through the door, "turn that radio off!" And I thought, what's the big deal with having the radio on?

Another example involved Jeff cooking at home. He told me that he cooked a lot at home, but his mother said she preferred him not to do that. At one point he told me "That's what my mom was saying don't go cooking your own food, eat what I cook, 'cause

that just wastes food." Jeff's mother was on a limited budget, especially since his parents were paying for him to attend a private school.

I wanted to hear more about these disputes and learn about them from the perspective of Jeff's mother. Although I spoke with Jeff's mother a couple of times on the phone, we did not have a prolonged conversation nor would she grant me a formal interview. Notwithstanding, she was quite contented for Jeff to "tell his story." And Jeff's story was really one of seeming alienation from his mother and father and most of his friends. Jeff had few good relationships in his life, except for his relationship with Sharon.

Jeff's relationship with his father, while not as conflict-ridden as the relationship with his mother, seemed distant. As noted, Jeff said that he really didn't have much interaction with his father because of the distance his father worked away from home. And then his mother worked the "second shift" at a local automobile plant:

> She goes in at four, as soon as we get home from school, she's like running around the house and getting ready to go to work. So, actually I kind of raised my sister on my own. 'Cause my Dad was gone, then my Mom would be leaving. it's just me and my sister staying at home by ourselves. When I was about eight since we first moved up here . . .

Jeff encountered much conflict at home with his parents, conflict which he said had been going on for the past four years. Despite this hostility, it is interesting that Jeff's parents were seemingly committed to Jeff completing high school and acquiring the high school diploma. Their commitment was most evident in their willingness to send Jeff to a fee-paying private Christian school that involved some material sacrifice in order to afford the fees. And they made this commitment after years of conflict and battles between Jeff and his mother.

The relationship between Jeff and his mother and father was certainly complex. They certainly seemed distant, but simultaneously supportive. Although he seemed connected with his sister, the significant relationship in his life was the one

with Sharon and their baby. This was a relationship that he worked on, that he tried to build, and that he valued.

The comparison of the relationships between Jeff and Marcus and their parents perhaps reveals that their relationships with the adults in their homes were complex and not easy to unravel. Jeff's relationship with his parents seemed the most distant and more complex to understand than Marcus's relationship with his parents. Although Jeff's relationship was marred with conflict, his parents continued to support him in his quest to attain the high school diploma. Marcus's relationship with his parents reflected on-going conflict, yet the bond between him and his mother seemed to remain intact.

Jeff's case starkly contrasted with Marcus's case. While they each had squabbles with their parents, and each left home for a certain period of time, they responded to the conflict and breakdown of the relationship with their parents in different ways. Jeff attended school less frequently, then dropped out of school, at which time he intermittently left home. After Jeff's entanglement with the criminal justice system, he returned to school with support from his parents, and he did not leave home for periods of time.

In contrast, despite the conflict with his parents, Marcus continued to attend school, but left home and moved into an apartment which he shared with his cousin and attempted to pay for his share of the household expenses. He continued to perform well at school and pass all his tests and examinations. He too returned home, because of personal difficulties with his cousin and the financial burden of supporting himself, even though he was resentful of his stepfather. In these each of their lives there seemed to be a marked difference in the reasons for them returning home. Jeff had a key turning point, which had little to do with his parents. While Marcus had no single turning point but rather a series of crises that saw him returning to his parents' home.

Schooling interwove their relationships with their parents in different ways:
On the one hand, Jeff had two kinds of relationships with school in the context of his relationship with his parents. One kind of relationship, that of alienation and disconnection, emerged because he became more and more disconnected from his parents he attended school less frequently.[17] Even though he felt distanced from his parents, "dropping out" of school became his response to the disconnection. The other kind of relationship he established with school was to embrace attending school in order to gain respect from his parents after, and because of, his entanglement with the criminal justice system. But it was Jeff's parents who spearheaded his new relationship with school. On the other hand, Marcus continually used his performance in school to assert his independence from his parents -- whether he lived at home or not. However, proving his "success" at school became even more significant when he living away from his parents. He used his success in school as a tool to regain the respect of his parents, and to prove that he could succeed even though he lived away from home, because he knew that his parents valued and rewarded success in school. Going to school was part of Marcus's strategy to define himself to his parents, while it was it was Jeff's parents who made school a new possibility in Jeff's life.

These two young men's relationships with their parents reveal that despite the apparent strains, they remained connected and supported by their parents. For Marcus and Jeff, building and maintaining connections with their parents was not easy for them. The other four young men, as noted earlier, too talked about the connection and support they received from their family members. Their stories provide glimpses of the ways in which relationships with families members are integral to the meanings they construct about schooling. The stories also reveal how their African-American masculinities come into being in the context of their families. The peer

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[17] This is the period prior to Jeff's entanglement with the criminal justice system. In noting the distance that developed between Jeff and his parents, I am not arguing that his experiences of school itself may have simultaneously caused him to become more disengaged from school.

group too was a significant site where relationships were influential in their emerging identities. I will now turn to an examination of the peer group and its significance in their lives.

THE PEER GROUP EXPLORED

The "peer group" is perhaps the most common relationship represented in literature about young African-American men and is often cited as an extremely significant arena in the identity formation process of young African-American men. Oftentimes, such accounts are about young African-American men from the inner city. One image of masculinity is found in *Makes Me Wanna Holler* where McCall (1994) provided a powerful and insightful autobiographical account of his life growing up as an African-American man in the United States. He presented a compelling image of the strength and power of the peer group in his life:

> Through those guys, I discovered the strength and solace in camaraderie. It was a confidence booster, a steady support for my fragile self-esteem. Alone, I was afraid of the world and insecure. But I felt cockier and surer of myself when hanging with my boys. I think we all felt more courageous when we hung together. We did things in groups that we'd never try alone. The group also gave me a sense of belonging that I'd never known before. With those guys, I could hide in the crowd and feel like the accepted norm. There was no fear of standing out, feeling vulnerable, exiled, and exposed. There was a comfort even my family couldn't provide. (McCall, 1994, p. 33).

This image painted by McCall has been further examined by Majors and Billson (1992) where the ways of being and acting described by McCall are seen as "cool pose." They argued that "Cool pose gives the black male his greatest sense of pride and masculinity" (p. 34). They used Oliver's (1988) notion of "compulsive masculine behavior," and further maintained that compulsive masculinity emerges as an alternative to "traditional definitions of manhood, compensating for feels of shame, powerlessness, and frustration. Being a man becomes redefined in terms that lead to destruction of self and others. Staying cool ensures that destruction remains palatable" (pp. 34-35). Majors and Billson suggest that many young African-

American men may reject those "brothers" who reject the standards of being "cool."

Therefore, going to the theatre, a concert, or camping may be seen as "uncool," and

African-Americans who engage in such actions are seen as "uncool."

The "cool pose" described by Majors and Billson (1992) seems to reflect

Dwayne's ways of being in his Detroit neighborhood. The peer group seems important

to many young African-American men living in inner cities. McCall (1994)

certainly articulated this point: "The group gave me a sense of belonging that I'd never

known before" (p. 33). Taylor (1991) considered the significance of the peer group

and noted that

> For boys, the peer group is the all-important tribunal, in which identity is
> shaped and validated by the "brothers" on the streets. Boys are expected to be
> "cool" in the face of all kinds of adversity, and learn to behave accordingly. The
> ability to stay cool under adverse conditions is not merely a matter of style . . .
> In short, "being cool" involves emotional toughness, even callousness and
> indifference towards many of the problems people and the adolescent
> encounters (p. 151).

Here, Taylor presents a form of peer group relations that would be familiar to

Dwayne, and other inner city youngsters. For instance, Dwayne described the display

of such emotional toughness as part of the building of his "self-esteem." I became

curious about his notion of development of self-esteem and pursued this further with

him:

> JP: So, how do you get self esteem?
> Dwayne: Like for me, fit in, smoking bud, drink brew. Rush people.
> JP: What does rush mean?
> Dwayne: Like a couple of guys on one guy or somethin'.
> JP: If you beat someone, who would you beat? Would it be a rival gang,
> or what could the reason?
> Dwayne: It don't really matter. It may, sometimes we used to do it, just to be
> doin' somethin' on the streets. Just to do it.
> JP: So you can be hard and respected?
> Dwayne: Yeah it made it feel as hard and as one.

Just as it was important for Dwayne to "feel hard," it was also important to feel a

sense of connection, unity, and "as one." As noted in a previous chapter, Dwayne talked

about his friends as his "boys, they be like my brothers, NFL, Niggers For Life. When

we do this and that, we go down together." At the same time, as the unity was

engendered through feeling "hard and respected," Dwayne's "brothers" also "gave" him

"love." There seemed tremendous comfort in his group of friends that he connected

with when he lived in Detroit. This support and deep sense of loyalty may be built

through "acting cool"; it was also peppered with "love" and "care" from the peers he

called his "brothers." Acting in certain ways potentially ensured continued

membership in a peer group. But his relationships with others was not only about

"acting cool," they were also about bonding, about connecting with others, and about

providing emotional support. The ways they acted in these groups reflected their

identities in the making; identities that not only reflected a response to racism, and

economic or racial oppression, but also a response to masculinities they associated

with white and black middle-class men. These identities had them identifying with

exaggerated forms of masculinity that emphasize toughness and violence. Thus the

peer group may also be seen as a refuge from the world.

As noted, masculine identities are not universal, thus these young men's

versions of masculinities may reflect their sense of powerless in larger society and

create a sense of power through the connections and patterns of behavior that the peer

group sanctioned. However, Dwayne's connection with his friends appeared to be more

than "being cool," as characterized by Taylor (1991). His peer relationships led to

my asking questions about the kind of relationships the other young men encountered.

Were the caring and connected relationships that Dwayne experienced similar to those

of the other five young men in this study? Was there variation across social class

groups in the kinds of relationships they encountered?

These questions are considered by Franklin (1992), who examined the form of

relationships among African-American men from different social class positions. He

argued that many working-class men engage in close, caring relationships much more

frequently than middle-class men. He further argued that

> when black men accept and begin to display societal definitions of masculinity,
> many of the traits thought to be essential for the development of close

friendships are lost. Basically, what happens is that expectation for these males begins to change. Empathy, compassion, trust, cooperation, and other such traits are eschewed in favor of ones such as aggression, competitiveness, stoicism, rational thinking, and independence (p. 209-210).

Franklin (1992) suggested that embrace of hegemonic masculinity sees some African-American men, particularly "upwardly mobile" black men, suppressing other forms of masculinity. His proposition is interesting because it hints of different forms of masculinity emerging among African-American men where social class is influential.

The images presented by McCall (1994) or Major and Billson (1992) certainly represent an interpretation of a strand of masculinity considered dominant among inner city African-American youths. But surely there are other forms of masculinities among African-American men in the inner cities and other locations in the United States? The stories of the young men in this study suggest the peer group did not play the same kind of role in their lives as often cited about inner-city youth. I raise these questions as a way to probe both the significance of all relationships in their lives and more significantly to understand better the form and content of the relationships these young men encountered with their peers. The image of the young black man in the inner city is an image that commonly seeps into the headlines of the commercial media: the tough, resilient and violent African-American man. For instance, a recent feature story in the Sunday New York Times (December 4, 1994) was headlined "The Black Man Is In Terrible Trouble. Whose Problem is that?" Images of the "troubled" African-American man generally present one version of young African-American men coming into being, and often represent only one potential aspect of their identities. But there are others. This is demonstrated through the stories of all the six young African-American men this study.

"They will stand by me"

Nurturance and care, at some level, seem to be woven through the culture of

Dwayne's peer group. These dimensions also seemed to be part of Marcus's connections

with his friends. For example, Marcus described his connections with his friends:

> Basically they grew up with me, they know me real good. They will stand by
> me. If I ever got into any trouble where I was going to get to beat up by a whole
> group of people, they would help me. Because that's how we are, that's how me
> and my best friends are. If somethin' happened to them, I would happen to stick
> up for them, I will stick up for them and stand by them, if somethin' happened
> to them. And they're goin' to stand by me. It's not like we are a big ole gang.

There is no doubt that these friends were important to Marcus, and despite his

conflicts with his parents, it was his friends to whom he turned for support and

connection. The group was maintained through "sticking up" for each other, "standing

by" each other. His description of his connections with others reflected a version of

masculinity that involved physical control and solidarity. Marcus, like Dwayne,

developed a version of masculinity that reflected collective strategies and survival.

> Marcus: I hang around Tyrone a lot. He likes me. He make time to see me.
> Anyway. 'Cause that's how close we is.
> JP: How long have you known him?
> Marcus: Ever since middle school. I've got about five best friends that I can
> deeply talk to.
> JP: What kind of things do you talk about?
> Marcus: Like, you know, my parents and everything. 'Cause them was the
> only people that was there for me when I had problems with my
> parents. They know more about that than my relatives do. They are
> the only person I can talk to. I can't go nowhere. He the only one I
> could talk to.

The significance of the support of friends in Marcus's life as he went about interacting

with the family, going to school, or going to work, cannot be overstated. Their solace

and comfort helped him sustain himself in the face of the challenges he encountered as

a young black man. Through his particular experiences in family, school, or work, he

developed a close emotional bond with his five friends that reflected a strand of his

version of masculinity that he lived out. Intermingled with Marcus's sense of a strong

network of friends was also a wide network of friends.

Marcus: I've got lots of friends. I'm very well known. I try to make myself
have no enemies. Don't want none. 'Cause I ain't the type that goes
around ... I have a lot of friends but I have five best friends, that I
basically grew up with ever since I came up to Allerton. Well, we
sort of split up after middle school. But we still keep in touch. I have
all their numbers. Just this weekend we was all together. Down at
the river front, walking around. I have three that go to Central. Two
that go to Western . . .

JP: Who do you hang around with most then?

Marcus: Well, I don't hang around the same people all the time. I have my best
friends, but I don't hang around them constantly.

Apart from Marcus and Dwayne, the other young men did not seem to have such a

strong peer group. Not only does this reflect their differing experiences and

possibilities, it also reflects their different opportunities. The fact that the other

young men did not have such a support group is significant, and particularly

significant in relation to arguments about the centrality of the peer group in the lives

of young African-Americans, as articulated by writers such as Taylor (1991) and

Mincy (1994).

As I explored the extent to which the peer group became a source of affiliation

for these young men, I asked them to talk about the important people in their lives.

While they most frequently identified with either a parent or friends, it was

significant that most did not name a women as a friend, with the exception of Jeff, nor

a teacher or an adult connected to their school. In fact, as the conversations developed,

it appeared that their friends seemed to play an extremely significant role in their

lives, but it was only their male friends that they talked about most. While they all

seemed to suggest that they wanted "good friends," they all did not seem to be able to

negotiate relationships in the ways that Dwayne or Marcus did. In fact, many of the

young men seemed to have very tenuous connections with other peers. This is not to

say that they did not seek greater connections with their peers; rather they struggled

to sustain deep, connected relationships with their peers, and particularly the male

peers they wanted to be connected with. Although some researchers have argued the

importance of the peer groups, how easy was it to sustain membership of the peers groups?

Interestingly, although the peer group was important to all of the young men, only four seemed connected to a peer group of some form. For example, Rashaud and Shawn all had friends but not in ways represented by McCall (1994), Dwayne or Marcus. Further, the friendships Marcus, Rashaud, and Shawn developed seemed to be formed and sustained within school or in an organization outside of school. In contrast, Dwayne's relationships were all formed in his neighborhood, "in the streets" in Detroit and, to a lesser degree, more recently in Allerton. Like Dwayne, the peer groups of Marcus, Shawn, and Rashaud were exclusively African-American. At the same time, Zakeev and Jeff, both working class, seemed to have few, if any, close friends. For Marcus, Shawn, and Rashaud, one of the most central criteria for belonging to their particular peer groups was not to "act white." Engaging in oppositional stances in relation to this image seemed significant in promoting peer cohesion.[18] In order to better understand their relationships with peers, I will turn to a discussion of trust in relationships.

"I just don't trust nobody"

Maybe the most central topic of all the conversations with these young men was the topic of "trust" in friendships. This topic, together with how they had been "let down" by friends, came up time and time again over the months of our conversations. While the theme in itself is an interesting topic, the vital significance of having strong and connected relationships with peers in their lives was the overarching issue that was part of many of their conversations with me about friends and relationships with friends and peers.

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[18] This image of "acting white" will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

That "trust" in friendship was a central topic of discussion is not surprising. Many teenagers growing up talk about lack of trust and connection with others of their age. But these particular young men's concern about trust in their relationships also told me something about the kind of men they wanted to be. Talk about trust in friendships was not just about what they hoped for. It also emerged from what they had experienced with others as they were growing up. Most centrally, they all wanted connection, community, belonging and sharing with others. Their discontent about the lack of trust in their friendships perhaps reveals the values they embraced and attempted to live out.

As they talked about their friends, they also talked about how over time there had been a shift in patterns of whom they related to and whom they trusted.

JP:	One thing I'm trying to find out are relationships that people have with each other. Do you have a lot of friends?
Dwayne:	Me?
JP:	Yeah.
Dwayne:	Yeah. I just don't trust nobody though.
JP:	Why's that?
Dwayne:	The things I've been though, and I've been let down.
JP:	Tell me how people have let you down.
Dwayne:	Like fightin' and everythin'. Let me down, hurt me, my fellas and things like that.
JP:	They did something bad to you, or they weren't there for you?
Dwayne:	They weren't there for me. I mean like the times I need them, or something like that.
JP:	What do you need friends for? For what kinds of things?
Dwayne:	I talk about family stuff to friends. You know, be there through thick and thin . . . somebody to talk to, want the right angle so you won't do nothin' stupid.
JP:	Did you have good friends in Detroit?
Dwayne:	Most definitely.

Thus, although Dwayne had talked about being close to his friends, his relationships and friendships were not always smooth. He had been "let down" and "hurt," which made him feel wary about trusting people. This suggests that while Dwayne may have had a seemingly solid support group, relationships were not always smooth, and were continually changing in response to the members' individual and collective responses to their daily challenges.

Jeff also raised the topic of trust in friendships and argued that there were few people that he could depend upon. In fact, Jeff didn't even use the word *friend* to describe the people he connected to. He called them *associates*.

