

READING, WRITING, AND RACIALIZATION: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF
BLACKNESS FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS IN A PRINCE GEORGE'S
COUNTY PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

BY

Arvenita Washington

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on interrogating the public institution of Prince George’s County Public Schools to examine how students and educators construct, negotiate, challenge, and reproduce notions of Blackness. The first research question is “how do youth of African descent, including the U.S. born children of immigrants and those with a Spanish ethno-linguistic heritage, construct or deconstruct a Black identity in a United States context”? The second large area of inquiry asks “how are educators influencing social constructions of Blackness”? There is also a focus on if and how the educational process acknowledges and responds to complex dynamics among students, how they identify, and how they get identified racially, ethnically, and culturally by others. I

investigate this quandary by using ethnographic data conducted over a seventeen month span in a middle school. I find that all people in the school, with an intentional focus on students of African descent with a Spanish ethno-linguistic heritage are engaged in their own dialogues and complex constructions of what it means to be Black.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has not only been an academic journey, but a spiritual one. God has truly blessed me with the opportunity of pursuing a Ph.D. and researching what I am passionate about and purposed for in this life. He always makes a way for me and always puts the right people in place to help me, even when the path did not seem possible. For this, I am eternally grateful and humbled.

Words cannot express the respect and appreciation I have for my committee. Having a dedicated committee who believed in my project and in me, in particular, my committed advisor, has made all of the difference in my experience in this program and obtaining a doctoral degree. I am indebted to Dr. Sabiyha Prince, my advisor and mentor. She was tireless in her efforts to see me through the dissertation process and went above and beyond what I could have ever imagined. She met with me while she was on sabbatical, allowed me to come into her home for numerous discussions and revisions, and is truly a mentor and a friend.

I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Rachel Watkins. She was one of the first professors I met at American University before I got accepted. She has been a huge support system for me before I officially started the program and throughout and for this I am eternally grateful. She too has gone above and beyond for me.

I would like to thank Dr. Clarence Lusane for being an exceptional professor and for also being on my committee. He always made himself available to meet about my

dissertation and career plans and was key in encouraging me toward the finish line. These three professors on my committee are outstanding scholars and remarkable human beings and I am blessed to have them as my committee, as my mentors, and as my friends.

I would like to give thanks to all of the professors at American University who taught and guided me through the program. I am grateful to American University and for the Graduate Merit Award Package and Hurst Scholar Award and Harvey and Sarah Moore Dissertation Writing Award that made it possible for me to financially matriculate in this doctoral program.

I have been blessed with the best friends and support system a person could have. There are absolutely too many angels to name. I thank each and everyone that has prayed for me, been patient with me, and has encouraged me throughout this journey. I would like to especially thank the cohort of women I entered the program with who also study people of African descent. Ariana Curtis, Calenthia Dowdy, Jacqueline Reid, and Malinda Rhone: I am so thankful for each and everyone one of you and the friendships we have forged.

I would like to acknowledge Hampton University, the place where I obtained both my undergraduate and Masters degrees. Historically Black Colleges and Universities are critical institutions for supporting and advancing the scholarship of students of African descent. It was at Hampton where I was nurtured and where I learned about Black peoples and about myself without limitations. This was one of the places where I experienced the true diversity of the African Diaspora.

My family has always had confidence in me and provided unconditional support. I thank those family members who have gone on but their spirit remains as a constant guide. I especially thank my cousin Denise who passed before I finished the program, but allowed me to live with her while I was at American and who infinitely encouraged me and so wanted to be here to see me complete my doctorate. I thank my biggest supporters, my Daddy and my sister Ava Maria. Without their love and support I do not know where I would be. I am also very thankful for Richard and Bruno who greatly add to my life.

Last, but not least, I am sincerely thankful to the research participants at Diversity Middle School and Prince George's County Public Schools for allowing me to do my fieldwork there. The heart of this research is really about better supporting students and educators. Without their trust and openness, this research would never have happened and would not have been as rich or complete.

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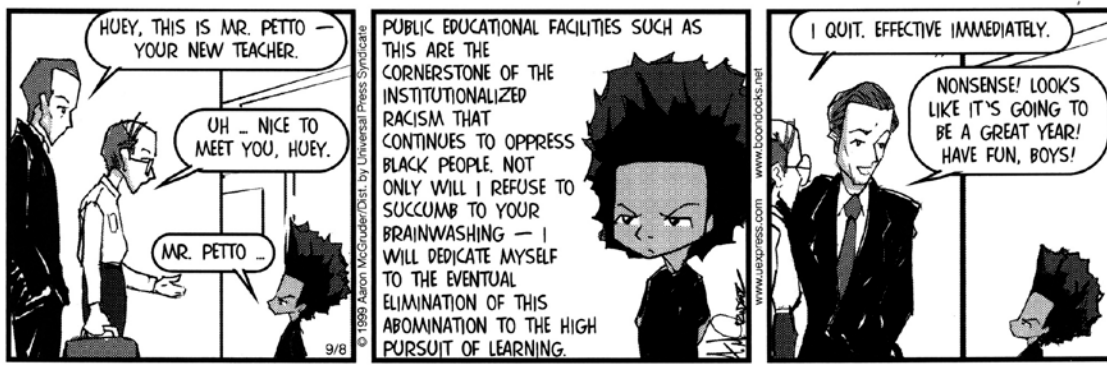
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



The Research Focus: Goals and Objectives

This research focuses on students' and educators' discourse and practices on African descended identity in a United States context in a predominantly Black, yet ethnically and culturally diverse space. I am investigating what it means to be Black, the contexts and processes involved in how it is constructed, classed, and gendered. Additionally, I am exploring how Black diversity is acknowledged, practiced, and contested in Prince George's County Public Schools (PCGPS or PG County Public Schools¹). I am also probing the ways in which students and educators recognize

¹ I use Prince George's County Public Schools and its acronym PCGPS or PC County Public Schools interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Blackness, how they conceptualize it, and if and how they imagine themselves and their families to be part of it.