> Jeff: . . . Well you get people talking about you, you know.
> JP: What do they say?
> Jeff: Basically like "Jeff want to be white. He don't have so many friends." So that's why I don't say I have friends. I have *associates*. You might catch me once in a while saying friend, but don't take it to mind. I have *associates*.

Jeff distanced himself from other people through using a different term to label the people he connected with. In our conversation he also raised what and how other people perceived him. He argued that many people claimed he "acted white" and that he had few friends. Jeff agreed with this point and provided more evidence as to why he thought he didn't have many friends.

> 'Cause to me a friend is somebody that is always there for you. No matter what you do to them. No matter what happened between you and him. Like you argue in a fight. If he see me out with my car broken down, he's gonna pull over and say "do you need some help?" Even though me and him have been in a big fight . . . I think there's a few people who I can depend on maybe, but not really. Well, there is one person who I know is behind me one hundred percent, Sharon. I'm crazy about her . . .

Jeff's image of a friend seemed to reflect the kind of connections that Dwayne and Marcus talked about, but he did not seem to be able to develop such friendships. As we talked more about his friends, it became clear that Sharon was perhaps one of the few people that he connected to daily and actually trusted.

> JP: Is it hard having a good friend?
> Jeff: No, it's just the way people are. Okay, I will say, like when my car is broken down on the street, the guys I associate with, they will help me. But what I'm saying somebody you've argued with, still they will go the extra mile with you to help you out, that's what I'm saying. Like a good, good friend. Somebody you can tell anything, so basically I wouldn't want many good friends. Another thing is I tend not to trust too many people anymore, because those that I did trust, turned on me. 'Cause some friends of mine, ever since I've moved up here [to Allerton], they've been my friends. They recently turned on me, basically 'cause of Sharon, spending too much time with Sharon. Me being out of the house and everything.
> JP: So they didn't support you at all?
> Jeff: No, not at all.

Intermingled with Jeff's conception of a good friendship -- going "the extra mile,"

"trust," "somebody you can tell anything" -- to are certain codes of conduct. I also

discovered from Latasha (Sharon's best friend) that some of Jeff's friends were not

happy with Jeff, not because he was dating Sharon, or because he made her pregnant,

but because of the fact that he had liaisons with other young women while he was dating

Sharon, and he did this without Sharon's knowledge. But more significantly, I learned

from Jeff that as he began to act more and more "white," his childhood circle of friends

slowly disintegrated. Jeff seemed to develop ways of being that were in part in conflict

with those sanctioned by his group of friends. Part of this conflict seemed to be

centered on his embrace of "acting white." Significant in the changed relationship

with his boyhood friends was that the friendships themselves became part of a process

of racial identity construction.

Over time I began to realize that Rashaud too had few friends. He seemed very

outgoing, very sociable and very easy to talk with in some ways. But as the months

progressed it seemed that the only person he really connected to daily was a school

friend, Siko. This was a friendship he had only developed over the course of the year.

"I don't have like a lot of different people. My true friend, that I can honestly believe

in no matter what, Siko, he's from Ghana. That's my boy," Rashaud shared with me.

They spent a lot of time together after school. For example, on one occasion Rashaud

told me, "Me and my friend last night, talking about going skydiving sometime next

year. And I was going to go to Costa Rica, and go out to California, I just like to go to

have the experience and then talk about it."

Rashaud did have other friends, at school and out of school, but these other

friendships were not marked with constant interaction. In fact, when I asked Rashaud

what he liked to do for fun he said, "Homework, hang out with friends. Basically it's

cold now, so I like to try and do well in the winter." Here, Rashaud placed his

homework at the center of his out of school activity. The only youths Rashaud

regularly hung around with were Siko and the people he saw at the *Jack and Jill Club*,

although he did not regularly interact with these peers outside the confines of the club

meetings and activities. Thus the friendship with Siko suggests there were few others

that he felt he could connect with at school. It could also reflect his not wanting to

connect to a particular sub-group of friends. But this seems a choice possibly

constrained by the social separation of racial groups at his school. This separation

will be explored in the following chapter. Significant in understanding Rashaud's

relationship with others is what he talked about with his friend. For example, he

discussed going on vacation to California or Costa Rica that reflect middle-class

possibilities that I doubt would be imagined as a possibility by Dwayne or Marcus.

Through this relationship we are provided a glimpse of his version of masculinity that

seemed to reflect his loneliness, his emphasis on academic individualism, and his

personal career ambitions.

Marcus talked about the different kinds of conversations he had with different

friends and acquaintances. For example, with the friends that he played basketball

with early evening, he rarely talked about his home problems. In fact, I learned later

that there was although he had five "best friends," he was still cautious about what he

talked about with them. He was frightened of being "hurt" by revealing personal

thoughts and feelings.

Marcus: I can't talk in the same way I talk to my best friends.
JP: How come?
Marcus: Because they wouldn't be able to understand what I be talking about.
             A lot of them know about what I'm into.
JP: But about your family problems, you wouldn't speak about it to those
             guys?
Marcus: No. 'Cause myself, I don't trust nobody.
JP: You don't trust me yet, right?
Marcus: Not to the certain point where I will just tell you everything about
             me.
JP: You're holding back?
Marcus: I'll tell you basically the stuff that you want to know.
JP: Like which stuff wouldn't you want to share with me?
Marcus: My real background of my family . . . I would never discuss that to
             nobody, 'cause that's me. I just holding myself up. I can to a point, I

can, like I don't like people to know too much about me. I always been like that. To me they can hurt me in the long run.

JP: Because they will make fun of you or what?

Marcus: No, just they can hurt me in the long run.

JP: And your friends, what kinds of things do they talk about themselves to you?

Marcus: Their family and things. We always talk the same things. Basically talk about problems we have.

Thus while Marcus may have had opportunities to share some of his problems with other friends, a possibility that did not seem available to Rashaud, he was selective in what he talked about with them. Once again this speaks to the tenuous nature of the friendships, and it also reveals how he did not want to make himself vulnerable. Through his selectively sharing aspects of his emotional and personal self, we are able to learn about the significance of maintaining an image of emotional control in the eyes of others. This can be seen as reflective of his masculine identity in the making, in that emotional control, while seen as a way of protecting himself against hurt, also suggests a barrier or the limit of the way he interacted with other men. Their talk about trust in friendships tells us a lot about the kind of relationships they sought. It also informs us about the kinds of identities that they made in the context of their different experiences of the structures and social practices of race, gender, and social class.

Nevertheless, what they talked about, and with whom, and the on-going relationship among their friends seemed primarily shaped by a quest to connect through a bond of loyalty, which seemed paramount to these young men. All the young men saw loyalty as one of the most fundamental features of their friendships with other men. But for Marcus, Jeff, and Dwayne their sense of loyalty seemed to be contradictory, in that they wanted their friends to support them, "go that extra mile," but they were still reluctant to fully trust their friends with inner thoughts or feelings for the hurt that may follow. These young men's accounts of untrustworthiness in friendships perhaps reflected the intense nature of their relationships where solid support was expected. The bond that connected and

disconnected them with their friends was around issues of consistency and supporting each other in personal daily struggles.

Franklin (1992) wrote about a similar pattern in his study of friendships between African-American men. He argued that much violence that African-American men are involved with "is certainly associated with accelerated use and selling drugs. However, a relatively large proportion of black male same-sex violence . . . may be related to *violations of friendship expectations*" (emphasis added)(p. 208). Friendship expectations seemed high for these young men. Therefore, because they highly valued their friendships, they were careful not to jeopardize these connections. This meant that there were certain strands of their personal self that they did not share. For instance, Marcus shared with me instances of his personal life that he had not shared with his friends.

Although many of the young men may have sought the intense peer group that McCall (1994) and Taylor (1991) described, it was only Marcus and Dwayne out of the six young men who had such a support group. While Shawn and Rashaud had one or two male friends that supported them, Zakeev did not seem to have any close friends in the ways the other young men experienced friendships. Jeff, on the other hand, had a close friend, Sharon, who was a young white woman. The different levels of intensity of friendships across the young men suggests complexity of the role of friendships in the identity formation process. The variation can be explained through taking into account why and how they formed certain relationships in and out of school; the meanings they gave to their own and others' identities through social interactions; and the racialized meanings they and others gave to schooling that caused them to be alienated from or connected to many of their peers and teachers. It was through the different individuals and groups they connected with and separated themselves from that they were able to display and live out versions of their racialized masculine identities. While many of these relationships may have provided the potential for

them to feel connected to people they could trust, ironically they were also sites that saw them developing stances where they didn't "trust nobody." In order to consider their relationships further, I will examine the particular relationships they experienced. I will explore these relationships in two contexts: (1) friends at school; (2) friends outside of school.

CONNECTIONS WITH FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL

One of the most interesting pieces of the talk of these six young men was their desire to be among their friends at school. This is not surprising. Friendships are important in the lives of all adolescents. What did these young men mean when they talked about their "friends"? Who were they friends with? What did it mean to be a friend? What kinds of things did they like to do and talk about with their friends? Did they only connect with peers from their own school, or did their network reach others who attended other schools, or who dropped out of school? These are just some of the questions I will explore as I consider their relationships with their friends.

Except for Jeff and Zakeev, all the young men had an African-American peer group with whom they met daily. This seemed the case for Marcus and Dwayne at Central, and for Shawn and Rashaud at Cedarville. They also hung around with these friends after school in their neighborhoods and in various recreational activities. As the semester progressed, Zakeev did develop a closer relationship with two African-American members of the school band. Jeff really did not have any friends besides Sharon, who was white.

As the months progressed, I began to realize that few of these young men had really close friends, as they defined friends, in their lives. Further, as I began to explore their friends and the institutional connection of their friends, it became apparent that in their personal life outside of classrooms, they did not have strong connected relationships with people outside of their homes. This is interesting, and

potentially explains the emphasis they placed on their desire for more connected

relationships with teachers.

Schooling and close friends

Five of the six participants identified African-American peers as friends and

mostly male peers; no one except for Jeff identified a white person. Yet, they all

attended multiracial schools. And in the case of two of the young men, they were very

much in the minority at school as African-Americans. These young men distinguished

between close friends and peers called acquaintances or friends, but not "close

friends." TABLE 4 suggest that few of these young men had peers in their lives that

they called close friends; the extent to which both school and non-school affiliations

became important in their patterns of friendship were also significant.

Table 4. *Primary and secondary levels of friendships*

Name	*Primary affiliations - - "close friends"*	*Secondary affiliations -- other friends/acquaintances*
Dwayne	Neighborhood male friends from Detroit	Friends from current school
Jeff	Girlfriend	Friends from middle school
Marcus	Male friends from middle/high school	Fraternity, reading group, basketball
Rashaud	Male friend from school	Friends from *Jack and Jill Club*
Shawn	None	Fraternity, members of school wrestling team; church
Zakeev	None	Male friends from current school; church

Two participants who had close personal friends at their current school were Rashaud

and Marcus. Both these young men were the only ones still residing in the same house

while they attended middle school and high school. The other young men moved to
different schools in their ninth or tenth grade years. This mobility surely must have
influenced their opportunities to connect with others in school. The mobility was
brought about as a consequence of family circumstances, activities and interests. It
perhaps reveals how decisions emanating from the family unit may influence
relationships developed in school. Moving from school to school saw some of these
young men leaving friends from old schools and trying to develop new friendships in
their new school.

It became apparent just how precarious it was to build friendships at school
and to make connections with their peers. In the previous chapter I noted that the
young men loved to spend time with their friends at break time or lunch time. In fact,
apart from wanting to acquire the high school diploma, meeting friends was one of the
other most consistent reasons they offered for attending school. Yet, when we began to
talk further about their friends and their peers, it became clear that they had few
friends. For example, at one point Shawn said:

> Shawn: I don't have any close friends. I've had in [my old neighborhood].
> JP: Part of that is that because you have moved to the area? Are there any other reasons, is it partly because of you?
> Shawn: A lot of my friends, I don' t really tell them personal stuff, I don't really try to get too close.
> JP: Is there a reason for that?
> Shawn: I had a lot experience of people who says they are your friend, and behind your back they will do something.

This becomes a troubling picture for the young men in thinking about the
extent to which they were alienated from the content and pedagogy in their classrooms.
I am not arguing that they did not have friends, nor am I critiquing the nature of their
friendships, merely stating that they really didn't have many friends at the various
schools they attended. They seemed fairly alienated. The image of the alienation they
experienced at school is deepened when considering their apparent alienation from the
content of schooling. The need for friendships is heightened in thinking about the
larger picture of their experiences at school.

Maintaining connections

Rashaud and Shawn each met their peer group daily at a certain area in the school. Rashaud had always hung around in the group. Shawn, who entered the school in Grade 10, initially associated with white students in a particular area of the school where the majority of white students congregated, then was beckoned by an African-American student to join other African-American students during the break time. Both these young men said that they were friendly with white males and females, and claimed that race was not a significant factor in their choice of friends or girlfriends. However, when I asked them to name their friends from school, they only named students who were African-American. And when I asked Shawn to describe his relationships with white students, he said they were "superficial."

Marcus and Dwayne each met friends during the recesses of the school day. They each spent a lot of time with their friends. There was a particular area in their school that they hung out in, where mostly African-American students hung out, but they did not confine themselves solely to this area when they met with their various friends. They also hung out in other places on the school grounds. This was markedly different from Shawn and Rashaud in that there was only one designated area that they hung out in.

School for these four young men was remarkably similar and also remarkably different: there were differences between the Cedarville students and the Allerton student vis-a-vis their experiences in classrooms, and students' culture outside of classrooms appeared somewhat different. But what was similar was the fact they preferred and consciously worked at identifying with a group of African-American students at break time and in an area that was "theirs." What was different is that the places that Marcus and Dwayne traversed were much larger and more varied than those of Shawn and Rashaud at Cedarville High School. Possibly this may have been

influenced by the proportion of African-American and white students attending Central compared to Cedarville.

Zakeev and Jeff did not seem to have a peer network at school. Jeff seemed to suggest that Sharon was the only person he associated with at Central. And then when he moved to Allerton Christian School, he said he had no school friends. Zakeev had a few students he talked with at Western. However, he did not have any peers at school whom he called friends and would hang around with after school. Zakeev's story of his attempts to make friends at school provides a glimpse of the difficulties that face youngsters at school as they try to develop connections with others.

"What am I doing wrong?"

Zakeev missed his friends from his old high school, Central. Unlike the other young men, Zakeev did not congregate with a group of friends at the beginning of the day. "I get off the bus and go to my locker . . . then I go downstairs, my class is in the basement. I go down there and I just wait for my class," he said. Zakeev did not find it easy to be accepted at school by African-American or white students. At one point, he said that at his previous school, "Central, they accept people no matter what. They accept people better. I'm not saying all people do, but most people accept people for who they are." Whereas at Western it was difficult for him to make friendships, but was something that he tried to work on daily at school. "I really keep to myself now . . . I talk to some people, I try, I always congregate with people, black or white, I'm a nice person, and I talk to people. And that's what I'm saying, the acceptance ..." He believed that essential to being accepted and connected with other students was being "popular" regardless of racial identity:

> Zakeev: It's to me, it's not really black or white [racial identity] at Western. It's really a popularity thing. It's like popular people, no matter if you are black or white.
> JP: How do you become popular?
> Zakeev: I don't know exactly, that's what I'm trying to figure out. I've sat back and said how do you do this?

Zakeev talked about a number of different students he spent time with outside of class when he was at school. He spent time in the morning before classes start talking to a white guy, Aiden, and sometimes an Asian guy, Vinh. During his lunch hour he spent time in the library where he spoke with a black young women, Trisha. He did not speak with these particular students outside of school. And he also spent time with two African-American male friends who, like him, were members of the school band. In fact, although Zakeev said he tried to congregate with white, Asian and African-American students, after about the first six months at the school, it was mostly African-American male students that he hung around with. He spent most of his time with two other young African-American men who were in his band class. As the year progressed, these were two students that he remained friendly with, but he didn't consider them friends.

In the end, Zakeev claimed that the white students at his new school were very much the same as the white students at his previous school. In the main, he did not associate with white students, and it was the black students that he tried to be accepted by.

> I don't know why these people are acting like certain way . . . to me and to other people . . . and it goes back to the acceptance part. At Central, they accept people no matter what. They accept people better. I'm not saying all people do, but most people accept people for who they are . . . And I'm trying to figure out, okay, what am I doing wrong? I'm trying to be nice, that's worked on some people. I'm not trying to say that I'm trying to use people to see if worked. I'm just saying that nice is the way I am. And the people, sometimes I say "hi" to them, and they just turn their back on me, and say nothin to me. And I really don't like that, but I just figure out that's the way they are.

Thus, it was difficult for Zakeev to connect with any student at school. He did not connect with white students; in fact, towards the end of the interviews, Zakeev started telling me how he had never interacted with white students until he went to Western. This is an interesting comment, because many of his classes at Central and Western were multi-racial, yet, in his mind, he had not interacted or connected with white

students. Yet despite Zakeev's openness and willingness to make connections with other students, he remained considerably alienated.

African-American connections

For the participants, there seemed two distinct patterns of friendship at school: one where a group met and congregated with a set of African-American peers daily, and another that consisted of a racially diverse group of individuals. The latter was the case for both Jeff and Zakeev, who at their schools, current and previous, did not seem to have many friends that they connected with daily. Dwayne, Marcus, Rashaud, and Shawn, in contrast, each met with a particular group of students every day. They spoke with the same students every day and usually met the students in a particular place in the school. This is interesting because they attended very different schools, with very different students compositions. Cedarville was majority middle-class white, with no more than ten percent African-American students, whereas Central was multi-classed and was almost fifty percent African-American. Yet in each of their schools they sought and preferred to hang out with African-American students. In the case of Marcus and Dwayne the net was cast more broadly than either Rashaud or Shawn in that they connected with a number of sub-groups. Thus, despite these four young men encountering different kinds of pedagogy and curriculum, and despite the differing student compositions, they all formed groups with African-American students during recess time and lunch time. In fact, on asking them to talk about school, it was the interactions with other African-American students, who were male and to a lesser degree female, that they spoke about. The identity of these students they interacted with was important and foremost in their accounts of the students they were connected to.

The relationships they formed in school seemed significant in their sense of their emerging identities. The students that they associated with were students with

whom they shaped or developed common values and interests, and who were thereby able to sustain them in school. Because they felt alienated from relationships in classrooms, the relationships with peers took on a greater significance. Spending time with school friends became an important activity in their experience of schooling. The peer relationships became significant to their identities as African-Americans because they served as a context to define themselves -- their racial masculine identities -- in relation to the meanings of the insiders and outsiders of their peer groups. The significance of racial identities in the connections they formed will be discussed in the following chapter. Maybe most significant is that they encountered different kinds of peer relationships, while they at most had a small handful of friends that they relied upon. The image portrayed by writers such as McCall (1994) and Taylor (1991) about African-American peer relationships perhaps did not capture the complexity of peer relationships in their lives. Many of these young men's relationships seemed plagued with uncertainty and lack of trust, yet four of the young men did have at least one person that they relied upon. Their relationships were uneven and complex. Peer groups at once seemed to be both sources of connection and sources of alienation.

In addition to the friendship patterns that seemed to emanate from school, some of the young men also developed friendships outside the context of school. These friendships were important to them. While they did not list the friendships with the people they connected with in the organizations as significant in their lives, they still mentioned the opportunities to meet and socialize with other peers at significant recreational opportunities that they enjoyed. All the organizations they belonged to were African-American. It seemed that formal networks and organizations outside of school played a significant role in the lives and the identities of these young African-American men. It is to these various forms of networks, however formal or informal, that I will now turn.

NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Although they all appeared to have friends from school, it was only Marcus who had a consistent and sustaining circle of friends at school who showed connection and care that most of them sought. While I note that most did not find such friendships in school, there is a larger question looming, and that is: Why should they be able to develop friends at school? Their schools did not seem organized to promote caring and connected relationships among students over time: they were rarely in classes with their friends; and they suggested that in the classes they did take there was very little interaction among students in classrooms. What they yearned for at school was to spend time with their peers. Not just to talk about school, but also to talk about girls, sports, television and the like. Many of them turned to organizations that were not connected to school as an avenue to develop friendships and connected relationships.

While each of these participants were involved in organizations outside the school, they varied in the kind of organizations they belonged to. These organizations ranged from church organization, youth organizations, informal basketball games in their neighborhood, and friends they hung around with in the streets. The membership of these organizations in the main was largely African-American. It seemed that the young men gravitated towards organizations with predominantly African-American membership. But this is a generalized picture of their association with organizations outside of school. For Jeff and Zakeev their association with organizations was minimal, and Dwayne was not connected to a formal organization but rather to an informal network of friends.

"Black brothers getting together being just boys"

The relationships they sought outside of school need to be seen in connection with both their experiences in school and their experiences in family. Four of the

young men were involved in a range of organizations. TABLE 5 presents a sense of the

range of organizations they participated in.

Table 5. *Peer organizations and networks*

Name	peer organizations and networks
Dwayne	Neighborhood friends in Detroit and Allerton
Jeff	Church group
Marcus	Brotherhood organization; reading group; basketball
Rashaud	Mother-sibling organization
Shawn	church; school wrestling team; Brotherhood organization
Zakeev	Church group

Marcus was involved in a "brotherhood," an organization closely connected to a

college-based fraternity. He attended weekly meetings with other young men, who

were all African-American, of varying social class backgrounds, and they talked about

issues and ideas affecting African-Americans. They also planned social

get-togethers. In addition, Marcus was involved in a college-based group that met to

discuss ideas around Afrocentricism and attempted both to understand the plight of

African-Americans in the United States and to develop strategies to build and

strengthen the solidarity of the African-American community. Many of the members

of the groups he belonged to lived in working-class and middle-class neighborhoods,

which suggests that racial identity was more significant than social class in

memberships of these organizations.

Shawn was also involved in a "brotherhood" -- although a different and rival

organization from the one Marcus belonged to. He joined the organization so that he

could meet people. He told me that "To me it is always having somebody you can depend

on, the guys will be there for you. That's one of the reasons I joined, I didn't know too

many people (at school)." All the people that he met and maintained contact with were African-American and lived in the greater Allerton area. "They talk a lot, they are going to do this or that, but they don't do too much. Kind of like hang out with a lot of the guys." The other members of the group did not attend Cedarville, and many were working-class as well as middle-class. He needed this group of peers so that he had others he could "depend on."

In addition, Shawn still maintained contact with his mother's church in Detroit, attending the church when he visited her. Even though it was almost four years since he had lived in Detroit, he still maintained the contact. During the summer of 1992, he participated, along with a group of young African-American men and women, on a church-sponsored tour of African-American colleges around the United States. Tuskegee and Fisk were among the colleges he visited.

Rashaud, who attended the same school as Shawn but at a different grade level, was also involved in a community-based organization. The organization was established by single African-American mothers for them and their children to get together. Most of the women, although not all, lived in the middle-class neighborhoods of Allerton and Cedarville. The *Jack and Jill* organization met most Sundays, and Rashaud looked forward to connection with other male and female peers. Like Shawn, membership of this organization saw Rashaud developing friendships that cut across social class lines.

Zakeev really did not have many friends in or out of school. In fact he spent most of his out of school time watching TV or practicing the saxophone. Occasionally he would go to the library or watch a movie with his younger brother. On a Sunday he would go to church with his brother and mother. Sometimes he attended church events.

Dwayne, since he moved to Allerton at the beginning of his tenth grade year, was not involved in community-based organizations. In Detroit, however, he belonged

to a subset of young African-American men with whom he hung around in his neighborhood. This group of young men served an important role in his life. As noted in a previous chapter, the friendships he formed in his neighborhoods were his solace: "My boys, they be like my brothers, NFL, Niggers For Life. When we do this and that, we go down together. . . They gave me love, they were there for me." In a way, it served as a place to go, to feel connected and respected:

JP:	Were you a member of a gang were you? You don't have to tell me if you don't want to.
Dwayne:	I mean it was somethin' like that.
JP:	Why was that important to you?
Dwayne:	(pause)
JP:	I'm trying to understand it, not in a negative kind of way.
Dwayne:	The reason it was important to me was because, the time I had problems, I ain't able to see no way out, you know I had problems, had a lot of pressure, easy influenced and all that. And just hangin' with friends and when we do all that stuff, it just make me feel good, fighting' drinking, smokin' bud, and all that, made me feel like I was hard and all.
JP:	Was that important to feel hard, why was that important?
Dwayne:	Yeah. Like you can't touch me, nobody can mess with you. Or if you step against me, then this is goin' to happen, no such thing.
JP:	Why is no one going to touch you?
Dwayne:	'Cause you're hard, you know. Like you beat on people, you get into a, and you win. You got to hate, making money and all that. You've got a lot of boys together.
JP:	So alone, if you are hard, it's no good. You need to have your friends with you?
Dwayne:	Not all the time, you might be you and someone else.
JP:	If someone sees you as soft, what does that mean?
Dwayne:	It's just like weak. It's like an image you're trying to portray, trying to hold up, like an image, in the streets. People in the streets, you know for the girls, you want people to know flat out you ain't fine, this is how you cut it, I'm going down like this flat out. It's like when you're raised up in the slums, it made black people down, that's what they're doing out there, is holding us down.
JP:	Why's it keeping you down? Explain to me.
Dwayne:	My opinion, kind of raised in a big city, a lot of crime, people poor with no jobs and all that, that's what going to go on, your family doing this and doing that, you crime, people sexually abusing their kids and all that, doing this to their kids, smoking drugs. That kid has so much hurt in him, he don't know who to talk to, don't know who to trust, don't know who to go to, you know, we getting little guys on the street, start getting into the road. Try to build ourselves up, so he have some self-esteem about him, try to get into the crowd.

The network that Dwayne connected with was significant to him in that it arose out of the conditions and experiences of his peers' encounters in the inner city. In a way the

network, or" gang," as he called it, represented the ingenuity of the youngsters to connect and form relationships around particular values and norms that helped them sustain their relationships. It became a context for them to develop meaning and a sense of themselves. Ironically, while the "gang" was important to his survival on one level, on another, its activities also saw his demise. He became involved in drugs -- taking drugs himself and selling drugs -- and was eventually arrested and sentenced.

But for Dwayne, while he didn't belong to an apparent institution, there is no doubt that his neighborhood and hanging out with his "fellas" represented a significant institutional affiliation for him. Connell (1987) writes about the significance of "street life" as an institution in the identity formation process. For Dwayne, it was clear that his friends from his neighborhood in Detroit were the most significant people in his life. His connections with his friends were also opportunities to talk about personal problems. These connections were not just about trying to be "cool." However, Dwayne was no longer living in Detroit, and while he had a few friends from school and played basketball after school, he no longer remained constantly connected with his friends from Detroit. But he always hung out with his peer group from Detroit whenever he returned home for a visit. He still considered these peers as friends and valued his connections with them.

In sum, four of these young men found some level of connection with other young African-American men in organizations outside of the school. Their stories suggest that the kind of organization they connected to varied according to their experiences outside the school, the kind of resources they and their parents had access to, the situation at home, and the degree of control their parents wielded in their relationships with their sons. The fact that they belonged to organizations is not surprising. What is significant about the organizations is that they were organizations comprised almost exclusively of African-Americans. Of equal importance is three of the four young men were connected to organizations with

exclusive male membership while Rashaud belonged to a mixed gender organization. It is also significant that for the working-class and middle-class young men their institutional affiliations blurred class lines and highlighted race and gender, rather than class identity. Significantly, this was *not* the case of Dwayne, an underclass youth. These organizations seemed to provide them with an opportunity to affirm their sense of social identity as young African-American men.

Franklin (1992) has written about the nature of relationships African-American working-class men develop. Franklin suggested "because often young black males resist their mothers' primarily single socializing efforts, many of them develop their masculinities according to their own and their peer groups' inventiveness and ingenuity" (p. 212). It seemed that both the working-class and middle-class young men saw the peer groups as very significant in their lives. Their peer groups did not consist solely of youths from school; they also consisted of other friends they met through organizations outside of school. Thus, the peer group formation became an institution that both shaped and was shaped by cultural and structural dimensions of the family and school.

RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

Thus far, the discussion has uncovered these young men's different relationships with families, peers in school, and networks outside of school. Yet these stories are also about their emerging identities. Important to note is the fact that the relationships in their lives were uneven, and that the relationships they sought in school were complemented with relationships they developed through organizations outside of school. In this concluding section I will focus some of the themes that have dominated this chapter: friendships as sites of connection and alienation; trans-social class relationships; community and family connections; and the sense of fragility in the relationships they experienced.

Connection and alienation

Most centrally, their talk about their friendships raises some interesting

questions about the dynamics and conflicts among friends within peer groups. Many

writers characterize the peer group as an all-encompassing place of reference, and

rarely articulate the multiple layers of conflict and connection that interweave peer

relationships. This is particularly true for literature on young African-American

men. For example Taylor (1991) argued that

> The peer group becomes the principal means through which they seek both a
> sense of belongingness and feelings of self-esteem. In fact, for males whose
> fathers are absent from the home, affiliation with street-based peer groups is
> a crucial step towards learning many of the socially defined and normative
> aspects of the male role in the black community and the larger society (Taylor,
> 1991, p. 150).

Taylor raises some significant points about the significance of the peer group. In my

study, the peer group was important for all the young men, *including* the two who had

fathers at home. They all sought peers in and out of school. Within the various

contexts the young men acted out their versions of masculinity. They were also a

places where they helped create it, through their talk about their lives and the lives of

others, and through the beliefs and values emerging from and dominating the very

group to which they belonged. But these peer groups became a place where they not

only developed a sense of "belongingness," as Taylor argued, they were also places

where they learned about conflict, hurt, and alienation. Thus, although the peer group

could be an agent of affiliation, it could also be seen as an agent of alienation. Peer

relationships were complex and while may influenced the young men's sense of self-

esteem were also sometimes inhibited some of the young men from sharing aspects

about their personal lives.

Taylor (1991) also argued that many youth who are alienated from their home

because of "insufficient support, physical abuse, or family accords, and from school

because of repeated failure and humiliation often find street culture a welcome relief

from the anxiety and stress associated with their other environments" (p. 150).

Taylor is convincing in his analysis about the need for the peer group, particularly among African-American men, given their experiences in school, family and beyond. Notwithstanding, many young African-American men in this study had good connections with their parents, albeit occasionally plighted with family conflict, and they still sought connections with a peer group, not just any peer group, but an African-American peer group.

Noting the significance of a group identified as African-American is one issue, another is the complexity of how group membership is sustained, or lost, as in the case of Jeff. Perhaps amiss in many of the discussions of the African-American peer group is the sense of conflict, frustration, affiliation, and alienation that were also defining aspects of the groups these young men belonged to. Notwithstanding these groups are multi-dimensional and conflict producing, and they often promote contradictions. Like Taylor, Mincy (1994) also tends to underplay these dimensions of the peer groups. He wrote,

> Adolescent black males have a propensity to exhibit real, honest, and authentic behavior in all interactions -- that is, for "being for real" or "telling it like it is." They tend not to stifle their true thoughts, feelings, or behaviors in most socials situations. While such authenticity may not always be appreciated or understood by others, black male youths tend to cut to the heart of a matter with their genuineness" (p. 37-38).

Mincy argues an important point about the authentic nature of interactions among black men but I wonder if he manages to capture the variation -- social class, race, sexuality, masculinity, geographical location -- and the multiple and complex ways in which African-American men interact with each other and with others. I am not arguing authenticity might not be a part of peer relationships, rather that the dynamic, contradictory, and contextual aspects of authenticity in friendships may be underplayed through his characterization of authenticity in friendships.

I have argued that peer group and friendships were complex and multilayered as a context for the shaping of the young men's racial masculine identities. At the same time, however, there were differences in their relationships and the forms of

connections the developed that reflected individual choices they made. But these choices were not made arbitrarily. These choices were influenced by structures of power that were reflected in school curriculum, the different classes these young men took, and the formation of racial peers groups in relation to other groups in their particular schools. The emergence of their racial masculinities, as Connell (1993b) noted, "is a collective process, something that happens at the level of the institution and the organization of peer group relationships" (p. 96).

Transgression of social class boundaries

For all the attention to peer group importance, there has been very little research about the friendship patterns of African-American males, and particularly African-American males of differing social class experiences. In a recent study about the perceptions of "impoverished and affluent" youth about social class, Brantlinger (1993) asserted there is a dearth of literature about social class influences on friendships, or about the differences in friendship patterns of different social classes. From her study she argued that the "shared-taste aspect of friendships served to firmly establish class identity. Many of the commonalties in high-income adolescents friendships were simply inaccessible to low-income adolescents because of lack of funds" (p. 164). Her study is about the friendships patterns of youth, with a sample of about 85 percent white students and 15 percent African-American students. Nevertheless, she did not differentiate racial or ethnic accounts for the differences. This is remarkable, but not unusual. Her study is interesting because she asserted that patterns of friendships rarely cut across social class lines, *except* in the case of working-class African Americans. She noted that four of the six African American participants in her study appeared to have close connections with middle-class peers. While Brantlinger pointed to the patterns among the African-American participants as an "exception" to her hypothesis that patterns of friendship rarely cross social class

lines, she did not fully elaborate or explain her understanding of the exception. Her study clearly raises interesting questions for race-class-gender researchers to address as they try to explain the interconnection of race, class, and gender in the relationships of school-going peers. In the end, while I understand that Brantlinger may not be trying to explain the differences between white or African-American relationships, I wonder whether her hypothesis is more about *white* working class and *white* middle class youth rather than an all-inclusive working-class and middle-class youth. Brantlinger's exception, in fact emerged as a dominant pattern among the participants of my study: friendship patterns did cross social class lines, and there also were trans-school relationships. But it was the middle-class youngsters who more commonly crossed social class lines rather than the working-class youngsters. However, most of the young men, with the exception of Dwayne, developed relationships across social class lines in some form or another as they maintained and constructed friendships with peers.

Community and family connections

Friendships were important to the young men. Along with family relationships, they were integral to the connections they formed with their community. Fine (1991) considered the connection of family and community in her study about dropout students. On contrasting community connections of dropout students with graduates she noted that the

> Dropouts failed in traditional academic terms. But perhaps, ironically, they retained intact some connection, even if problematic and temporary, to community, kin, peers, and racial/ethnic identity. . . the dropouts appear more critical of social and economic circumstances and that graduates remain "optimistic" or "naive" about their social or economic circumstances . . . (and) pride themselves on sharing family, but the sharing ends at the boundaries of extended kin, not into the community (p. 135).

Her argument suggests a definite contrast between graduates and dropouts. In contrast, these six young men, all considered as potential high school graduates, a

pattern of connection to both family and community appeared among four of the young

men. Of the remaining two young men, Jeff and Zakeev, Zakeev certainly maintained

connections with his family, while the connections that Jeff maintained with his

family were tenuous, although in the last instance they seemed supportive.

It is through the family and the community connections that these young men

were able to seize opportunities to connect with others and receive different kinds of

support. Granted relationships with family members were complicated and conflict-

ridden. However, although Marcus's and Jeff's relationships with their parents

reflected conflict, they also reflected connection. Family households were also sites

for these young men to develop caring and connected relationships with their brothers

and/or sisters. Their families were important and sustaining influences upon their

connections with school. The families were also sites where they made and lived out

strands of their versions of their masculinities. In the same way, the organizations in

the community were extremely significant in their affirmation of their racialized and

gendered identities. Significantly, for Dwayne, Jeff and Marcus, their organizations

were comprised of African-American men. Thus, on one level we see the significance

of race in the formation of groups, on another, these groups also became sites where

they learned about each other as young men, where they developed their versions of

masculinities.

At the same time, there is no doubt that schooling played a central role in these

young men's friendships patterns. The fact remains, however, few actually developed

the kind of relationships they fervently sought. Only two had friends that they said

they could trust: Marcus and Rashaud. Examining relationships in school provides a

picture of the complexity of relationships with peers in school. Schools became places

where five of the young men appeared to simultaneously strengthen their bonds with

other African-Americans, and also a place where they felt alienated, they needed to

seek bonds, but particular bonds, outside of school. The fact that they were not able to

develop strong connections in school raises questions about the public nature and meritocratic assumptions of school possibly undercut possibilities that non-school networks could provide. Also, the out-of-school bonds could have lessened the need for in-school connections. It is through a combination of the various kinds of relationships across institutions that they were able to sustain themselves: through friendships in school, out of school, and with family members.