My project has two main questions. The first is “how do youth of African descent, including the U.S. born children of immigrants and those with a Spanish ethno-linguistic heritage, construct or deconstruct a Black identity in a United States context”? Embedded in this primary question are smaller areas of inquiry that look at the extent diverse youth challenge or incorporate dominant notions of a Black identity. How are transnational identities being constructed or negotiated in a predominantly ‘Black space, and in what ways do national origin, language, class, citizenship, phenotype, peer groups, and popular culture shape the way in which a Black identity is constructed by students in this particular middle school?

The second large area of inquiry asks “how are educators influencing social constructions of Blackness”? Rooted in this is the query about dynamics between students and educators, particularly how educators (teachers, administrators, counselors, librarians, and support staff) perceive and understand racial and cultural dynamics and how this awareness is integrated into planning, teaching, counseling etc.

In order to adequately address both of the main research questions, I look at the media and in popular culture, and particularly at how Blackness and the application of particular scripts is colored, gendered, and classed and how these external constructions impact the ways educators and students internalize both positive and negative understandings of Blackness.

Throughout the chapters of my dissertation, I make use of cartoonist and cultural critic Aaron McGruder's comic strip *The Boondocks* (2003). Because of its political views and provocative exploration and criticism of realistic tensions among Black people and culture in the United States it is an extraordinary useful introductory exegesis of the chapters. In a satirical way, McGruder's illustrations add a clear visual to the kind themes and subjects presented in the chapters. In every day discourse, one of the major criticisms of McGruder's work is that his comic is too political, intolerant and sarcastic toward White people, interracial couples, and the exploration of people of African descent identifying in other ways besides "just" Black. However, McGruder's social commentary on Blackness and critiques of Black culture is representative of how many Black people feel in the United States, is representative of issues and tensions that people of African descent contend with on a daily basis and as they interact with people among varying racial/ethnic, gender, class, and political lines (2003). In simplest terms, some of McGruder's work that I selected to use resonates with my research because through his comic strip he addresses how people identify, get identified, and identify others. This reveals important information about how Blackness is constructed, positions of solidarity and contestation, and most importantly, how race is sustained through larger structures of institutional power. He does this primarily through the lens of his main characters who are Black, male youth and ironically are often times at school, lending to support the notion that students are social commentators, actively in the midst of these racialized

constructions and institutions such as schools, and play a huge role in informing and suppressing identities.

My years of experience as a teacher, have made me aware of the fact that the relationships students and educators have with Blackness, the assumptions and notions that surround it, and its connection to identity construction in this predominately 'Black' school system powerfully affects learning and larger social relations. The data in my dissertation research reveal key processes that continue to inscribe race, particularly notions of Blackness, as well as other actions and discourses that impact spatial relations among diverse people. An important fact that remains consistent throughout this ethnographic journey is that both students and educators are left to unpack issues of race and ethnicity as it relates to these spatial relationships and tensions without much support to successfully do it. Educators in my research lack knowledge about race and culture, do not have formal training or on-going support for tackling conflict among students that have racial, ethnic, and cultural undertones, nor do they have structures in place to help for integrating teachable moments about difference and similarities in the curriculum. Students are not getting accurate information to bridge any deficits and pre-conceived notions about race, particularly Blackness in their knowledge base. In addition to this, there are few spaces for students and educators to challenge themselves and ask questions about race outside of conventional conversations.

This dissertation research reveals that Blackness is constructed in variety of ways. I am using a number of theoretical approaches to examine diasporic subjects within

Prince George's County (PG County²), Maryland. Prince George's County does not exist in the shadows of Washington, D.C. It is an inimitable place to do research because of its close proximity to our nation's capital, but mainly because it is a unique space to consider how conceptions of Blackness are constructed and sustained in the realities of the people who live in the largest Black middle class county in the United States. I am analyzing people's discourse on incorporation and exclusion in both public education institutions and as inhabitants and workers in Prince George's County. My work follows a trajectory of scholars who examine dislocations of African-descended individuals living in diasporic communities sharing and contesting space and racial and ethnic labels. My research also engages a reflexive process of examining my own positionality in how I am in the field and how I interpret meaning in how Blackness becomes constructed (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Narayan 1993 Slocum 2001).

During my time in the field, and as I write this dissertation, I am keenly aware of the historical moment in which we are living. Now, more than ever, the United States is as racially and ethnically diverse as it has ever been in the history of this country. The 2000 census, whether politically motivated or not, allowed people the option to choose more than once race. Major immigration debates are aggressively taking place, most of which are using antiquated rhetoric about national security, patriotism with xenophobic and racist messaging, and politicians delivering eloquent speeches about erecting laws for sending certain folks back and keeping particular people out (Weisman 2008). There is a

² I use Prince George's County and its acronym PG County interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

new emergence of racial profiling and increased tension, particularly in Virginia, which targets immigrants of color that is legalized in spite of what we know about its inequity, scare tactics and violence (Mack 2008). The people that are most impacted are almost always people of color, primarily Brown and Black.