Tenuous connections

The puzzle of their relationships in school appears to be complex. Their various stories reveal that these six young African-American men did not have the same kinds of friendships. What they all had in common, however, was their desire for connected and trusting relationships. Thinking about how much they sought friends and relationships, and then the relationships they really called friendships, we learn that their friendships were not as stable as they desired. Also, their relationships in classrooms in the main were not too connected, particularly for the working-class young men. They all had acquaintances at school who they connected with, but only Marcus and Rashaud were able to feel connected to some friends at school. The stories about their relationships with school suggests a somber and depressing picture of young men committed to acquiring the high school diploma, who tried to sustain themselves through school by having strong relationships, yet these relationships in the end seemed tenuous.

Understanding the meanings of schooling that interwove their relationships in and out of school will be the focus of chapter 7. Before I turn to these analyses, I will consider the various racialized and gendered images of themselves and others in and out of school that they talked about. The images provide us with glimpses of how they viewed themselves and reveal how meanings of their social identities were relationally constituted and negotiated.

Chapter 6
IMAGES OF SELF, IMAGES OF OTHERS

In the previous chapter I argued that for the six young African-American men a sense of *connection* was important in the relationships they developed. Such relationships involved respect, trust, and opportunities to share thoughts, feelings, and concerns with an African-American person. In the post-field analysis I began to learn that as they went to school to acquire the high school diploma, they were also involved in the process of constructing meaning about their experiences and themselves. There were aspects of schooling they used to shape their identity and there were also aspects of schooling that shaped their identities. For example, acquiring the diploma was integral to the person they wanted to be and how they wanted to be viewed by others. But the meaning of the high school diploma in their lives was not solely of their making. It was connected to larger institutional structures and practices inside and outside of school. These institutional structures and practices intermingled with their social practices as the young men gave meaning to the high school diploma and encountered relationships in school. As they continued to go to school, they continued to interact with teachers and peers, and continued to develop and change their social identities. Within the intermingling of the structure and culture of schooling in their lives, how and what sense they were able to make of these relationships and events in their lives are significant. While school was about getting the high school diploma, it was also about negotiating the meaning of schooling, the diploma, relationships, and identities. Although these young men sought relationships with peers outside the

institution of schooling, relationships in school remained extremely significant to

their on-going sense of identity and this negotiation of meaning.

In this identity formation process there were certain images that seemed to

become central to them as they developed their sense of their social selves. Some of the

most significant images they talked about were the racial images students held of

themselves and of each other. These images were not just about the way people acted

and talked. They were also about their connection to students through peer groups that

were formed on the basis of racial group membership. It was no accident that students

separated themselves into racial peer groups. This mirrored divisions permeating the

larger society in which schools become one of the sites where racial divisions may be

made. Such racial divisions are formed through a process which Omi and Winant

(1986) argued is a "racial formation process by which social, economic and political

forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are

in turn shaped by racial meanings" (p. 61). Schools became a place where racial

categories were made and given meaning, where these young men tried out their racial

identities and where they observed others try out identities. While many of the

significant images they talked about were racial images, these images were

simultaneously infused with social class and gender meanings. For example, they often

accused other African-American students as "acting white," and in describing what this

meant, it was clear that they were talking about their images of white middle-class

students, not white working-class students. Through these images, they were also

implicitly defining "acting black." And when they suggested someone "acted white,"

they did not simultaneously suggest the person transgressed gendered boundaries.

The frame for this chapter is developed through considering the notion of

images in their lives. This notion of image includes the ways in which they wanted me

and others to see them, the ways they saw others, and the meanings and ideas they gave

to these images. These images did not define their social identity. Rather, they were

part of their social identity. Such identities did not emerge within a vacuum. They were relationally situated within a hierarchical social arrangement shaped by access to race, class and gender, power and privilege. Here, their identities came into being and were giving meaning through their images of experiences with and about others. It seemed that their identities comprised of many images developed in different contexts through different relationships over time. Through focusing on their images of themselves and others in their lives, I also learned how these images were infused with values, beliefs, ideas and behaviors.

Much of the chapter focuses on racial images because they were the images which we spent most time discussing and which seemed most significant to them and their identities in the making. Toward the end of the chapter I discuss Marcus's and Jeff's racialized gendered images of young women, and consider these images in the context of their own emerging masculine identities. I came to see how these various images seemed to intermingle their sense of who they were and who they wanted to be, and who they thought others were and wanted to be. This chapter focuses primarily on the schooling context as the site where they produced and discussed the images of others and themselves. Among the various images I discuss is that of the meanings of "acting white." It is these images that I will discuss first, followed by a discussion about race-gender images.

"ACTING WHITE" AND IDENTITY FORMATION

As noted in the previous chapter, connections with people was a common theme across conversations with the young men. African-American people were important to these young men's sustenance, to their on-going survival, and also to the building of their identity. Interweaving these relationships were also the hegemonic and oppositional images, meanings, and symbols they believed African-American men should or should not embrace. Studies about the intermingling of aspects of hegemonic

culture in the lives of racial minorities (Fine, 1991; Mac an Ghaill, 1987; MacLeod,

1997; Solomon, 1992; Weis, 1985), girls (Grant, 1992; McRobbie, 1991), and

white working-class students (Connell et. al., 1982; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977) all

suggest simultaneous strains of resistance and accommodation as ways in which

students respond to and make sense of their schooling experiences. Across the

literature about racial and ethnic minorities' experiences, notions of resistance and/or

accommodation have been addressed through exploring the racial images and identities

embraced and rejected by African-American students.

In relation to African-American students, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Ogbu

(1991; 1992) have addressed a theme of "acting white" as significant to understanding

African-American students' experiences of schooling, particularly to understanding

the relationships between their emerging social identities and academic achievement.

They argued that the fear of being accused of "acting white" makes many African-

Americans student avoid adopting certain attitudes and behaviors. For example, they

avoid spending time on school work because they and their peers consider such

behaviors as "acting white." They further maintained that the problem of African-

American students not performing at their potential in part is

> because white Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that black
> Americans are capable of intellectual achievement, and partly because black
> Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability, began to
> define academic success as white people's prerogative, and began to discourage
> their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating white people in academic
> striving . . . Because of the ambivalence, affective dissonance, and social
> pressures, many black students who are academically able do not put forth the
> necessary effort and perseverance in their schoolwork, and, consequently do
> poorly in school (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986, p. 177).

Fordham and Ogbu develop their frame through arguing two factors as central to

understanding the expressive dimension of minority-majority group relations:

oppositional social identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference. "Acting

white," according to the students in their study, included the following dimensions:

speaking standard English; listening to white music on radio stations; working hard to

get good grades; getting good grades in school; listening to classical music; being on time. Those students who chose to pursue academic success were perceived by their peers as acting "white" and therefore not truly black (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Weis, 1985). Ogbu (1991) has suggested that a strategy of "cultural inversion" sees African-Americans regarding "certain forms of behavior, events, symbols and meanings as not appropriate for them because they are characteristics of white Americans; at the same time, however, blacks claim other forms of behavior, events, symbols and meanings as appropriate from them because these are not part of white culture" (p. 441).

The development of a framework for thinking about strategies such as "acting white" that African-American students may use to cope in schools is helpful to my study. While I do not seek to explain the connection between coping strategies and academic success of African-American students in schools, I do want to examine and discuss the ways in which these six young African-American men came to see themselves as African-American men and as students, and how images of themselves and others were significant in that process. Various studies about the coping strategies of African-American students provide a basis for understanding the complex nature of schooling for African-Americans. The works also suggests that it is not solely the institution of school that promotes success or failure. The ways in which students respond is also an important influence.

"Acting white" became a significant topic of conversation as I asked these young men to talk about their time outside of classrooms. The topic was not one I initially intended to explore. Rather, conversations about "acting white" emerged spontaneously from all the participants of the study. For example, during a conversation about friends at school, Zakeev used the notion of "acting white" to talk about an African-American middle-class young woman who attended his school. He said, "She tries to act white, but that's not how the white people act. She acts different, she stand out, and

she's black. But she's farther than the white, she wants to be white, but she's farther than them. It's like she's more preppie than they are." Here, Zakeev argued that a young woman he knew embraced certain ways of being that were exaggerated behaviors and attitudes that he connected with white culture in the U.S. As each of the young men raised the topic of "acting white," I began to explore their differences and similarities in the meanings they developed, and why this notion was important for them to talk about.

In talking about schooling, I asked them all to tell me who they hung out with, what they talked about and where they hung out. Their responses were interesting. As noted in the previous chapter, four of the six young men responded that they hung out with a group of African-American students. The two middle-class young men, Shawn and Rashaud, seemed to stress the fact that they hung out with African-American peers, more so than the other young men. These two hung out only with African-American peers and congregated in a particular place in the school they each called "the ghetto." Dwayne and Marcus too hung out with different but exclusively African-American peer groups that congregated in various places within the school. For Jeff and Zakeev, as discussed in the previous chapter, there did not seem a distinct pattern of meeting people in a particular place in school.

Hanging out with particular groups of students, mostly fellow African-American students, did not seem an accident. As Winant (1994) argued, "Race provides a key cultural marker, a central signifier, in the reproduction and expression of identity, collectivity, language, and agency itself. Race generates an 'inside' and an 'outside' of society, and mediates the unclear border between these zones" (p. 30). Race seemed such a cultural marker in the lives of these young men. In this chapter I discuss how they used the groups and interactions and language within these groups to develop and validate the images of who they wanted to be. The groups were also influential in the emerging behaviors and ideas that became significant to

their identities as African-Americans. It is to the various groups that they identified
with that I will now turn.

"Don't hate me because I speak more proper"

I will start by exploring some of the images of African-American and white
identities that were part of Jeff's experiences at school. Racialized images and
interpretations were significant to the formation of his emerging identity. I especially
focus on Jeff because he was the only young man who acknowledged that other students
accused him of "acting white." These students were the peers from his old school,
Central. In the context of Jeff being accused of "acting white," he admitted that he
would "change" his "culture" "to get ahead in life." However, he also suggested in spite
of changing his "culture," "getting ahead" would not be easy because of structural
barriers that lay in his path because he was an African-American.

"Acting white" to Jeff was seemingly part of his strategy to get ahead. He
believed that he had to act and talk in certain ways in order to be successful. At one
time he said to me:

> ... if it takes me to change my culture, to change my speech, to get ahead in
> life, to get that big house with that white picket fence, I'm going to do it. As long
> as it ain't hurting nobody else. Don't hate me because I speak more proper, be
> happy for me, and in return, I'll be there for you. A lot of people don't want to
> see you achieve.

Jeff here presented an idealized symbol of success, a house with a "white picket fence."
He believed a recipe for success included embracing talk and ways of being that he
associated with white people. "Acting white" for Jeff was certainly about achievement.
He saw himself as having to change his culture, be a different kind of person "to get
ahead in life." At the same time, he recognized that his actions clearly evoked conflict.
"Don't hate me," he said, as though he knew that his actions clearly represented a
political act, one that may not be approved of by his peers.

But for Jeff, who spent two years as a sophomore and struggled to get good grades, "acting white" was not just about getting good grades. "Acting white" in itself was synonymous with being a "proper person." His commitment to believing in the importance of "acting white" in order to get ahead seemed to intensify after his entanglement with the criminal justice system and as he moved to the private school. But Jeff was not always like this:

> I was brought up where I used to be around a whole lot of black people and stuff, but [now] I more relate . . .to more proper people. And at Central, you find people like with slang and stuff. I used to talk slang a lot. If you ever talk to my sister, she will sound totally proper. And you will be like "is this the right number?" A lot of people will call my house, and say "who's that white girl on the phone?" My sister is very proper. For another reason, when we came up here, we went to a proper school, Miller Street, and we mostly associated with younger white kids.

Being "proper" was important to Jeff. This was not just about the way he talked or dressed. It was also his connectedness to symbols of 'whiteness' such as school, or *being* with white people. Ironically, although Jeff may have attended a predominantly white elementary school, his friends were predominantly African-American, not white, throughout elementary and middle school. And it was during this time he acknowledged that he "used to talk slang a lot." He had a group of friends that he used to spend most of his recreational time with.

Jeff:	. . . we used to do everything together, they used to come over and spend the night. There wouldn't be a day that I wouldn't go over to their house, go to movies and stuff.
JP:	Was it like a group of three or four people?
Jeff:	Oh yeah, it was two brothers, and two others.
JP:	About four people then.
Jeff:	About four or five of us.
JP:	And were they black or white?
Jeff:	Black.

But Jeff no longer was connected to these friends. In fact, he had few friends. He said that he wasn't "hurting anybody" by talking "proper." But many of his peers were not enamored with Jeff's ways of being and talking. In fact Jeff said that a lot of people at school said things such as "Jeff want to be white. He don't have so many friends." It

seemed that Jeff's way of being that his African-American peers criticized cost him his

friendships. I asked Jeff to elaborate on why some of his peers called him a "sell-out."

JP: People say you're a sellout because of...?
Jeff: How I act, who I go with, who I associate with , how I talk. I like to talk with my hands.
JP: Is that a white thing to do?
Jeff: I don't know, but a lot of people are like "Why are you using your hands?" That's another reason why I like Allerton Christian, 'cause you get a lot of more proper kids there.
JP: Proper in what way?
Jeff: Like you know, they talk more proper, and you can kind of relate to them.
JP: You have to break it down for me now, what does it mean to talk proper?
Jeff: Basically, not to talk in slang. Like "hello" instead of "yo." I might joke around with my friends and stuff and say "watsup (inaudible)"
JP: What about dressing?
Jeff: You can say I dress kind of preppie.
JP: Is it a conscious effort for you, or does it seem natural?
Jeff: It seem natural, regardless. I used to say to a lot of black people too, "Oh you just want to be white," and all this other stuff.
JP: You used to say that?
Jeff: Well I used to think that. It's just a process, you know . . . Another reason, 'cause I talk too properly, they say "Oh you just want to be a white person" . . . You might get a few of them, like "you act white" and stuff, they don't want to be involved with you.

It is interesting that Jeff's move to a new predominantly, and almost exclusively, white

private school saw him feeling better able to "relate" to his peers. Most significant is

his account of moving to a stance of "acting white" as "just a process." While he

admitted that he used to say to some African-Americans, "Oh, you just wanna be

white," he later began to live out the kind of identity he criticized.

The question becomes, how do we account for such a change? To argue that the

change in schools, or his entanglement with the criminal justice system, were the

influences upon Jeff's new ways of being would be to discount his prior experiences in

school and in the larger society where he had constantly learned about "proper" people.

As he grew up, he learned about the high value placed on symbols he associated with

white people, and it seems that at some point he decided to appropriate them as part of

his identity. The need and desire to appropriate the symbols has to be understood

within a context of what Jeff thought he needed to do and be in relation to the dominant symbols and images of "whiteness." In the meantime, the friends he grew up with became disconnected from him, and it was students with whom he shared no personal history, but a common way of "acting," that he chose to associate with. Jeff suggested that the way he talked, acted, and dressed may have been the reason some African-American students disassociated themselves from him.

Although Jeff may have acted in ways that Ogbu (1991) may view as "choosing academic success" (p. 186), he was not a high-achieving student. In fact, academic achievement as such was not a crucial issue in his life. He was in mostly the low-track classes, and he did not achieve high grades at either school. And, until the time he moved to the private school, he was very disenchanted with school and disengaged from classroom work. In fact, while Jeff seemed to resist the pressures of his African-American peers to conform to certain behaviors and ways of talking that they sanctioned, he simultaneously was not an academically successful student. The cost for Jeff of "acting white" was the loss of his boyhood friends and connections.

Frankenberg's (1993) study of the social construction of "whiteness" among white women is helpful here as I unravel the complexity of Jeff's construction of his identity. She provides us with her conception of whiteness, where she argues that

> First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege.
> Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves
> and others, and at our society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural
> practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 1)

These three aspects of the social construction of whiteness are helpful to thinking about these young African-American men's construction of "acting white." Most importantly, Jeff may have taken on certain cultural practices that are associated with white people, but his social location was not a position of structural advantage. Jeff may have been able to name and embrace certain cultural practices associated with "whiteness," but at the same time he was penalized through institutional and cultural practices because of the location of African-Americans in a race hierarchy in the U.S.

For Jeff, much of his success was about how things *looked*. He wanted to dress certain ways, talk certain ways, and to go the "proper" school. For Jeff, acting these ways was important to him. To an observer this might not have seemed to add up to much. But for Jeff, his ways of being seemed important enough for him to continue to act, dress and talk in ways considered as "acting white." Ironically, at one point he told me that "what white people do is they like to keep the white race, their brother man up there out of the level of poverty." Here, he seemed to suggest that it is white people who create the conditions to protect white people from falling into poverty, and the same privilege is not afforded African-American people. Thus, the fact that Jeff believed that it was harder for an African-American person to get ahead than a white person and he acknowledged that being "proper" was related to "whiteness" suggests that he recognized some barriers ahead of him. Consequently, despite Jeff's "acting white," and resisting and rejecting connections with his friends and peers, his identity reflected a hegemonic culture and simultaneously acknowledged structural inequality.

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Forging an identity, particularly within the context of schools that did not always represent their needs or interests as African-American students, undoubtedly heightened their sense of their own racial identity and others. Being at ACS, with an African-American population of three percent, must have further heightened his sense of his own racial identity, given the school had almost exclusively a white students body. I will now turn to how the other five young men rejected symbols and images that were "white" and embraced those that they considered African-American as they shaped their sense of social identity.

"Just trying to be someone you're not."

Rashaud and Shawn, the two middle-class students, provided more detailed accounts about the racial identities and group formations at school than those of the

other young men in the study. They each told me that all students at Cedarville High hung out in a particular area of the school. They identified two main groups at school, namely "the preppies" and the African-American students. Rashaud said in one section, "the commons," there were "your little white kids and some of the wannabes." A "wannabe" was someone who "wanna be accepted by whites," he said. Some of these "wannabes" were African-American while others were Asian or Latino. "I don't want to say sell-out, oreo, Uncle Tom, it's not like that deep. You have your kids who don't want to hang out with us," he said. In his section, which he called "the ghetto," were mostly African-American students, joined by a few Latino students. At the same time, he suggested that those students who did not hang out in the "ghetto" were not quite a "sell-out." "It's not that deep," he said. Perhaps he was alluding to the fact that their actions do not represent an overt political act of rejecting African-American culture.

To Rashaud, "acting white" meant the way students "act, talk, dress." And while these ways of talking, acting and dressing were about racial identities, they were also about their gendered identities in that the ways in which we dress, talk, and act reflect and make gender divisions. But the notion of acting white, to Rashaud, overtly signified racial meanings. In addition to talking, acting, and dressing in particular ways, "acting white" to Rashaud also meant "acting fake . . . When I say someone's acting white, they are not in touch with being black." I asked Rashaud to elaborate on his idea that some African-American youth are not "in touch" with being black:

> Rashaud: They would rather disregard seeing, going to see Malcolm X, or learning about heritage, instead going to see *Home Alone* or something stupid like that. Or to go, they would rather support something like, what's a good analogy or metaphor? They would rather support a country club which is predominantly white, which they couldn't possibly get into . . . instead of going to the Black Family and Child Institute in Allerton, and donating energy and effort.
>
> JP: And getting good grades, is that anything to do with acting white?
>
> Rashaud: No, that's acting smart.

Interestingly, Rashaud viewed getting good grades not as "acting white" but as "acting smart", whereas Jeff viewed getting ahead and "acting white" as being "proper." Jeff's

conception of "acting white" was much broader than Rashaud's view. The fact that Rashaud attended a middle-class school and was a successful student with more options available to him than Jeff while Jeff has not been an academically successful student, could in part explain their different perspectives. Further, Rashaud's view of students who "acted white" was not only about students who did not actively associate with black students at school. It also involved being connected with the larger black community through viewing certain movies about African-Americans, learning about African-American "heritage," and getting involved in community issues.

Maintaining a sense of *connection* was important to Rashaud, and his association with other African-Americans seemed to help him preserve his sense of racial identity. This was also important to Shawn, who attended the same school as Rashaud. About the African-American students who "acted white," Shawn said such ways of being "offends a lot of black people, you know, they [the students who "act white"] are ashamed to be black." He too hung around in the same area of the school as Rashaud, and admitted he "criticizes black students who hang around in the commons." He explained further, "It's not that I hate white people. It's just that I have more fun around black people." But Shawn had not always hung around the "ghetto" area. When he first arrived in the school in Grade 10 he used to frequent "the commons" area of the school.

> I used to hang around there often, and one of the black friends said "Why are you hanging around here? Don't you know they're racists over here and everything?" And ever since that day, I've been hanging around [black students] . . . But even in my sophomore year, I never really did associate with that many people. I was a new kid in my sophomore year. I was trying to find out where I fit in anyway.

Here, Shawn suggested he accepted his fellow-student's remarks and recognized the need to distance himself from racism. He thus began to associate with students who hung around the "ghetto" area. It may be the need to distance himself from racism, rather than specifically wanting to connect with African-American students that saw him frequenting the "ghetto" area of the school. Nevertheless, the fellow-student's comments suggest that the African-American students at his school worked to maintain

a culture of solidarity among themselves. This was in part accomplished by developing

an oppositional stance in relation to the white students at the school.

Essentially to Shawn, "acting white" meant "just trying to be someone you're

not." It also meant whom you associated with. "I mean if you are black, and always

hanging around with white students, you never come over and hang around with the

black students, don't speak to any of the black students" was problematic to him. But

division between black and white students was not only maintained through black

students consistently being connected with each other through frequenting a particular

part of the school building. It was also maintained through collective responses to

white students. For example, Shawn told me that "the blacks in our area, they always

tease the white people, and a white person walks past and they are scared. And they are

not going to hurt them. One guy was leaving his school, and he saw us, and he started

locking his car doors." Such collective actions by African-American students,

combined with the responses by white students, served to reinforce the separation of

African-American and white students and created tension between them. The actions

also served to reinforce connection and to consolidate social group membership among

the African-American students. It is perhaps the racial association aspect of their

social group that was the most consistent aspect of "acting white" that runs through the

conversations of Rashaud and Shawn.

Although Rashaud was extremely successful at school, he simultaneously seemed

to reject aspects of "acting white." He was on the honor roll and in almost exclusively

"advanced-track" courses, yet outside of class he hung around exclusively with

African-American students and saw his connections with the group as important to his

social identity. In Rashaud's eyes, academic achievement did not seem to be part of his

sense of "acting white." In fact, the other young men in the study also did not see

achieving good grades as part of "acting white." This was not surprising in relation to

Rashaud or Shawn, as many students at their school were high achievers, with almost ninety percent of the students going on to college.

Interestingly, Rashaud criticized the students who "acted white," yet he also said he adopted a particular way of talking that consciously was not slang.

> I don't talk like, "yeah you," and all that. I try to use good English wherever I can. I don't smoke, I don't do drugs, I don't shoot dope, I'm not running in the streets all the time. And I . . . don't drink at parties and I don't boom music till all times of the night.

So while Rashaud criticized others for "acting white," part of his sense of his identity was to not be involved with drugs, or alcohol, and not have "loud music till all times of the night." As noted earlier, Rashaud saw himself as a "role model," and how he acted as a teenager was important to that image. This image also included speaking "good English." In contrast, Zakeev and Marcus considered this kind of talk as "acting white." Their differing meanings of "acting white" could have been dynamically shaped by social class experiences.

In other regards, Marcus's and Zakeev's meanings of "acting white," however, did not dramatically differ from Shawn's or Rashaud's meanings. As noted earlier, Zakeev spoke of a young African-American woman who "acted white," and he suggested her affect was integral to her "acting white." "Acting white" to Marcus was "how you talk. It's just how white folks say stuff. It's sounds crazy." Zakeev said that acting white to him meant, "The meaning is, what people say, white people are corny . . . They're like stuck up, like they are better than everybody else . . . And there are some black people that way." Zakeev adamantly argued that despite the predominance of "white" ways of being at his school, he would not change the way he spoke.

> Zakeev: White people to me they talk . . . they try to keep proper English, proper that, proper this . . . everything's right, everything's perfect. They don't like to be wrong.
> JP: Do you have to change the way you speak when you speak to white people?
> Zakeev: I won't. I refuse.
> JP: Why's that?
> Zakeev: Because, I don't have to. I shouldn't have to, I'm American and that's the way I talk, you accept it or you don't.

Zakeev vehemently argued that he was not going to change his speech style. This conversation was not about African-American people who "acted white," it was a criticism of his sense of white people. Zakeev's criticism differed from Rashaud's, who did not criticize white people, but African-Americans who, in his mind, "acted white."

Marcus also said there were a number of students who "act white" at school. An example of the ways in which language use indicated embracement of racial identity became apparent in one of our conversations:

JP: And the other thing I wanted to find out from you, being cool. Do you often say, "he's a cool dude."
Marcus: Not cool (laughs).
JP: Is that a white word?
Marcus: Yeah, that's what they say, "cool dude."
JP: So what do you say?
Marcus: Fresh, you don't put dude on it, that's the thing (laughs). That's how you can distinguish a white person from a black person, because they always put their little words in there. Like dude, after a certain word. Like we say hard or something like that. Fresh. Can say something like "cool daddy," or something like that.
JP: What's that mean?
Marcus: It's just smooth.
JP: What do you have to be to be smooth?
Marcus: It's just a figure of speech, it's not really nothing, a lot of people try to be hard, 'cause wearing all their little stuff, pimpin' down the hallway.
JP: What's pimpin'?
Marcus: It's a walk, a certain walk.

This conversation reveals how use of language enabled Marcus to distinguish between "white" and "black" ways of being. He clearly suggested that the difference was not just a matter of how a person pronounced words. It was the very meanings associated with words that were significant. Like Shawn and Rashaud, "acting white" also involved "who you hang around with all the time." He suggested that his brother was someone who "flat out, he just act white . . . You know, he'd do for his white friends all the time before he would do for his kinfolk." Marcus was very angry with the way his brother acted. Such a person to Marcus was a "sell-out":

To me it's people going against their own race. Like turning over their whole life to please the white man. Basically I have one at work . . . When I started saying something black power stuff, and everybody hitting on it, Malcolm X stuff and all that. He don't want to hear about it. He blow me off.

This example of the African-American coworker provided a glimpse of how work, besides school, became another context where Marcus learned about his relationship to white people and constructed his meanings of white culture. "Acting white" to Marcus was about relationships with white people. It was also about relationships with African-American people whom he suggested acted white. So, his stance was constructed both in relation to white culture and the way it was manifested in the lives of white people and some black people. Marcus, like Rashaud, valued conversations about African-American culture and saw such conversations as significant in his relationships with other African-Americans.

Marcus said that the social context was influential in what people learned about culture, and in associated ways of being and talking. At one point he said that

> Basically, I think it's because it's the environment that you grew up in too. Because if you going live in a white neighborhood, you're going to act that way just to please them . . . To me it's people going against their own race. Like turning over their whole life to please the white man.

Here, he situated his notion of racialized ways of being through power relations between white and black people. He saw people who "acted white" as "going against their own race. It seemed that Marcus's conception of African-American ways of being was important to him because the ways of being in his mind stood *in opposition* to white ways of being. But the image is not a simple dichotomous one; it is relational. Marcus, like Rashaud, Shawn and Zakeev, constructed the image of being African-American in relation to white people and in relation to African-American people who in his mind "acted white."

In contrast to Marcus and the others I've discussed so far, conversations about the way people acted and the infusion of racial identity in talk and ways of dressing did not seem significant issues to Dwayne. In a sense, Dwayne's concern was less about trying to be "proper," "being someone you're not," or juggling tensions in order to get ahead. The issue for Dwayne, and his peers from Detroit, was "survival." Part of that survival, when he lived in Detroit, was living out social practices that his "brothers"

collectively sanctioned. As he said at one point, "It takes street smartness, knowing the game, knowing how to survive." So for Dwayne and his peers, issues of getting ahead were seen differently from the other five young men. Dwayne said of his friends in Detroit:

> They feel there is no way out, all the odds is against them. That's what the world had gave them, you know there's nobody in the family, they look at the other people and they want to be like them . . . they want to make money, they want to be on top.

Dwayne talked at length about why and how people around him in inner city Detroit got involved in crime as a vehicle to material wealth and status. For him the battle to forge an image to his liking was not predominated by a tension between living out white or black culture, but a tension between embracing street culture or not. Not to be involved with street culture meant not being involved in crime and staying out of jail. And while Dwayne lived in Allerton for a time, before running away from his foster home and returning to Detroit in February 1993, the issues relating to "acting white" did not seem of significance to him. Nonetheless, he told me that all his friends at Central were African-American, and he did not interact with white students at school.

Across the various interpretations of "acting white," it became clear that for the two middle-class young men the issue was about who they associated with, how people dressed and acted, and the beliefs and attitudes they held about the African-American community. For Marcus and Zakeev the form of talk was significant too. Across these four young men, their critique of "acting white" was not just about a response to other African-Americans in school who "acted white." It was about how they wanted to represent themselves as African-Americans. "Acting white" was also about the images they themselves tried to live out as African-Americans. For Rashaud and Marcus it was also a criticism of white cultural practices.

These four young men, Marcus, Rashaud, Shawn and Zakeev, tried to live out an image that was different from Jeff's or Dwayne's. All the while, the six were *all*

committed to being successful in school. So what were the images that they embraced as African-Americans? While Jeff seemed to embrace a "white" image, did the other young men embrace a common image of being an African-American? Or, in the case of the four who opposed the "acting white" image, was it solely their opposition to "acting white" that they shared? Exploring such questions is helpful to understanding the images of African-Americans these young men tried to build and negotiate for themselves as African-American men. Common among five of the young men, with the exception of Jeff, was their desire to challenge forms of racism or racist images through various forms of talk and actions. In order to consider the ways in which they came to see themselves as African-American men, I will now turn to the ideas they shared with me about their images of African-Americans.

IMAGES OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS

Talk about images the young men embraced, or the images of "acting white" they rejected or acted in opposition to, was simultaneously talk about how they saw themselves as African-American men. As noted, four of the young men rejected certain ways of acting or talking, suggesting that particular "white" ways of being were inappropriate for African-American men. What was most important to four of the young men was being seen by others as associating with African-Americans. But this was not the only aspect of their image of themselves that they saw as significant. Marcus, Rashaud, and Dwayne saw challenging dominant images of African-Americans as important. Marcus believed that knowledge of African-American history and experiences was significant, and Rashaud believed that promoting himself as an "outstanding" student was significant. While Dwayne did not want to be classified as a "statistic." It is to these various images that I will now turn.

Self as "outstanding" African-American

Rashaud provided the most detailed list of various images of African-American

people. He suggested a range of images of African-American identities. His various

images included "militant," "mainstream" "outspoken but civil," "on-the-corner

hanging-out type," and finally "the outstanding." He offered these categories in

response to a question I posed to him:

> JP: People say the African-American community is diverse, how would
> you describe that diversity within the African-American
> community?
> Rashaud: You have strong militant, pro-black African-Americans, and then
> you have your mainstream African-Americans. You have your
> outspoken but still civil African-Americans, you have your let's see,
> on-the-corner hanging-out type African-Americans. Then you have
> the others -- and others can classify as any type of person, anyone...
> JP: Where would you put yourself in those groupings?
> Rashaud: I think there is other, then is outstanding. I probably would put
> myself with outstanding, just because, you don't try to be
> conservative, but you try to be outspoken but you don't try to be
> militant, but you do try to put your point across. But you don't try to
> be hanging out at the corner.

Rashaud's category of "outstanding" African-American represented an image of

someone who was *not* part of the other categories. It was someone who spoke out but

was not "militant." It was also someone who was not "hanging-out at the corner." He

elaborated on his position further by arguing that "I'm not very Afrocentric, but I do

stand behind what my people say." Rashaud's images of African-Americans possibly

captured both hegemonic images of African-Americans and images shaped by responses

from the African-American community as they have challenged oppression and

exploitation, and as some embraced white cultural practices. He seemed to weigh up

all these images in his mind and in relation to these images carved out an image for

himself that draws from the array of images. He described the image of himself as

"outstanding." Through creating this image he does not ignore his racial identity; he

believed that the image of himself as an "outstanding" student would challenge white

conceptions about African-Americans and be a source of encouragement for African-

Americans.

This complex image that he painted of himself perhaps reveals how identities are situated and negotiated in context. In this case, his context was a family where the idea of "role models" was strong and predominantly white middle-class school and neighborhood in which he was a racial minority. In Chapter 3, I noted that he wanted to be a "role model" to his family and peers to encourage others to follow his successes and to challenge hegemonic images about African-American young men who drop out of school, who are unemployed, or who are involved in the drug culture. Ironically, he used dominant notions of school success to develop this image of "outstanding." His relationships with African-Americans and whites in his neighborhood and beyond impacted the ways in which he chose to live out his identity and the partial images he chose to embrace as he interacted with others in school. Rashaud's sense of the image he tried to live out as an African-American was different from Marcus's.

African-American Identity as knowledge

Marcus too spoke about different ways of being among the African-American students. Possibly, he would fall within Rashaud's category of "strong militant, pro-black African-American." It seemed that for Marcus, being an African-American was not only about the ways he talked, or acted, it was also "educating" himself about the history and experiences of African-Americans in the U.S. The image of the young African-American man he portrayed was not solely one shaped by actions, behaviors, or way of talking. It was also shaped by displaying knowledge about African-American experiences and events with African-Americans. *What* African-Americans talked about was significant to him. For example, Marcus said that his commitment to talking about the plight of African-American was well known among his peers at school. At one point he told me that

> Everybody at school know I'm into that and they respect me for that. They
> always like to hear me talk about this stuff. I ain't got no problem talking about
> the stuff. That's what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to educate myself, so I can
> educate my other brothers and sisters.

Marcus was pretty clear about how he wanted to be seen by others and how he earned

their "respect."

> If you can't accept me for who I am, I've got to dress up, look all pretty for you,
> you can forget it man. It ain't all about that, accept me for who I am. Not for
> who you want me to be.

Being an African-American also meant more than just understanding the plight of

African-Americans, it also meant educating each other. Just as Zakeev argued he was

not going to change the way he talked, Marcus argued that he was going to dress and be

who he wanted to be. But what was it that Marcus wanted to be accepted as? We are

offered a glimpse of how he interacted with other students at school as he told me how

he confronted students who wore Malcolm X T-shirts yet really did not understand what

Malcolm X represents:

> I say, "How can you wear something when you don't know what it stands for?"
> That's how I feel. I say, "How can you all wear that and go against what he says."
> One of the things he was saying was not to fight your other brothers. You know,
> you don't see him going around fighting his black brothers, he was going against
> the white man, he wasn't going against his own people. I say, "So how can you
> wear his shirt, and don't go by what he stands for?" That don't make no sense. I
> say to everybody, I say" Do you know what he stands for?" If they wear Martin
> Luther King [T-shirt] I say, "Do you know what he stands for?" 'Cause people
> don't really get down to, they give you them little books and em, church and all
> this stuff, but they don't really get deep down into the deep stuff about it. It
> just tells the basic stuff when he was on TV and all, it don't tell his life. Away
> from home, away from the media. People just read the basic, Malcolm X
> powerful, power to the people, just like you've got Black History month, every
> year.

The interaction Marcus described illuminates how he interacted with other African-

Americans about his racial identity. For Marcus, it seems that wearing symbols of

racial identity seemed inadequate. To him, it was important to understand the texture

of Malcolm X's life, not just today's revisionist versions. He maintained he was vocal

with students about the importance of knowing African-American history, and he

argued that efforts must be made to read and understand more than "the basics," such as

"power to the people." He wanted his peers to understand how the ideas Malcolm X

articulated are important in the building of unity of African-American people. At the

same time, it was only through the act of Marcus sharing his knowledge about African-

Americans that he was able to validate his image among his African-American peers.

Challengers of dominant images of African-Americans

Understanding power relations between black and white people was certainly a

strand of Marcus's sense of what it meant to be an African-American person. He asked

the question, "How can a black person be racist? We don't have nothin' to be racist

about. Basically, they [white people] got the power, we don't." His frustration was not

just about power per se. It was also about how power was wielded. For example, at one

point he talked about the images of African-Americans that dominate the media:

> Basically what I want white folks to know is don't treat me like . . . a person
> that just do their labor, that you can just boss around. We're people too, we're
> not just animals. And that's how they try to put black folks, like in the news, in
> the media . . . You know how they say black folks are all bad. You know they
> always have something in the Detroit news . . . You don't see us going down and
> getting that stuff [drugs] And if they really wanted it to stop coming into the
> United States, they can. Really, the government, has something to do with it. I
> think they are the one's that are doing the stuff. You *know* they doing the stuff.