As I write this, we are in the midst of a presidential election year where two strong democratic candidates; a biracial (Black and White) man, viewed as and self-identifying as African American and White woman were recently vying for the democratic nomination and for the first time in the history of the election process, race and gender are being addressed publicly. Although we are aware that “racial dichotomizing” - focusing analysis and discussion of race solely on Black-White relationships – is endemic in the U.S.” (Omi and Winant 1994) it is not useful going forward. Almost fifteen years ago, Omi and Winant addressed how continuing with a narrow Black/White binary is problematic:

Too often, today as in the past, when scholars and journalists talk about race relations, they mean relations between African Americans and whites. There are several problems with this situation. First, if the complex nature of race relations in the post-civil rights era is not analyzed and theorized, if it is not the subject of media attention, neither politicians, nor ordinary citizens will be able to grasp emerging trends. Antagonisms and alliances among racially defined minority groups, differentiation within these groups, and the changing dynamics of white racial identity, to pick but a few central issues are examples of the crucial developments which such approaches miss almost entirely (1994:153-154).

In addition to this first example, Omi and Winant further their argument by disputing this dominant discourse of a Black/White dichotomy and by explaining how it “ignores...a range of issues – involving access to education, patterns of residential segregation, and

stratification in labor markets - cannot be adequately addressed by narrowly assessing the relative situation of whites and Blacks” (1994:154).

I agree with this as my project examines how Blackness is constructed for diverse people in a Black space that seems to be un-interrogated for its diversity. I use the term “Black” in the broadest sense to encompass all people and cultures of African descent. I am using the term “Black space” as a location bounded by a predominance of people of African descent. A Black space has residents, businesses, a proliferation of leaders of African descent, and a preponderance of Black culture. In this dissertation, I discuss, as others do in everyday discourse, Prince George’s County and its public school system as a predominantly Black locale. An important aspect of my theoretical framework is the view that Prince George’s County and its school system, as a predominantly Black space, is a diverse place.

I am nuancing what it means to be Black and problematizing Blackness. My research intentionally does not satisfy the trope of looking at Black versus White or test scores of Blacks compared to those of Whites. My project is pioneering because I am exploring the experiences of diverse people and situating the presence of Afro-Latinos and Latinos who may not identify with being of African descent as a major point of analysis in my work. This is breaking away from significant, but historic Black/White issues and doing it in PG County, a place where there is scarce research, but a great need on this topic. The theoretical implications for this work are that race and ethnicity should be examined in a more specific context and research involving education should be more

ethnographic. There are also implications of using a place like Prince George's County for theorizing how diversity exists in other places that appear to be homogeneous. This research contributes to the ethnographic deficit in PG County and in educational studies as a whole and lifts up critical information about diversity within groups.

I am documenting the voices of educators and students on these concerns and because of this momentous place we are in as a nation, it is timely that this research joins the reigns of the few others who do similar work. I am purposefully using this opportunity to elevate this type of scholarship and to encourage related studies. As Dávila succinctly put it, "...institutional spaces are not only the ones that most affect and translate to access to urban policies and economic resources, but also those least likely to be the subject of ethnographic and critical analysis (2004:17). Because of this truth, my work addresses the ethnographic deficit in education and in Prince George's County and will contribute to interdisciplinary fields.

In this dissertation I interrogate the social construction of Blackness as a way to understand the rules and ideology that inform racial experiences and the crafting of racial selves for students of African descent. I engage in this research because I argue exploring the ways in which the constructions of racial identity are woven throughout the school, will encourage students and educators toward inclusiveness, multicultural understandings, and an intellectually stronger and more supportive learning environment.

This research also has implications for the study of the African Diaspora³ because of its focus on diverse people of African descent in an educational setting in the United States. I introduce three concepts to complicate the diversity of African descendents in my research as a part of my theoretical framework. The first is the term *Multi-generational U.S.born Blacks*⁴ (MGUS Blacks), used as a descriptor to specifically denote people of African descent born in the United States with several generations of their family lineage being originated from here. The second concept is *direct bi-racial parentage*⁵, which is used to nuance notions of “mixed” heritages, and specifically used to distinguish individuals who have parents of different racial backgrounds. The third term, *recent mixed-heritage*⁶ is also used to nuance the conceptions of being mixed, It is used to explore the reality that there is no pure race or ethnic group and also used to acknowledge that some individuals understand their heritages in different ways based on the recentness of the diversity of their racial/ethnic backgrounds. There is a wealth of knowledge to contribute to Diaspora studies concerning the autonomy of African descended individuals being able to self identify and interact with others within a predominantly Black school. There are also critical lenses that can be used to view and discuss diversity within Blackness.

Some scholars use identity politics to discuss the political strategies of organizing campaigns and coalitions on the basis of a shared ethnic or racial identity. “Identity

³ Throughout this paper, when I refer to Diaspora, I am referring to the African Diaspora.

⁴ See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth definition of “Multi-generational U.S. born Blacks.”

⁵ See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth description of “direct bi-racial parentage.”