While Marcus challenged the images of African-Americans dominating the media, he

also argued that relationships between black and white people are about the economic

exploitation of African-Americans in the economy. Further, Marcus maintained that

the current drug problem in the U.S. is not solely the problem of the African-American

community, and that white people were significantly involved in the drug industry, yet

African-American people were portrayed as "bad." Dwayne argued a similar position

in relation to the control of the drug industry by white people:

> My opinion, you know, I don't think it is right, because when you look down,
> you don't see no black man flying no plane over here, across the United States
> over to here . . . I ain't got nothing against whites, ain't' saying all whites is all
> wrong, you know, it themselves they're making it. They rich. Then it comes
> down to the little pushers on the streets, and they goin' to do what they got to do

But these are the only two who so vehemently brought arguments about white

domination to the conversation. Notably, Dwayne was from the underclass and Marcus

was working class. The other working-class and middle-class participants did not

bring an economic analysis to the conversation. It was the images imbued with ideas

about economic oppression that they wanted to challenge through the images they

embraced and the identities they constructed.

In a previous chapter, I noted that Dwayne was trying to be a different kind of

person than he was in Detroit. This was difficult for him. His experiences also

influenced the images that he had of white people:

> I guess my experience, is like I say, kind of hard. Like we going in places like
> in the country when I went to placement, and things like that, mostly the
> majority of people are white people around, I'm not prejudice at all, I don't
> know how they just treat people like that. We all can breathe or whatever, we
> got the same mouth . . . just a different color. . . True, the United States of
> America was given to us, and they locked us up. As far as being, you know
> around white people, they plant stuff, doing those sneaky little thangs, and they
> just stood there laughin' in your face, to keep nigger boy down, or whatever.

Here Dwayne is referring to his experiences in a juvenile home where many of those in

authority were white people. These were the images that he carried of white people.

Embedded in these images is the image of African-American people oppressed.

Challenging racial dominance was also important to Zakeev. He noted that there

was racial discrimination in the U.S. and he wanted to do something about it. He said,

> . . . there is a lot of black people standing up and saying discrimination is a
> problem. And I want to be one of those black people that stand up and says "Hey
> there is a problem."

Zakeev's sense of racial identity and the importance of race in certain contexts varied

and changed according to the situation. He told me that he really didn't always think

about race. Yet when I began asking him about relationships between black and white

students, particularly black men and white women, he said, "In a way I don't like it

that way, deep down inside of me, like no, like ugh. I don't know . . . but after a while I

try to accept it." Zakeev here revealed how he was resistant to the idea of interracial

relationships but was trying to be more accepting of such relationships. Race

interweaved the images and values and beliefs that Zakeev held. Sometimes he said that

he didn't think about racial issues much, while other times he said that he wanted to

fight against racial discrimination, such as the Eurocentric curriculum in his history

classroom. In the final analysis, Zakeev, as an African-American, embraced certain values, ideas, and beliefs that he associated with the African-American community and his stance was not much different from that of either Marcus or Dwayne. "Knowing your roots" was important to Zakeev. At one point he said, "If you live by them [whites] a lot, you won't know your roots very much." His statement reveals his understanding of how he and others learn about culture through association and connection in context. Zakeev, Marcus, and Dwayne all spoke about and challenged issues connected to racial discrimination. In contrast, racialized power relations did not seem a significant concern to the two middle-class participants, Rashaud and Shawn, nor to Jeff.

"Hockey is just a white sport!"

It wasn't just through people not being "fake" or being a "sell-out" through how they acted, talked, or dressed, or what they talked about, that indicated these African-American students' commitment towards a collective identity. Symbols within school were appropriated to affirm their racial identity were also significant. Sport, for example, was a significant symbol to them. Just as involvement with sport is a major social context where masculine identities are developed (see, Messner, 1992), so it is an institution where racial identities develop and change. For example, during a conversation, Rashaud told Latasha and me about an African-American student, who had recently moved to Cedarville from Maryland, who played hockey. Both Rashaud and Latasha, an African-American friend, considered hockey an inappropriate sport for African-Americans to play:

Rashaud: Basically, Clyde came from Maryland . . . he was going to an all-black school where they had to bus in white kids. And he turned out, and he turned out white out of an all-black school. That's so uncommon. When . . . Clyde got here, and it was like a shock. It's like "what's up, what's goin' on?" And a couple of days later we see him walking around and we say "what are you doing?" . . . and my man had tried out for varsity hockey. Now this is like the only black kid on the varsity hockey team. Of all the hockey teams in the

	tricounty area. I swear Clyde is the only one [African-American] And everybody is like "what?"
JP:	When you say everybody, you mean all the African-American kids?
Rashaud:	Yeah, and all the white kids were saying it.
JP:	Why is that? Are there certain sports that African-American kids play and white kids play?
Rashaud & Latasha:	*(In unison)* Hockey is just a white sport!

While some readers may argue that Clyde playing hockey actually challenged the attachment of race identities and meanings to certain sports, his actions also provide opportunities for students to further rally around a symbol they used to affirm their racial identity. They seemed to use their opposition to Clyde's practice as a way of reinforcing their own racial identities and symbols and meanings associated with their racial identities.

At the same time, five of the six young men saw basketball as a black sport. In the same way, this sport activity was seen as a symbol of their racial identity. By the same token, however, only three of the six young men played basketball almost every day. Dwayne, Marcus, and Zakeev all talked about playing basketball after school with friends. Most of the time, they played with other young African-Americans from their neighborhood. It is interesting that the two middle-class young men and Jeff, who was working class and had middle class aspirations, did not play basketball much. But even though the others did not play much sport, they were still spectators of sport. Although sport activity, whether through being a player or observer, may be seen as a vehicle for expression of racial identity, it was simultaneously an activity that is deeply gendered. Messner (1992) argued that competitive sport for players and spectators alike becomes a vehicle for the construction of masculinities, where boys and men learn about hegemonic ideas about what it means to be male. He further argued that "sport at once is a domain of contested national, class, and racial relations, at least symbolically, as a separate and superior group to women" (p. 19). Thus sport becomes an activity and a symbol not only of racial identity, but also gendered identity. Hence, their participation in sport -- either as players or spectators -- provided

opportunities for the young men to live out their versions of their racialized masculinities.

The images presented here are only a few of the images of African-Americans they talked about with me, and only some of the images that shaped their racial sense of self and the racial sense of others. These young men were in the process of becoming, not just young men, but young African-American men. These identities seemed to be formed in relation to racialized divisions in sport that they reinforced, in opposition to their beliefs about white people's conceptions of African-Americans, and in the case of Marcus, in the tradition of historical figures who have powerfully shaped the struggle against racist oppression in the United States. As we discussed these various racialized images, for instance talk about "acting white," it became apparent that much of what they represented as African-American cultural practice was shaped in part by their opposition to conceptions of white cultural practices. This maybe is not surprising as they had had white cultural practices thrust upon them, with little or limited opportunity to learn and affirm their own histories and cultural practices that would strengthen their self image. Instead, they were struggling to define themselves in schooling contexts that were overwhelmingly shaped by institutional and social practices that seemed to perpetuate racial division through privileging some images, representations, and social practices, and subordinating others.

While most of these images have focused on the racial aspects of images they constructed, these images were simultaneously gendered. Of importance here is that these racial images were not dichotomous; rather they were relationally constituted. In order to better understand the interconnection between race and gender, I will turn to some ways in which race-gender images of others influenced them.

IMAGES AND RELATIONS OF GENDER AND RACE

Images of gender and race became prevalent as the young men actually talked about gendered images that were simultaneously racial images. However, few of the young men actually talked at length about their gendered images of women. Given that it was Marcus and Jeff who talked most about their images of women, this section will focus on their narratives about their images of women. These images are important in understanding their racialized masculine identities in the making. The images are also important in understanding how school contexts shape the versions of masculinities they enacted.

White women, black masculinity and schooling

Jeff's relationships with others at Central and the friends he grew up with were not terminated solely because he transgressed an apparent racial boundary through the way he acted. The relationships also were tenuous because of his relationship with Sharon, who was white. Jeff said that a lot of his African-American peers did not associate with him because of the way he acted or talked. At the same time, however, because of the way he talked and acted, Jeff said, "It was just like a lot of more white girls was more attracted to me, dancing and start dating with them." In fact, Jeff began dating white girls more than he dated African-American girls. The picture of Jeff "acting white" seemed to be not only about getting ahead, it was also about him embracing images associated with dominant white culture. Jeff believed that his embrace of "acting white" was influential in him being able to date white girls. Further, "acting white" was enacted through dating white women.

But Jeff not only went out with white young women, he fathered a child with a white young woman. It was his relationship with Sharon that additionally provoked a tenuous relationship with his boyhood friends and many of his African-American peers at school, male and female. He said that

Yeah, a lot of people don't like me at Central also because of Sharon. They don't like to see somebody happy. You know you've got something good going on. (They say) "If I can't have nothing, you can't." You get rumors goin' around.

Probing Jeff further to uncover the nature of the rumors, he told me, "I think another thing is that Sharon used to be a virgin, a lot of guys get jealous, because 'how come I couldn't get it?' and all this other stuff." Thus, being "proper" was not just about talking and acting, it was also about his sexuality. As Lorber (1994) noted, "The social construction of sexuality is tied to the social construction of gender by marking off categories of who it is proper to mate and have children with" (p. 64).

The fact that Jeff mentioned Sharon losing her virginity, and Jeff was her sexual partner, suggests ways in which sexual conquests are viewed as status symbols among *young men* and are integral to proving a certain kind of masculinity, a heterosexual masculinity. This talk about Sharon potentially confirmed not only Jeff's masculinity but also a kind of masculinity where his heterosexuality was part of the fabric of his masculine identity as an African-American. Another way in which he was able to live out his quest of "acting white" was not only to date a white girl but to father her child. The image of Jeff becoming a father enthralled him: "I was happy, I was overjoyed," he told me. The relationship with Sharon may have contributed towards the affirmation of the gendered identity he embraced. At the same time, his relationship with Sharon took on an important gendered significance in his relationships with other men, particularly African-American men. Notably, he did not share information about his fatherhood with the white male students at his new school. This suggests that gendered identities are not only formed in relation to women, but are also formed in particular contexts in relation to men through the various kinds of masculinities lived out by men.

Although the talk about Jeff and his relationship with Sharon may or may not have affected his relationships with others, what was significant was that this young African-American man, already aware of the damaging images of African-American

men dominating society, aware of the hardships that face black young men, seemed to place emphasis on the need to assert his masculinity in the arena of school. It was through making public at Central his sexual relationship with Sharon that he was able to accomplish this. Through this relationship, "sex is prized not as a testament of love but as testimony to control of another human being" (Anderson, 1990, p. 114). The relationship became a vehicle to prove his self-esteem and pride and his heterosexual masculinity. As Massey (1991) argued, "Black boys engage in sexual activity earlier as a result of other blockages in the opportunity structure in our society" (p. 119). Sexual activity possibly becomes a way to exert his sense of masculinity, given a context imbued with distorted and hegemonic images of African-American men and his harrowing experiences with school and the criminal justice system. He fathered the child before his encounter with the criminal justice system, but after the experience he became almost entranced with the idea that he was a father. It seemed as though the criminal justice system had stripped him of his sense of manhood and thus fatherhood became a mechanism whereby he was able to regain his sense of masculinity.

Interestingly, while Jeff made public his sexual relationship with Sharon at Central, he chose to be silent about his fatherhood at ACS. He decided that revealing such information to peers at ACS was inappropriate. His decision not to share these details of his life with white peers at ACS further revealed how Jeff used the social context of schooling to live out certain images of race and masculinity. At Central, it seemed important to his sense of manhood to reveals aspects of his relationship, while at ACS he made a different decision. He seemed to use fatherhood to define his identity in relation to African-American men at his old school, but not in relation to the white men at his newer school, ACS. An interesting question that I did not explore with Jeff was whether he chose not to talk about his fatherhood because he thought sexual activity as a teenager would tarnish his image at ACS, or whether he chose not to talk about his fatherhood because he had a relationship with a white young woman.

Clearly, Jeff did not make these decisions arbitrarily. He seemed strongly influenced by different institutional and cultural contexts of the two schools. These two different responses reveal how masculinities are actively and relationally made in context and the influence of the institutional and cultural forces in schools in the making of masculine identities.

Jeff's relationships with others in school, then, were not only about his racialized identity, they were also about his gendered identity. While gender seemed to enter Jeff's conversations only in his talk about the sexual relationship between himself and Sharon, gender was present in *all* his conversations about his identity. When he "acted" in particular ways, he was not wanting to embrace femininity but masculinity. In this way, it seemed that his embrace of "acting white" was not only about his racialized identity, it was also about his gendered identity. When students accused him of "acting white," they meant that he "acted" as a white man as opposed to a white woman. There were implicit gendered meanings embedded and intertwined in his racialized ways of being and talking. This relationship with Sharon was important to his sense of racial identity, just as it was important to his sense of masculinity. It can be seen as giving him an avenue to assert his power and control as a black man.

Jeff and Marcus shared some similar experiences yet their social identities were somewhat different. They both lived with their biological mother and step-father; they both had younger siblings in their homes; and they both had squabbled with their mother to such an extent that they moved out. But that is where their similarities ended. What is interesting is the ways in which their identities as young African-American men in many ways were quite different. Yes, they were both working class, they were both young men of seventeen years, and they were both African-American. They also shared commonality in the passing of their heterosexuality. But how they lived out their identities, how they went to school, and how they related to others in and out of school seemed different. What was strikingly

different was the ways in which they talked about images and ideas of others, and used these images to develop a sense of who they were and wanted to be.

"What do you want with a white girl?"

For Marcus, as with Jeff, gendered images intermingled our conversations through talk about women and sexuality. For example, at one point, Marcus told me that he was "not really into relationship black and white thing. I hate to see my black sisters with white males. I think we need to stay with our own color." However, I suggested I occasionally saw black men with white women, but rarely see black women with white men. Curious about this, I asked Marcus if he agreed with my observations.

> Marcus: Let me tell you about that. The reason is because, white girls are easier to get than black women. Black males don't want that challenge, black females will give you a challenge. They ain't gonna let you get them real easy. You have to prove yourself to them.
>
> JP: Like what?
>
> Marcus: The way you treat them. Basically you can get in their [white women's] pants easily. That's what it is. And I don't really like it, that's stupid. I don't really like it, I always say, "Come back to us."

While Marcus related the issue of sexuality through his images of women, intertwined with his ideas about women, sex, and men as "challengers" were also ideas about race. His images were also imbued with the objectification of African-American and white women. He argued that having sex with African-American women was a "challenge" as opposed to the "easy" white women. He used the idea that black women are more difficult to "conquer" as a way to strengthen his image of black women, but this image of African-American woman was not only shaped by racial meanings, it was also shaped by his version of masculinity. Having a relationship with a black women implicitly suggested Marcus's heterosexuality, and his sense of a *black man*. Strands of sexuality, race, and gender identity came to the fore as he talked about women. Lorber (1994) correctly noted that sexuality is not just about behavior, it is also involves "desire and actual sexual attraction and fantasies" (p. 60).

Marcus, therefore, enhanced his version of masculinity as a black man through his commitment to, and the image he carried of, black women:

> Farrakhan says whites are an imitation woman. Anything black , you've got all
> the different shades of color in the black female, you've got big, you've got
> small, dark skinned, light-skinned. What do you want with a white girl? Hey,
> I'm not trying to cut. But ain't got no booty. And you know, black females,
> they've just got, everything is there, the perfect woman.

Marcus like Jeff used images and connections with women to develop his sense of self. However, it was a sexualized image that interweaved Marcus's talk about African-American women. In his mind, the black woman is "the perfect woman." He sexualized the body of African-American women and white women to argue his position about the beauty of black women. He denigrated white women, suggesting they are easy to "conquer." And conquest was part of the image of masculinity he constructed for himself. But his embrace of the beauty of black women was not arbitrary. It was connected to his sense of identity -- his African-American masculinity and heterosexuality.

Race-gender images of women and emerging masculinities

These images of women and relationships with women and men were connected to the young men's construction of their sexualities. The identities were simultaneously gendered and raced. Most important is that their talk about images of women was significant in their relationships with men. Talk with other men about women became a site for their affirmation of their version of masculinity, where men wielding power and control was a significant strand. For example, Jeff's relationship with Sharon saw him rejected by his African-American peers but apparently the target of jealousy because he engaged in a sexual relationship with Sharon. It seemed that Jeff's relationship with Sharon was not just about him having a relationship with a white woman, as a way to affirm his version of masculinity. He may be considered as "acting white" and rejecting other people's sense of his identity as an African-

American, but at the same time he asserted and affirmed his image as a man through the sexual relationship with Sharon and fathered a child. At the same time, his relationship with Sharon, a white young woman, could possibly be seen as a way of both challenging and trying to access white men's power (Collins, 1990). The relationship with Sharon, however, could also be seen as a story about competing masculinities among African-American and young white men at school: Jeff fathered a child with Sharon and thereby was able to prove his manhood to his peers who seemed to place value on sexual conquests of women, yet the relationship could also challenge the power of young white men. This challenge is complex, however because such challenging of power could have been an issue in relation to the young white men at his old school, Central, but at his new mainly white school, he chose to withhold the personal details.

Through exploring the ways in which these young men's sense of racial and masculine identities were constructed in relation to images, representations, and relations with others, we are able to catch a glimpse of the complexity in examining the ways in which race and gender interweave their lives. The discussion reveals that these two young men asserted their racialized masculine identities in different ways, but they both suggest images of men overpowering women through sexualized images and relationships as significant in their versions of masculinity.

RELATIONAL IMAGES, RELATIONAL IDENTITIES

A dominant theme that runs throughout this chapter is the *relational* nature of the images the young men constructed, which in turn speaks to the relational nature of their identities in the making. Through exploring the images they embraced, rejected, or criticized, we are able to capture glimpses of the different ways they came to see themselves and others.