⁶ See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth description of “recent mixed heritage”

politics start from analyses of oppression to recommend, variously, the reclaiming, redescription, or transformation of previously stigmatized accounts of group membership. Rather than accepting the negative scripts offered by a dominant culture about one's own inferiority, one transforms one's own sense of self and community, often through consciousness-raising." (Heyes 2002:3). Often, this transformation will result in forming new boundaries for racial identity and creating new tensions with essentialized notions. di Leonardo discusses identity politics as an American term that has implications for "competing identities" and the "loss of a unified national political and/or cultural vision" but also incorporates into the discussion connections to "multiculturalism, diversity, strategic essentialism, diaspora cultures, and hybridity" (1994:167).

This dissertation is situated within a theoretical framework that uses the concept of the social construction of Blackness as a mechanism for understanding the societal factors and processes that aid in constructing a racial identity for people who, historically are a part of the legacy of the African Diaspora, who may be identified under the umbrella term Black or African American, but may or may not share phenotypic similarities that are often ascribed to people of African descent.

The social constructions of Blackness in this research context are the processes that shape understandings of what it means to be Black and how flexible, although not necessarily unidirectional, those tenets are, with a focus on the institutional level (the administration), down through individual teachers and students. The social constructions of Blackness are the dynamics that both legitimate and disrupt notions of a collective

fixed Black identity. These processes involve multifaceted issues that inform how people of African Descent, indeed, have multiple identities and complex ways of identifying, how they get identified, and also how they negotiate and/or contest those practices. There is theoretical emphasis placed on how phenotypic characteristics and racial labels aid in constructing Blackness. This in turn unveils how group solidarity and/or membership and individual identification is shaped in the response to the broader social context.

This research critically analyzes how race is institutionalized in public education, even in areas that are interpreted as racially, culturally, and ethnically homogeneous. It also explores how broad racial categories that are too often used as homogeneous boxes have implications for school climate, specifically the learning environment. Some key findings show fragmentation among the African descended. There are distinct parameters around what it means to be Black as well as a limited sense of belonging as a result of various social constructions based on stereotypes, physical appearance, and pedagogy. Moreover, biologizing race, class, place, and behavior are found to have huge influences on how Blackness is constructed. As such, this work has significance for the advancement of multicultural education and pedagogy, inclusiveness, relationship-building, teacher readiness and support, and how and what students learn.

This research also has implications for the nuanced study of the African Diaspora here in the United States on topics of education and diverse constructions and reconceptualizations of Blackness. Moreover, there is great potential to contribute this research to advancing scholarship on racial and ethnic relations. The theoretical

implications of historicizing race and specific aspects of racial and ethnic relations can be transformative. New theoretical approaches for working with students and educators as well as innovative strategies for theorizing Diaspora emerge out of this research.

Organization of Chapters

Including the introduction, this dissertation is divided into nine chapters. In chapter two, I illustrate the historical and present day backdrop of Prince George's County. I explore migratory patterns, and trends in housing and education. I emphasize issues that impact Prince George's County and its residents such as positive and negative media attention, the political climate, public institutions, county demographics, crime, and its notoriety of having the largest Black middle class in the nation. In addition, I describe my research site, outlining my past connection and acknowledging my own positionality throughout my dissertation research. In contrast to this historical backdrop of the county, I detail how my research is situated in the present.

Research and discussions about Blackness and schooling are limited in discussions of diversity and are prolific in discourses on achievement. In chapter three, the literature review explores a wide spectrum of interdisciplinary topics and scholarship spanning across scholarship on race and racial theory to diaspora to education. While I use a range of literature, I intentionally draw on the works of scholars who are of color and/or of African descent and female and place them at the heart of my work where other

anthropologists may opt to use the more traditional canon of our discipline which is incredibly void of scholars both of color and women. Many of these scholars have been marginalized because of their racial/ethnic group and/or gender, and how they position themselves within their research (Daniels 2000; McClurin 2001; Rodriguez 2001; Simmons 2001; Slocum 2001). I argue that it is exactly for these reasons that their personal experiences and multiple subject positions that they bring to their research enrich scholarship. I also focus on using frameworks for diaspora and transnationalism, instead of assimilation theories to strengthen this dissertation. Other major categories for review are class, gender, multiculturalism, and diversity.

Chapter four details the methodology. I describe the data collection and tools I used to conduct my fieldwork. I define how I am using participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and writing samples, and why.

The next three chapters introduce three important themes that emerge from the research. I outline how each will be analyzed as contributing factors to the social construction of Blackness at the research site. Chapter five *Phenotype and Naming*, explores how phenotypic characteristics and naming, as well as power dynamics, are embedded in daily discourses. The data in this chapter reveal the kinds of labels that are imposed on others and the processes of self identification in which both students and adults are engaged, as well as anecdotal experiences that have informed these processes, largely based on so-called physical markers of a racial or ethnic identity. This chapter

also raises interesting questions about how far we have come in terms of using physical markers as descriptions for identity, biological race, and behavior.

As I move away from discussions of phenotype, I venture toward investigating how students and educators conceptualize race and place in chapter six. Within this discussion are issues of class, misconceptions about Africa, and connections and disconnections within the diaspora. This chapter details some of the ways that students and educators conceptualize shared space, class, history, Blackness, nationality, and Africa.

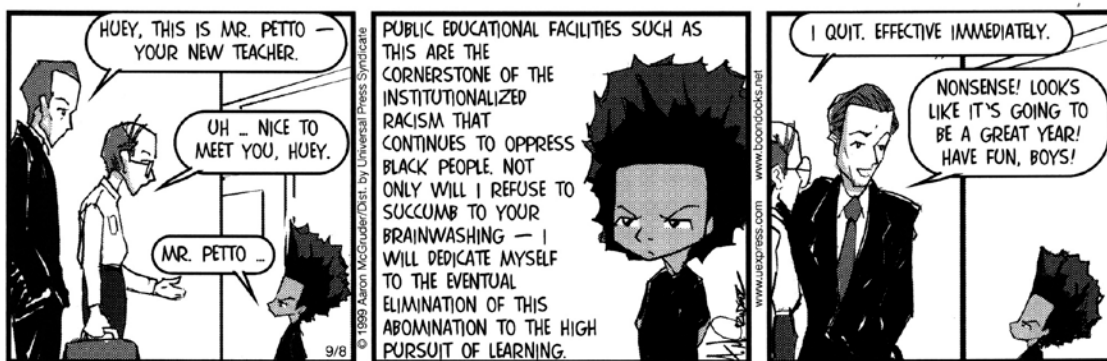
The final analysis section, Chapter seven, interrogates *Group Association* as being both a building block for unity and an iron curtain for cultivating tension and segregation. This chapter examines the intentional and unintentional racial projects of group association within the school. This chapter highlights some of what I term “raced activities” and markers of group association and exclusion. This section analyzes important information about the emerging of gangs that are almost always racialized groups and the salient yet ever becoming insidious divisions and acceptance of divisions between MGUS born Blacks and Latinos of non-identifying African descent.

I end this dissertation with the Chapter eight, the *Conclusion*. This chapter reveals the significances and impact from the findings of my data collection and analysis sections. Moreover, it addresses new questions that were raised and the vast implications for future research that will impact pedagogy and cross disciplinary scholarship, and most importantly, ideas for moving this research toward social action.

This dissertation reflects the feelings and expressions about Blackness in Prince George's County by staff and students. I also acknowledge that because of my own subject positions, researcher positionality is a factor in my project. There is a part of me that is inserted in the data that emanate in this dissertation. I am a Prince George's county resident and I am a former educator in this county and at my research site. In addition to this information, my physical appearance, educational background, and age was a factor during my presence in the school. I also acknowledge that I came to this research with a public anthropology agenda for social justice in schools, wanting to uncover processes of power that are not interrogated that impact both students and educators. I feel that it is important to elevate the complexity of people and their experiences of Blackness and/or being Black. I am in no way disparaging or disavowing Blackness, especially as a political tool of solidarity. In fact, I come to the research with a very Pan-Africanist view and a desire to work for the solidarity of all peoples, particular peoples of African descent. However, I believe that we cannot get to a place of unity without creating the space for active participation and learning about the presence of diversity within this solidarity. Because of this and because this is truly part of the ethnographic process, I had to do constant self-evaluations with myself about how I interpret the data yet. As other scholars have discussed (Jones 1995; Narayan 1993; Slocum 2001), I had to not only determine what was beneficial and problematic about what I brought to the research and my how I analyzed data, I also had to include my existence and my voice as a legitimate part of the process.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH SETTING AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY



“Gorgeous Prince George’s”: Past and Present

Prince George’s County, Maryland, sometimes affectionately and contentiously referred to simply as “PG” or “PG County”, borders Washington, D.C. to the east. According to census data, it is described as “the wealthiest, most highly educated, predominantly African American jurisdiction in the country” (Hornsby 2003:41). Historically, PG County was an agricultural area from slavery in 1715 until the 1950s. Although PG County has been cited as having more African Americans than any other county in Maryland long before the Civil War, it began transforming into a suburban

community after desegregation and Blacks from Washington, DC began to move to the county in search of affordable housing and desegregated neighborhoods (Johnson 2002, Rowe 2003). This exponential growth of Black families, both U.S. born and immigrants, including immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries coupled with the proliferation of middle-class incomes can be partially attributed to migratory trends beginning in the mid 1960s in response to affordable housing, less stringent zoning practices, and access to Washington, DC (Johnson 2002, Rowe 2003). PG County continues to become a primary destination within the Washington, DC metro area for working class and immigrant populations which are predominantly African and Latino. The trend is fundamentally for more affordable housing compared to surrounding areas, particularly compared to Montgomery County and northern Virginia and because of its close proximity and accessibility to Washington, DC.

In terms of political representation, Wayne Curry was the first African American to hold the highest elected position of County Executive in the PG County in 1994, holding this position until 2002, also marking a significant shift in the county's demographic make-up to a predominantly Black county (Johnson 2002). Curry's successor, Jack Johnson, also an African American, is currently the County Executive. Johnson coined the phrase "gorgeous Prince George's" to bring attention to the positive aspects of living in this county (Chappell 2006). Both county executives represent the Democratic Party, the political group that currently has the largest Black representation. Al Wynn, an African American in the Democratic Party, was re-elected to the House of

Representatives seven times. Wynn came into office shortly after his respective district became a Black majority. These three political icons, particularly Curry and Wynn are important to mention because residents associate them with the solidification of strong Black leadership and it is documented that they became pivotal figures in an established predominantly Black county (Chappell 2006; Johnson 2002).