The young men developed meanings and images of social identities in contexts that were historically shaped through relations of power and privilege. For example,

their seemingly oppositional identities were constructed in relation to the hegemonic images of African-American masculinity -- images of black men as violent, aggressive, and socially irresponsible. But they were also constructed in opposition to hegemonic versions of white masculinity. For instance, Marcus and Zakeev criticized white identities and tried to live out identities that were somewhat in *opposition* to the hegemonic images of black men; and at the same time, in *opposition* to images of white people.

While I may have described some of the images being seen as in opposition to one another, this dichotomous representation of images does not fully capture the interplay of images in their lives. For example, the meanings given to "acting white" were not just formed in relation to white people, but also African-American people who embraced aspects of white culture. Meanings were also shaped through their images about African-American people who embraced African-American culture. Further, these men were forming racial images even though they were not always interacting with white people. Such racial images were significant to their sense of self and identity.

Racial images and meanings, however, came into being not only through their individual practices. Collective actions, through their forming seemingly cohesive peer groups at school, also seemed to be a further force in their affirmation of identities. Many of these young men seemed to hang out with students in certain groups to validate their sense of their racial identity and concomitant behaviors and beliefs. Four of these men at once sought solidarity with other young African-American men and rejected aspects of white culture that they defined as not African-American culture. In their exclusively African-American peer groups at school, their talk and behaviors apparently were influential in their bonding. This sense of connection with other African-American students was important to them, not only because of how they came to see themselves in relation to teachers, pedagogy and curriculum within school,

but because of the limited and negative images about African-American men that dominate society. This connection was not apparent for either Jeff or Zakeev who had few friends but still tried to embrace particular racialized images as they constructed their identities.

Their meanings emerged through social processes that were influenced by social practices and social institutions which explains why the images they presented of themselves and others varied. Four of the six young men saw themselves acting in ways in opposition to "acting white," while Jeff embraced certain ways of being that he and others defined as "acting white." Dwayne did not consider issues of "acting white" as significant as the other five did. Rather, he was involved in a battle of embracing or rejecting African-American masculinist "street culture" in the shaping of his identity. Part of this street culture represented involvement in "hanging out with the fellas" and being involved in crime or drugs.

These images, while seemingly racialized were also infused with gendered meanings. They defined their masculinities as African-American men in relation to versions of African-American and white femininities and masculinities. They tried to build an identity as men that represented distinctly African-American, not white, masculinities, and that did not reflect some of the dominant ideas, values, and beliefs about African-American men that permeate US society. Such meanings about African-American men are given dominance in our society, despite these images representing only a few of the lived experiences of many African-American men. Many of these negative and limited images are constructed in ways that distort the reality of African-American men. As previously noted, the media and social science have largely contributed towards this distortion. Constant stories on television and in our newspapers and magazines focus on the trials and tribulations of inner city African-Americans. Shaping such stories are usually statistics about African-American men being a significant proportion of the prison population, or the number of African-

American men who die before their twentieth birthday. In social science there are

many stories about the plight of inner city youth, their disenfranchisement and their

alienation from social institutions.

These hegemonic images and their own subordinated images played out in

different ways in the young men's lives. They appropriated some images, some maybe

for their own use that may have served their own interests; while others may

seemingly serve their own interests, but in fact may have acted to reinforce dominant

social relations. And yet other images mitigated against their interests. For instance,

the stance of rejecting "white" talk, ways of behaving, and dressing led to Marcus,

Shawn, Rashaud, and Zakeev asserting their membership, collectively and

individually, as a distinct African-American group. While this on the one hand helped

them forge a connectedness with other African-Americans, it also sees them

consciously separating themselves from white cultural practices, yet unable to change

the institutional and social practices that dominated the school so that their interests,

concerns, and commitments were met. Through their practices, they seemed to

reinforce their marginalization as a subordinate group and did not alter the relations of

power in the school.

The images presented in this chapter are about meanings given to social

practices and about institutional structures that represent certain interests. Marcus

and Zakeev not only challenged the racist practice of individuals but the power and

privilege shaping the racial nature of institutions such as the media or the school.

Many of the practices they opposed were deeply interwoven into the fabric of these

institutions. Jeff's embrace of "acting white" as an African-American man seemed

influenced by his disenchantment and alienation from school and his entanglement with

the criminal justice system.

The interweaving of these various images in the lives of these young men

suggests that the identity formation process is complex and linked to both institutional

structures and social practices. The complexity of these images also suggests the complexities in explaining the interconnections of dimensions of race, class, and gender in their lives. In the following chapter I will investigate the complexity of the meanings they constructed of school in relation to the institutions they inhabited daily as young men. I will also examine the challenges I faced as I tried to unravel the race, class, and gender dimensions of their day-to-day experiences.

Chapter 7

POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND INEQUALITY

Across the preceding chapters, a central thread that has dominated my discussion has been that of trying to unravel the meanings, images, and experiences that informed the narratives of the six young men and consider these meanings and experiences in the context of their interactions and encounters in schooling, family, and with peers. Each of the chapters provides a sketch and way of understanding how these meanings were interconnected with the making of their social identities. I have tried to show that their meanings and identities were not static, fixed in time, but were continually evolving. Neither were their meanings solely of their own making. These meanings were situated in contexts and relationships that are rooted in history with privileges, options, barriers, and opportunities that both constrained and supported their goals, ambitions, and desires. Such patterns of privilege and penalty were dynamically shaped through interlocking and interconnected systems of race, class, and gender.

Examining the various meanings, experiences, goals, and desires that the young men talked about, and simultaneously discussing the institutional structures and cultures they inhabited and how race, class, and gender relations of power intersected in their lives is no easy task. There were multiple layers and interactions that were influential in making sense of their experiences. For instance, understanding their stories needed to be located within the context of their day-to-day experiences that were reflected in their individual biographies; within the context of their experiences

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as members of cultural groups that reflected their age, gender, race, and social class; and also within the context of the institutions they inhabited, such as schools and the family. These institutions in part reflected larger ideological and structural influences, which in turn had their own internal mechanisms reflecting some degree of autonomy, yet simultaneously mirroring relations of power in the larger society. In order to understand the complexity of the interaction of institutional and social practices in the lives of the young men such explanations, on a conceptual level, need to be located at the level of concrete experiences. In this chapter then, I want to address three themes: (1) the multiple strands to their meanings of schooling; (2) the interconnections of social institutions in the meanings they constructed; and (3) the interplay of race, class, and gender relations of power in these men's experiences and meanings. Although I weave these three themes throughout the discussion in this chapter, I will examine elements of these themes through examining first, the interconnection of power and privilege with their differing meanings of schooling and the diploma; second, the interconnections of experiences in institutions such as the family and with the criminal justice system in the making of meaning of school; and third, the complexity of the threads of race, class, and gender embedded within and interwoven through the meanings they gave to experiences, events, and symbols in their lives.

POWER RELATIONS AND THE MEANING OF SCHOOLING

One of the central institutions that I have discussed has been that of school. Throughout this work, I have learned how the meaning of school represented more than what the young men did in classrooms. Understanding their experiences in other spheres of school seem equally as important, for instance, in relation to their experiences with peers outside of classrooms. Their meanings of school were also constructed with their family members, and in relation to institutions such as the

criminal justice system. For example, Dwayne's and Jeff's stance of going to school was constructed in opposition and in relation to their experiences with the criminal justice system. For most of the young men, going to school was integrally connected to their commitment to acquire a high school diploma.

In this section, I discuss the experiences in school that were influential in the meanings the young men gave to school and the diploma. I argue that although school was about acquiring the high school diploma, it was also about their relationships with teachers and students, and their experiences of curriculum and pedagogy.

Schooling and the diploma

For all the young men, school was about acquiring a high school diploma. But there were differences among the young men about what the high school diploma and school meant to them. Understanding these differences can be explained through situating their meanings in their everyday culture and their experiences of different institutional contexts. Their meanings of the diploma were constructed through experiences such as their relationships with various actors inside and outside of school such as family members and friends, their access to knowledge and pedagogy, the courses taken, and the neighborhood in which their school was located. The structures of these institutions reflected complex political, cultural, and economic spheres of society that affected in the kinds of meanings they carved out for themselves. Embedded in the culture and structure of these institutions were also dimensions of race, class, and gender power and privilege. These influences intermingled their day-to-day experiences as they formed different meanings about the high school diploma. Through this complex process of making meanings of school and the diploma they came to affirm and/or reject their own and others' conceptions of themselves and schooling. Invariably, the oppositional knowledge and stances they developed were unrewarded by the school, while engagement in the agendas of the school was rewarded.

An examination of the complexity of the making of meanings of school and the
diploma, however, needs to consider the constraints that these young men encountered as
African-American men as they strived for goals beyond high school. Their opportunity
to pursue their potentials were often hampered by barriers emerging from encounters
and interactions inside and outside of school. Within the context of school, the most
significant institutional forces that shaped the barriers and penalties they encountered
were primarily in the form of the disengaging and alienating pedagogy and curriculum
they experienced, but there were others. They all had different grade point averages,
they attended different schools, and experienced different kinds of support from teachers.
They also had different access to knowledge of what to do with the diploma once they left
the school, and their diplomas carried different social weight. These constraints were
not of their making; they were various structural constraints produced in societal
institutions. For example, Zakeev was not allowed to take an advanced mathematics class
and was placed in a general mathematics class that comprised almost exclusively of
African-Americans. While Marcus was in a history class and had to endure the teacher's
narrow conceptions of African-American experiences. These experiences of power
relations that intermingled their social relationships influenced the making of their
meanings of school and the diploma.

Pointing to the significance of institutional constraints and social practices in
their lives further explains the differences in the meanings the young men constructed
about schooling and success and how the diploma represented a *version* of success to all
the young men. However, there were variation in the kind of success the diploma
symbolized to them, just as there was unevenness in the kinds of resources they had
access to and the penalties and barriers they encountered in school. There were also
various strands to each of their notions of success, one of which suggested that the
diploma could be acquired through hard work and that good grades could reap material
rewards and social recognition. Meritocratic ideology, however, was only one strand of

the meanings of success that the diploma embodied. The diploma, for some of the young men, was a stepping stone to college entrance, while for others, it was a form of achievement and an accomplishment in its own right.

For Dwayne and Jeff, for instance, the diploma may have represented an opportunity to go to college, but at the same time, more immediately it also represented a version of success that reflected not getting into trouble with the police and proof to others that they could be successful in staying "out of trouble." For these two young men, the version of success they could reap from the high school diploma contrasted with Rashaud's version, who hoped to go to a college, and Shawn's, who said that the diploma wasn't worth much without a college degree. For Rashaud and Shawn, the diploma represented success in the future. They felt they could wait for the accrued benefits. On the other hand, for Dwayne and Jeff, and to a certain extent, for Marcus and Zakeev, doing well in school was intimately tied to seeking some form of immediate recognition -- from their parents or other authority figures in their lives. These variations in the meanings of success that the diploma embodied were intrinsically connected to their access to resources and their concomitant location in a race, class, and gender order.

Variations in access to resources became most evident on comparing the two middle-class young men with two of the working-class young men. Zakeev and Marcus, both working-class, and Shawn and Rashaud, both middle-class, all had goals of going to college; but it was the two middle-class men who not only knew which college they wanted to go to, they also knew and followed through with what they had to achieve in order to go a particular college. The two working-class men did not possess knowledge about what they needed to do in order to gain college entrance, nor did they take courses that could enhance their quest to go to college. Further, the two middle-class men gave less weight and social significance to the high school diploma than the two working-class men. Ironically, while Rashaud and Shawn gave less importance to the high school

diploma, their diplomas carried more weight and social significance compared to

Marcus's and Zakeev's diplomas, given the high school Rashaud and Shawn attended and

the grade point average they accumulated. Through their experiences of the world, the

middle-class young men came to see the high school diploma as being a vehicle to college.

Though Marcus and Zakeev saw the diploma as a vehicle to college entrance, they were not

as dismissive about the value of the diploma as a form of achievement in its own right.

Their access to resources dynamically shaped their construction of the kind of success

the diploma represented.

Amidst these different experiences, social class seems to emerge as an

explainer for their different experiences in and out of school, their differential access

to resources and the different meanings they gave to school and the diploma.

Dimensions of race and gender, however, seem integrally connected to the social class

explanation for their different meanings. How they experienced social class as

African-American men, and how they experiences being African-American as men

seemed deeply intertwined with the meanings they developed and their relationships of

other racialized and gendered and class groups.

On the level of their individual biographies, their images of success, for

instance, did not seem accessible for all the men to live out. These images, although

shaped by their access to opportunity, power and privilege, were simultaneously

rooted in the ways that race, class, and gender experiences shaped and were shaped by

their definitions of manhood which seemed to be part of the different images of success

they formed for themselves. For instance, Dwayne's access to opportunity -- through

the kind of school he attended and the classes he took -- seemed more severely

constrained than Rashaud's. Also, these two seemed to experience race differently. The

experiences of Dwayne in Detroit, and the kinds of relationships he developed with his

"fellas" in the streets, his disconnection from school, and his entanglement with the

criminal justice system were all at play in the making of not only his racial identity,

but also his sense of manhood. Dwayne's experiences were in stark contrast with Rashaud's, whose experiences were not only far removed from those of Dwayne, they were very different given where he lived and how he spent his time in and out of school. These differences suggest Rashaud had greater access to more privileges and options that Dwayne that were part of his day-to-day experiences at home, in his school and in his neighborhood. Clearly, their meanings were shaped by a *range* of cultural and structural influences in their lives and not just economic interests that would influence but not determine each of their images of success and views of the diploma So, in thinking about the lives of these two young men, their goals were not solely tempered by class-based interests, but also their goals were affected by their social class experiences, their racialized experience and their experiences of manhood.

Granted, the intersection of race *and* social class relations of power and privilege in part explains this unevenness across the young men, yet when I consider the various meanings the young men constructed of the high school diploma, the images of success they constructed seemed to be also intimately tied to their images of themselves as successful *men*. Images of success were simultaneously, and not in addition to, imbued with *gendered* meanings. Admittedly, all six of the young men did seem to hold an image of success whereby the diploma was a vehicle for a man to wield power in the labor market and to provide income to support his family. However, being a successful man meant different things to them. But what kind of successful men did they want to be? For Dwayne, it was providing an income and not being characterized as a "statistic," while for Rashaud it was pursuing a professional career, economic and social mobility, and a firm position in middle-class life.

Hence the meanings they developed around the diploma reflected not only the classed-based but also racialized and gendered interests and experiences. Here, I am not arguing that social class dimensions of their lives were insignificant nor am I dismissing the ways in which gendered relations of power privilege the interests of

men. Rather, I am arguing that a focus on the interconnection of race, social class, and gender helps me to better explain the different meanings of schooling and the diploma. For instance, in order to understand their location in a gender order it is important to consider the kinds of resources they had access to as classed and racialized men. Also important to consider are the kinds of masculinities they lived out as African-American men in relation to other versions of masculinities and femininities -- in relation to the gendered identities of their friends, peers, teachers and family members, and in relation to dominant images of black and white women and men. Their location as men in a gendered order in itself narrows an explanation of their access to power and privilege. It is when I examine their social location in a gendered regime as interconnected with their racialized and classed experiences that I am able to better explain their different meanings of the diploma and schooling.

In sum, the different meanings, interests, and symbols associated with the high school diploma suggest that it is not solely social class location that influenced their meanings but the intermingling of social class, race, and gender in their lives. These versions of success and their views of the diploma were undoubtedly influenced by institutional and cultural practices. Such practices were in part the consequence of social class relations of power, however, their experiences were also enmeshed in racialized and gendered relations of power. The diploma became one of the central reasons for attending school, in part, because of and in spite of their disengaging experiences in classrooms. Though such disengagement may have been a common thread among the young men, there was some variation in what they experienced in classrooms, and the consequences of their involvement. Having noted that institutional interconnections, relations of power and social practices were significant in the meanings of the high school diploma the young men constructed, I will now turn to a more embedded examination of the meaning of schooling through exploring the complexity of their experiences in classrooms.

Missing teachers, missing students

Through the young men's accounts of life in classrooms I learned about the nature of their relationships with teachers, their relationship with other students in and out of classrooms, and the form and content of the curriculum and pedagogy they experienced. I have noted that the pedagogy and curriculum they experienced did not reflect who they were as young African-American young men nor did the experiences provide opportunities for them to develop understanding of their world and beyond. The relationships reflected relations of power between a student and their teacher where the curriculum and pedagogy, in the main, tended to marginalize and silence their perspectives and connections with subject-matter. In many ways, the teachers were seen purely in functional terms: as curriculum giver, as allocators of grades, and as disciplinarians. This is not surprising because it was the form of relation of power with teachers that they mostly experienced.

Although these six young men also sought respect from, care by, and connection with their teachers, not one of the young men talked about experiencing a form of connection with teachers. Thus, I have come to think of them not just as experiencing limited connection with their teachers; the teachers they are looking for were missing from their experiences at school. Many of their teachers were not African-American. They so needed teachers who understood them, who cared about their perspectives, who embraced their commitment to go to school, who provided opportunities for them to talk about their lives and their experiences, who would listen to them, and nudge them as they learned about the world on their own terms.

Amidst the experiences in classrooms and in school more generally, it is clear that these young men to varying degrees sought connections with others. Instead, it was only in the hallways, and in the spaces of the day when they were not in classrooms that they were able to maintain and sustain some level of interaction with others. Their experiences of curriculum and pedagogy in their classrooms seemed to hinder their

ability to develop connected relationships with their peers. It is ironic, however, that they spent so much time with other students in classrooms yet classrooms did not seem to be fertile grounds for them to develop personal and intellectual connections with other students. Relationships with students in classrooms also seemed amiss. It is not surprising then, that the relationships with other students in their classes were not a central piece of their experiences in school.

Despite these young men generally not being able to form connected relationships with other in classrooms, it was the middle-class young men, and in some instances, Jeff at his new private school, who *did* experience discussion and hence interaction around subject-matter in some of their classrooms. While I never learned about the *kind* of discussion they experienced, there seemed, from their accounts, to be *more* interaction among students and their teachers than the other three young men. For Dwayne, Marcus, and Zakeev, however, their classroom experiences seemed to consist almost entirely of independently completing worksheets, answering textbook questions, and following teachers' directions. Consequently, even though the middle-class young men, Rashaud and Shawn, and Jeff, did not establish strong connections with others in their classrooms, there seemed the possibility that they could have experienced knowledge somewhat differently.