In addition to this leadership, the PG County PS has had five leaders in twelve years, failing to retain appropriate superintendents. After feuds and scandals leading to this high turnover rate for school superintendents for PG County PS, namely Iris Metts and Andre Hornsby, the current superintendent since 2006, is John Deasy, a white male who “promises to close the white/Black achievement gap (Anderson 2006). In listening to residents and employees connected to the public schools, there is a sentiment of critical awareness and to some degree tension that Deasy, a white man, is leading and representing the largest predominantly Black school system in the country. Deasy has recently announced his resignation as superintendent effective February 1, 2009 (Ruffin 2008).

Rucker and Thomas-Lester argue that because “people are leaving Prince George's and others are moving in, the county is becoming firmly established as a path to the middle class (2007). Historically a working class county, I argue that PG County is not just now merely becoming the passageway to middle-class status in 2008 but has been “becoming” ever since schools began to integrate in the mid-seventies. Although this was some twenty years after the de-segregation of schools in 1954, this is when

action was finally beginning to take place and families of African descent were beginning to grow in numbers in predominantly White neighborhoods and schools. I argue that because of cultural practices and survival strategies of extended families living together and possibly the ability to start and utilize businesses within social networks, U.S. born Blacks as well as immigrants of African, Caribbean, and Latin American descent have been able to use these stratagems in PG County from the onset of these migratory trends to establish paths to middle class status.

Prince George's County is not just a dot on a map that lies unknown to people. The country knows PG County indirectly as a neighbor to our nation's capital and home to branded entities such as the National Football League team, the Washington, Redskins, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, and Six Flags America Amusement Park. Prince George's receives its own attention as many have been taking note of the county, even though some of the attention has been interpreted by residents as negative publicity representing the county as a high profile crime area. In 2005, the ABC drama *Commander in Chief*, which focused on the first female president in the United States, had an episode where the president sent U.S. Marshals into PG County to quell crime. George Pelecanos⁷, part of the writing and production team for the critically acclaimed HBO television drama, "The Wire" set in Baltimore, Maryland has written several crime novels situated in Washington, DC and its adjacent PG County.

⁷ For more information on George Pelecanos and his novels see http://www.hbo.com/thewire/cast/crew/george_pelecanos.shtml and <http://www.hachettebookgroupusa.com/features/georgepelecanos/meet.html>

While Pelecanos' books have vivid depictions of crime in Prince George's County, Connie Briscoe (2003) published a novel entitled *PG County* in which she develops her characters around the wealth of African Americans, the exclusivity of their gated neighborhoods, businesses, and social lives, and also the tensions in their personal relationships. Briscoe has a follow-up to *PG County* called, *Can't Get Enough* (2006), again highlighting Prince George's county in a different light contrary to the negative attention and stereotypes consistently aligned with this predominantly Black space.

Although sometimes thought of as a corridor of its own, the highly recognized University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), the flagship entity out of the thirteen Maryland Institutions of Higher Education, resides in PG County. This university has been dubbed 'a public ivy school' because of its high scholastic achievement paired with state tuition prices. Its sport teams are also nationally recognized as they have won numerous championships. Terrapin paraphernalia can be seen all over the state of Maryland but little attention is pointed to the fact that the university is located in PG County Maryland. In addition, University of Maryland, University College (UMUC) and Bowie State University (BSU), a historically Black college/university (HBCU), are two other institutions in the University System of Maryland, also located in PG County. Sojourner-Douglass College, a private institution in Baltimore, has a satellite campus in PG County. Prince George's Community College (PGCC) is the only junior college in the county.

According to the U.S. University Directory⁸ the racial/ethnic demographics of the major higher education institutions in Prince George’s County are as follows:

**Table 2-1
Bowie State University Demographics**

Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment Numbers	Enrollment Percentages
Non-Resident Alien	N/A	N/A
Black, Non-Hispanic	4,680	88%
Hispanic	78	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	96	2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	13	Less than 1%
White, Non Hispanic	374	7%
Race Unknown	78	1%
Total Number of Students	5,319	

**Table 2-2
Prince George’s Community College Demographics**

Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment Numbers	Enrollment Percentages
Non-Resident Alien	553	4%
Black, Non-Hispanic	9,619	78%

⁸ See www.stateuniversity.com for more information on institutions of higher education. The racial/ethnic categories that are in these charts are the ones used in this source.

Hispanic	475	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	498	4%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	49	Less than 1%
White, Non Hispanic	1,133	9%
Race Unknown	70	Less than 1%
Total Number of Students	12,397	

Table 2-3
University of Maryland College Park Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment Numbers	Enrollment Percentages
Non-Resident Alien	3,057	9%
Black, Non-Hispanic	3,919	11%
Hispanic	1,754	5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4,143	12%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	122	Less than 1%
White, Non Hispanic	19,585	55%
Race Unknown	2,789	8%
Total Number of Students	35,369	

Table 2-4
University of Maryland University College Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment Numbers	Enrollment Percentages
Non-Resident Alien	231	Less than 1%
Black, Non-Hispanic	8,826	32%
Hispanic	1,343	5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,611	6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	173	Less than 1%
White, Non Hispanic	12,288	45%
Race Unknown	2,957	11%
Total Number of Students	27,429	

The fact that PG County has a majority Black population coupled with my personal observations of residents, students and alumni, leads me to argue that Bowie State University, because of its status as a historically Black University is easily positioned as being located in PG County in every day discourse. When positioned in discussions with other educational institutions, there is a sentiment that positions BSU or simply “Bowie State” as a “lower” academic institution, even in comparisons to other HBCUs. The implication is driven by the fact that is it predominantly Black and because of its location. In addition to BSU, PGCC, primarily for its namesake, which also has a large Black student population is also normalized as a PG County institution while the two other universities in the state of Maryland system are conceived of as location-less,

free standing institutions that have transcended boundaries of a county, at least the confines of being in PG County. People refer to going to school at Bowie State University and at the community college in terms of going to school in “PG” and attending the University of Maryland College Park as simply in “College Park”. In fact, matriculation at UMCP is rarely recognized with going to school in PG. In these instances, there is a clear distinction of how Blackness is constructed and confined within higher level institutions in PG County.

In writing about *Race and Space* and symbols of otherness, Bolles argues that this has “everything to do with black looks and the politics of representation from a location that centers on racism, sexism, and other forms of domination and oppression” (2001:1). The politics of representation that Bolles addresses can be applied to PG County’s higher education institutions through the lens of exclusionary cultural practices of mutual constructions of space. There are drastic differences between a College Park and a Bowie State in terms of funding, population numbers, national recognition, and of course in racial/ethnic demographics. People who attend these institutions as well as residents in PG County internalize these differences and assign cultural, racial, and spatial meaning that often comes at the price of being exclusionary. Johnson argues that,

...individuals or groups appropriate this complex and nuanced racial signifier in order to circumscribe its boundaries or to exclude other individuals or groups. When blackness is appropriated to the exclusion of others, identity becomes political (2003:3).

I agree with Johnson, but also argue that when whiteness is appropriated to the exclusion of others, identity becomes political as well and it aids in particular constructions of

Blackness. In both respects, this is the way College Park get written outside of authentically existing inside of PG County and how Bowie State is quintessentially of PG County from all parties, regardless of racial location.

While it is well documented that the population of PG County grew on the strength of desegregation and more affordable housing opportunities, according to the 2000 census, the homeownership rate was “61.8% in the county” compared to “67.7% for the state of Maryland⁹”. Ironically, the garden style apartment dwellings that initially attracted so many Black residents and others to PG County are now a haven for drugs, burglaries and other crimes and considered the “projects” of the county by residents and police officers. In some areas, these properties are being considered for demolition to “build up” the area and to attract retail.¹⁰

In 2006, “62% of housing was owner-occupied” (Metropolitan Washington Council of Government 2006). Bullard maintains that “Homeownership is the largest investment most families will make in their lifetime” and that “about 60 percent of America’s middle-class families’ wealth is derived from their homes” (2007:7). In the November 2006 edition of *Ebony* magazine, one of the oldest and most successful publications geared toward African Americans, a feature article was dedicated to life in PG County. According to author Kevin Chappell in 2006, “the average price for a new

⁹ Statistics can be found at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24033.html>

¹⁰ For more news information about revitalization in Prince George’s County see <http://www.wjla.com/news/stories/0707/437686.html>.

home is more than \$700,000, with many fetching more than \$1 million.” Chappell establishes the following:

With an average household income of \$74,000, the county has moved up from the fifth richest county in the state three years ago to the second, even surpassing Baltimore County and Anne Arundel County, a mostly White area awash with multimillion-dollar waterfront homes on Chesapeake Bay. In fact, the county has a greater percentage of households earning more than \$200,000 a year than any county in Maryland. While Prince George's County has some of the most expensive houses in the state, it is also among those with the youngest residents. The median age of its 900,000 residents is 33, with 44 percent being married couples and 35 percent of households having a child under the age of 18 (Chappell 2006).

Arguably, Chappell's numbers may be inflated as a county average and are perhaps restricted to certain locales such as Bowie, Mitchellville, and Fort Washington. These numbers are impressive compared to other areas of the country, particularly for communities predominately of color. Nevertheless, this specific scenario has little impact of the broader wealth gap between whites and Blacks. Bullard cites that “in 2000, Black middle-income families worked about twelve more weeks than white families to earn the same money” (2007:8). He also mentions that “homes in Black suburbia appreciate in value more slowly than comparable homes in majority-Black suburbs with similar median incomes” (2007:8). In addition to not earning the same money, most Blacks do not enter the housing market with the same assets and experiences that are and have been historically privileged to many whites (Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Shapiro 2003).

Pattillo-McCoy argues that a more suitable moniker for the Black middle class is the “lower middle class” (1999:2). She builds a case for the delicate nature of a Black middle class by comparing it to the white middle class. She establishes that unlike the

dominant middle-class, “Black middle-class neighborhoods are characterized by more poverty, higher crime, worse schools, and fewer services than white middle-class neighborhoods” This description reflects the makeup of PG County. Regardless of the prices of houses, the median income, public knowledge about Black spending habits, and the consistent commuting to other counties for both work and play, PG County lacks the services of high end retail and restaurants that are in abundance in neighboring counties.