The eagerness of the six young to develop trusting, connected friendships, and the desire of some of them to learn about their own culture and history, suggests the imperative of crafting curriculum and pedagogy that would meet *their* needs and interests. It would be wonderful if educators could acknowledge that the lives of African-American men could be socially, emotionally, and intellectually enhanced if more attention was given to their needs and interests. Instead, these young men were alienated from their classrooms, from the teachers, from the content, and had little or no opportunities to develop relationships around the intellectual work of the classroom.

Although I have discussed the kinds of relationships these young men

encountered in classrooms, relationships with teachers and students cannot

disentangled from the curriculum and pedagogy the young men experienced. These

relationships they encountered emerged from the curriculum and pedagogy and hence

the form and content they encountered. Significantly, these relationships and

experiences of knowledge were intimately tied to the web of meanings they held about

schooling and the diploma.

Curriculum, pedagogy and power relations

I have noted that these six young men had different experiences of curriculum and

pedagogy in their different schools and that race and racism became a common thread in

their experiences in classrooms. The classroom then became one of the sites where they

learned about racial relations of power through the silencing and marginalization of some

perspectives, and the privileging and centering of others. For instance, in their history

classrooms, they learned about race as a process and as a topic. Despite their critique

about the lack of attention to the history and experiences of African-Americans in school

subjects, race and racism remained at the heart of much of what many of them

encountered through their time in classrooms and other arenas at school. Understanding

the common thread of racism that they experienced can be explained by their location in

a raced order that privileges the interests and experiences of whites. But the form of

racism they experiences was different, particularly on comparing the middle-class

young men to the other four. Both Rashaud and Shawn suggested that there was some

attention to African-American history. Moreover, these two were both less critical of

the lack of attention to African-Americans in school curriculum compared to Marcus and

Zakeev and Marcus, who were passionate about the exclusion of African-American

history from their curriculum. Zakeev even challenged his history teacher about the

omission, and his teacher said it was "Just not in [his] curriculum." Social class

certainly may partially explain the differences in their experiences and their critique.

The variation in their experiences, however, needs to take into account the

interconnection of race and social class. Previously, I have noted how the distribution of

knowledge in their schools echoed the work of Anyon (1981) that caused students from

different social class backgrounds to experience different kinds of authoritarianism in

relation to their social class location. The middle-class young men seemed to have more

opportunities to engage in curriculum and pedagogy that seemed to offer them a wider

array of possibilities of coming to know and understand the world. They used fewer text

books in their classrooms and engaged in more discussions that the other young men.

Although they were provided different and less substantial opportunities, Dwayne,

Marcus, and Zakeev were more critical of power relations than the two the middle-class

young men. Perhaps it is not surprising that the high school diploma was the focus of

their talk about schooling, given the meaningless and insignificant content of school

subjects they often experienced. The difference among the young men raises questions

about what and how they learned, and how the knowledge they had access to influenced

how they saw themselves in relation to others in the development of their identities as

African American young men. It is when I look at the race-class experiences as

interconnected that explanations for their different experiences can be more thoroughly

accounted for.

At the same time, while I note the interconnection of race and social class, and I

previously have noted that they were silent about gender relations in the classroom, this

doesn't mean that gender was not part of their discourse or the meanings and

relationships they constructed. Gender appeared as important subtexts in their accounts

of life in classrooms as I learned from the interaction between Marcus and his history

teacher. Classrooms became sites were they lives out their versions of masculinity in

relation to versions of masculinities and femininities. Marcus's interactions with his

biology teacher around his grade also revealed the complex nature of the relations of the

power between a teacher and a student. Race was clearly integral to the relationship

because the teacher suggested to Marcus that she was not racist. "How can I be racist and

my daughter went to see Michael Jackson?" she apparently said to Marcus. She gave

racialized meanings to the interactions, as did Marcus. She articulated a view of race

that trivialized racialized relations of power. Her understanding of race, rather than

pacifying Marcus, reinforced his racialized images and his notion that she was racist, as

were the institutions that he saw her representing. Although racialized meanings were

interwoven through the interaction, gendered meanings also intermingled the

interaction. In this instance, the teacher was a white women, and the student, an

African-American man. This was not just an interaction between an African-American

person and a white person, it was simultaneously an interaction between a white women

and an African-American man. Marcus seemed to use his power as a man to challenge

the women, and thereby to assert his gendered power, to challenge her power, not just as

a women, but as a white woman. It would seem that race and gender, together, were at

play in this interaction. Disentangling dimensions of gender and race would seem to loose

the complexity of the social interaction. At the same time, Marcus's response to his

teacher may also be seen as a working-class challenge to the authority and control that

she wielded in a classroom that saw him learning in procedural, technocratic way,

offering him little opportunity to experience knowledge on his own terms. Such is an

example of the interconnected ways in which race, class, and gender may interconnect

through interactions that appeared to be around the dimension of race, but may also be

imbued with subtexts of gender and social class.

Questions that emerge from my analysis are: what kinds of gendered interactions

did these young men participate in, observe, and create as they experienced pedagogy and

curriculum in classrooms? Did they live out, experience and negotiate different forms

of masculinities? What kinds of opportunities did they have to be the nurturing,

connected young men they wanted to be? These questions are important to thinking about race, class, and gender interconnections and the versions of masculinities they lives out in classroom.

My analysis suggests that the variations in the young men's meaning of school and the diploma and the differential access to opportunity and resources can be explained through analyzing the ways race, class, and gender relations of power were interwoven through the lives of the young men. Ironically, while the young men shared a commitment to staying in school, and developed different kinds of critique of schooling, they situated themselves in a process that did not always serve their interests, with the middle-class young men poised to benefit most from participation in school. The various meanings of schooling they developed, however, were not only formed through what they encountered in school. Equally significant were their experiences in other institutions as they went to school.

INSTITUTIONAL INTERCONNECTIONS

I have argued that it is difficult to understand the young men's commitment of going to school without understanding their prior and on-going experiences outside of school and in the context of their differential access to power and privilege. Their meanings of school were not constructed solely in school. What went on in school for the young men was connected to dynamics in their lives outside of school, just as dynamics outside of school influenced how they went about going to school on a daily basis. This section explores the ways in which the young men's experiences with family and peers were each interconnected in the meaning they gave to school, and how schooling influenced the meanings they gave to relationships with peers and family. I will also focus on the interconnection of the relationship between the criminal justice system and schooling. The different meanings they developed, however, emerged from their differential access to power and privilege that was created by and influenced

their different experiences in institutions. In this way, family experiences were influential, but not determinant, of the meanings they gave to the high school diploma. This section is framed through considering the following two-fold question: what were the relationships between family members, peers and the young men, and what bearing did these relationships have upon their emerging meanings of schooling?

Schooling and relationships with family members and peers

Family households were sites that reflected different kinds of relationships and competing interests among family members. Family household members for most of the young men, together with other family members, provide significant support for and advice about attending school. An examination of these six young men's relationships revealed that meanings of school were not only constructed solely through their involvement in the institution of school but also through a web of interconnections of institutions.

Continuing to go to school became a way to seemingly strengthen the relationship between these young men and their family members, and in some cases, between mothers and their sons. For example, amidst the strained relationship between both Jeff and Marcus and their parents, doing well in school was a way to strengthen their unstable relationships. By the same token if Marcus did not do well in school, this affected his relationship with his parents. Sometimes it resulted in his being grounded at home. Another way in which the family and school interconnected in the making of meaning of schooling was through the monitoring of their homework by their parents. This action became a way for the mothers to follow through on their commitment for their sons to attend school. The interaction meant that homework tasks were central to their relationships in matters about schooling, and the subject matter content became marginal.

In the same way that staying in school and engaging in homework activities influenced their connections in relationships with family members, the demands of the parents' workplace influenced the kinds of activities these young men were expected to participate in at home. For instance, Marcus, Jeff, and Rashaud were the older siblings at home, and thus were expected to take care of their younger siblings while one or both of their parents worked. They had the opportunity to assume these responsibilities because they had the available time after school. The activities and responsibilities they undertook influenced the kinds of interests and ideas they embraced and rejected. Three of the young men took responsibility for the care of their younger siblings in the afternoon and developed warm caring relationships with their young brothers and sisters. Such experiences became part of their sense of memberships in a family and also influenced the kind of young men they were becoming. In contrast with the three working-class young men, neither of the middle-class young men were expected to assume such responsibilities and instead spent their afternoons completing homework tasks and projects with little interruption.

The family, however, was also a context where different kinds of activities came into conflict with each other and was not just a place that was shaped by connection and affection. Following through with their parents' demands of taking care of younger siblings meant the young men were forced to place family responsibilities over other social commitments with friends they may have wanted to pursue. For example, because Marcus was expected to take care of his younger siblings, this often meant he could not spend time outside of the house with his friends as frequently as he preferred. The family responsibilities meant that he could not always play basketball when he wanted to, thereby strengthening the bonds with friends he considered important in his life: his boyhood friends, and the friendships he sought out during recess at school, friendships that he wasn't able to develop in classrooms. The friendships were important sustaining influenced to him as he continued to go to school.

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On other occasions, when Marcus was not living at his parent's home, these friendships

became central to his sustenance as he negotiated the fragile relationship with his

parents.

School also played a significant role in the formation of their friendships.

While some of the young men were able to develop friendships in school, for others the

alienating relationships they encountered saw many of the young men look to African-

American organizations outside of school to develop relationships with other young

people. The young men seemed dissatisfied with the relationships they formed in school

and thus sought avenues outside of school to develop connected relationships with

youths of their own age. This was ironic: school seemed to become a place where they at

once were able to strengthen their bonds with others, particularly African-American

peers, but schools were also a place where they felt alienated or unconnected with

other students, particularly white students. Thus, it was through a combination of

relationships in a range of institutions that they were able to sustain themselves. In

this way, they were attracted to organizations in their communities with

predominantly African-American membership. But they belonged to different kinds of

organizations and their parent's access to resources influenced the kinds of

organizations they belonged to. Rashaud's membership of the *Jack and Jill* club was

initiate by his mother. While Jeff and Marcus belonged to brotherhood organizations.

Shawn and Zakeev belonged to church organizations, while Dwayne did not belong to any

formal organization. The kinds of organization they belonged to reflected the kinds of

resources the parents and sons did or did not have access to.

These young men's experiences in their various neighborhoods saw them

interacting with different youth and adults. Most of the young men developed

relationships with peers that cut across social class boundaries. However, the middle-

class young men lived in environments that were somewhat removed from conditions of

poverty and argued that they encountered few barriers in their quest for the high

school diploma. In contrast, the other four young men were confronted daily with the conditions of poverty and hardship through their families, with neighbors, and with peers who were struggling to make ends meet and/or who were unemployed. These different experiences seem influential in the making of these four young men's view of the diploma as an achievement in its own right and the possibility of the job, and explains why the two middle-class young men seemed to be contented to wait for economic security through acquiring a college degree.

The criminal justice system and schooling

A second example that once again illuminates the complexity of the institutional connections and race, class, and gender privilege and power in the making of meanings of schooling was Dwayne's and Jeff's relationship to the criminal justice system. Each was aware of the damaging images of African-American men that dominate our society. The ways in which they responded and became entangled with the criminal justice system seemed to be interconnected to their lived experiences. Where and how they lived was certainly about their racialized, gendered, and social class experiences. For example, Dwayne hung out in the streets with his "fellas," and developed ways of being with these young men, in an environment where he saw "no way out." At the same time, Jeff, who was disengaged from and had virtually dropped out of school, found himself being charged with armed robbery and the theft of a stolen vehicle. It was his social location in school and neighborhood together with his experiences with the criminal justice system that influenced his meanings of the high school diploma.

Neither of the two middle-class young men had lived in contexts where they were so vulnerable; rather, their lived circumstances saw them pursing different kinds of lives than either Dwayne or Jeff. Rashaud and Shawn each were middle-class and had different options and privileges outside of school. Having a different relationship with school and different experiences outside of school meant that the

choices they made, and the influenced upon these choices, were different from those of Dwayne and Jeff, and hence had different implications. Not only did Rashaud and Shawn have a different experience at school, but involvement with the criminal justice system was far removed from their experiences. It was the interconnections of experiences of the criminal justice system and schooling that resulted in Dwayne and Jeff using schooling as a vehicle to regain and develop their sense of pride.

Institutional interconnections reflected an integral web in the making of the meanings of school. The various interconnected experiences in institutions suggest that there were a number of forces at play in the making of meaning of schooling. These young men's social location in school and in other institutions affected the very meanings they developed. It wasn't just the fact that their experiences of institutions were different, it was that these experiences intermingled with and reflected different kinds of access to power, privilege, and resources within the various institutions that explains the difference. I will now turn to a discussion of the complexity of understanding race, class, and gender dynamics in explaining their meanings and experiences.

COMPLEXITIES OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER DYNAMICS

Throughout this work, I have argued that there were complex and contradictory processes that were interwoven through the fabric of these young men's lives as I tried to unravel the ways in which they made their identities. A central strand of my argument has been that the interaction of experiences in school and with family and friends had different but sometimes similar consequences for these young men, even for those of similar social class backgrounds. I have tried to understand the ways in which these interactions were interconnected to relations of power that were woven through the lives of these black men through examining both their differences and

similarities in the meanings they developed, and their experiences of schooling and beyond.

Explaining the interaction of race, class and gender, however, has not been an easy task for me precisely because these dimensions are complex and contradictory. These are not only structural phenomena, they are also simultaneously cultural phenomena that are continually changing and evolving in different contexts over time. Throughout this work, I have also struggled with the complexity of trying to understand the meanings the six young men developed through a lens of the interconnection of race, class, and gender, and trying to scrutinize each dimension in order to illuminate the complexity of individual circumstance in relation to social structure. For example, in some instances, I have tried to focus on the meanings of the schooling that reflected their experiences of race, and simultaneously bring into my analysis the subtexts of gender and social class, and consider the interactions of race, class and gender in the meanings they gave to their experiences. I have also focused on the interconnected experiences on the level of personal biography, the level of a cultural group, and the level of social institutions. Through examining these various levels, at times, I focused on the way race and social class were woven through their meanings and the choices they made and the options that were available to them. More muted in my analysis was the strand of their gendered identities in understanding and explaining the meanings they developed.

Part of this unevenness is due to the difficulty I encountered in unraveling gendered dimension of their social lives. It was difficult to get a sense of the gendered identities of the various actors they spoke about. I struggled with adequately explaining how their social identities were simultaneously situated in a gender order, which Connell (1987) suggested reflects three major structures: the division of labor, power relations between men and women, and sexuality. My conversations with these young men included occasional references to the two of these, but sexuality was

far less frequently raised, it thus constrained my ability to evenly explore their gendered identities. They did not always provide gendered meanings as part of their conversation which meant that I did not always pursue gendered dimensions of their conversations. For example, they often did not differentiate the gendered identities of the students they interacted with in and out of classrooms. Notwithstanding, gender was a subtext of their experiences. These young men in differing contexts were in the process of becoming young African-American men that were not only formed in relation to women, but also in relation to men. Their masculinities were also formed and influenced by their ways of being and acting as men in their groups, or with their friends; they were also influenced by the structure of relations in school. Such a structure involved the ways in which they experienced knowledge, the ways knowledge was organized in school through the various tracks within and across schools, and the forms of student-teacher relationships they encountered. Complicating the versions of masculinities coming into being were patterns that sometimes cut across the young men, for instance racism. This pattern, however, was manifest in different ways and had different consequences because of how the young men experienced and responded to racism and because of the resources that were at play in their experiences and responses.

The difficulty in understanding their meanings through a race, class, and gender lens is not only one of being able to examine the various dimensions, the larger difficulty of one of unraveling the complexity of the *interconnectedness* of race, class, and gender. For example, there were small incidents such as the interaction between Marcus and his biology teacher, Ms. Huffington, that were filled with intertwined race, class, and gender power relations. In the courses of Marcus's daily experiences of school, these "small" incidents accumulated and affect one another in ways that probably weren't additive, which in turn further adds to the complexity.

In sum, their stories can *only* be understood if seen in the context of power, privilege, and inequality. This helps us understand how they experienced school, how the complex interplay of race, class and gender affected them each differently, and how they shared both a commitment "against the odds" to go to school and a simultaneous critique of it.

Shawn Braxton, Jeff Davidson, Rashaud Dupont, Dwayne Reynolds, Zakeev Washington, and Marcus Williams provided rich accounts of the complexities of going to school as young African-American men in the 1990s. They all went to school with the hope of acquiring the high school diploma. Not everything in school, however, was meaningful to them; they invariably seemed alienated from others and encountered seemingly insurmountable challenges along the way. Notwithstanding, they did develop a consciousness, a critique of the world around them through their experiences with others in and out of the school.

A poignant quote form Marcus revealed the intensity of the critique:

> To me how I feel about the education system, I mean they don't have the locks on our hands and feet no more, but they've got it on our brain. They've got the locks on our brains now.

Marcus's voice of critique emerged from his experiences in the classroom, during basketball games, at work, and on the telephone with his friends. In the same way, Dwayne's voice of critique spoke to the harsh realities of his life as an African-American man:

> Like when you grow up in the ghetto, they are like slums, basically set up for to keep a black person down. And when you grow up in that, you see things like that, and you be around it, it's just like you're going to be into it. 'Cause the steps already stand up so high, that you know, you ain't gonna get no black male in inner city, crime city, like Detroit where I'm from, he's not going to make it. No. And that's how it is. You know you are going to start getting in trouble, hanging out with the fellas, smoking bud, 'cause it's set up to hold us black people down.

Such voices of critique suggests that human consciousness, and particularly critical thought, is not only emergent through and in response to the actions and choices of teachers in schools, but is very much organic to the their day-to-day experiences both

outside and within school. All young men spoke about the problems that face young African-American men in the 1990s. Their voices of critique and discontent became a central strand of their identities in relation to their friends and families. This discontent with and critique of power relations and social position stand in the face of the idea that school passively socializes students into their roles. Rather, the six manipulated their situations, and given the constraints that shaped their lives, went to school to acquire a high school diploma. But ironically, while they critiqued school, their experiences of school could see them unable to pursue their goals and ambitions. They articulated the values and beliefs that the diploma signified and situated themselves in a process that did not always serve their interests. Yet against these odds, with incredible courage and remarkable strength, they continued to go to school.

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