In 2005, the *Washington Post* ran an article entitled “Prince George’s Makes Sales Pitch for High-End Retail” that discussed County Executive Jack Johnson’s unsuccessful plan to attract upscale industries¹¹ to PG County (Barbaro and Williams 2005). *Washington Post* writers Sterling and Talley’s respond to this article by arguing that “Contrary to Mr. Johnson's assertion, upscale retail is not the key to the county's economic future. Economic stability is derived from a well-run school system, police department, and county services administration” (2005). Although this statement may be true, it still cannot overlook the needs and desires of PG County residents and does not address or acknowledge the fact that they feel like they are treated as substandard citizens. The lack of resources and the refusal to create upscale trade signals blatant racial undertones to residents. This again connects to the larger theoretical frame for investigating constructions of Blackness and its intersections with class location and Whiteness (Barbaro and Williams 2005; Cashin 2007; Chappell 2006). This also clearly

¹¹ For more information about Prince George’s demographics related to income and retail stores, visit the Prince George’s County Executive’s website at http://www.co.pg.md.us/PGCounty/NewsRoom/PressReleases/PressReleases/news_article6450.asp?h=80&n=0

reveals the disparity between Black wealth and White wealth and how racism perpetuates this disparity (Oliver and Shapiro 2003). An entire county, despite its median income, large number of residents, and large physical span of land, which compares and exceeds neighboring counties, is excluded from the luxuries of higher-end retail opportunities. In this sense, Blackness in PG County is very much constructed and bounded by its lack of resources and the kinds of available resources. Blackness is then equated to and justified as 'being without' as neighboring counties that are predominantly White are normalized as 'having rightful access to'.

Sterling and Talley respond to the lack of resources in the county by citing crime statistics as a deterrent for higher end companies establishing businesses in PG County.

In 2003 Prince George's reported 7,263 crimes per 100,000 people -- second in the state only to Baltimore City, which reported 7,643 crimes. But while Baltimore police cleared 19 percent of their crimes, Prince George's police cleared only 7 percent of all major reported crimes, a 22.2 percent decline from 2002.

Prince George's County had more burglaries, more larceny-thefts and 256 percent more car thefts than Baltimore City -- 17,628 compared with 6,874. These staggering statistics mean high insurance costs for businesses and consumers who are afraid to shop in Prince George's (2005).

Although race, specifically Blackness, is a major indicator in this discussion, as both articles give the racial demographics and compare PG County to neighboring counties with vastly different racial make-ups, Sterling and Talley's article calls for a well thought out approach to handling the crime issues to create a more inviting environment for higher retail trade (2005).

There have been a number of crime cases that have made national media attention related to PG County. In 2002, the Beltway or DC sniper murders were one serial killer case that spanned the D.C. metro area with incidence in PG County. *Essence* magazine featured an article on the growing domestic abuse in PG County. In the fall of 2005 a husband set his wife on fire at her place of employment. Not even a full year later in the summer of 2006, there was another copy cat domestic abuse crime where a man set his girlfriend ablaze. There were other incidences where women died at the hands of their boyfriends and husbands. All of the perpetrators in these high profile cases were Black men.

Most recently, during the 2008 Superbowl game, three men were shot and killed inside of Uno's Pizzeria Restaurant in Largo, Maryland. These murders were the result of arguments and bets placed on the game. This popular shopping area has a Magic Johnson's Movie Theater and a Starbucks and is one of the newer establishments in PG County, which is metro accessible. However, it has no high end retail stores or restaurants. Despite growing crime issues, the newest attraction to PG County is the National Harbor Project¹², which is located at both the entrance of PG County and the Maryland border with northern Virginia, right off of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. PG County has "an out-migration of 61 percent of its workforce" mainly to Washington D.C. and Montgomery County which purports higher salaries and hourly wage jobs. Statistics

¹² The National Harbor Project is mixed used development on the Potomac River in Prince George's County. For more information, see <http://www.nationalharbor.com>

suggest that “25.7 percent of the region being employed by the federal government” (Metropolitan Washington Council of Government 2006), The National Harbor will become one of the top ten employers in the county, bringing new jobs to at least ten percent of county residents (Metropolitan Washington Council of Government 2006).

PG County is also steadily changing its demographics. There is a growing Latino population, largely from Central America but also with an additionally growing presence from other Spanish-speaking places as well. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Government cites that “of foreign born, half originate from Latin American, 23% from Asia, and 20% from Africa (2006). The Brookings report by Rucker and Thomas-Lester identify the following:

...those moving to the county -- many from Montgomery County and the District -- are more likely to be foreign-born than those leaving. Census data show that the proportion of the county's population that is foreign born grew from 13.8 percent in 2000 to 18.7 percent in 2005, and many of these new residents are Hispanics and African nationals. The concentration of Latinos, particularly Salvadorans and Guatemalans, is changing the faces of some of the county's northern communities, as it has changed others in the region. In Edmonston, a town of 1,300 about two miles past the District line, the Hispanic population is poised to overtake the Black population, census data show. Historic North Brentwood has been a mostly Black hamlet since it was settled by African American Civil War troops, but it has become 25 percent Hispanic” (Rucker and Thomas-Lester 2007).

This is important information to the research because it emphasizes the dynamism of PG County and the people who live here. These demographics serve as an key lens through which to view potential racial and ethnic tensions and opportunities, especially given the current immigration debates and the spiraling national economic situation of 2008. Although this is still the largest predominantly Black county, the demographics continue

to change. Blacks of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds are also moving farther out to places like Charles County, for more affordable housing and job opportunities as this county is quickly developing. Studying the movement of people into and out of PG County over the next few years may serve as another timely research opportunity, but now proves to be a significant time to carry out this research.

In the study of spatial relationships in terms of allegiances and tensions among “Latinos, Blacks, and Afro-Latinos” Dzidienyo and Oboler index how the early 21st century is a historical moment (2005). Their research notes (Mindiola et al 2002) that there is “much greater visibility of Latinos and African Americans in the daily life of the society, as exemplified by a variety of social settings, ranging from schools and workplaces to social service agencies and neighborhoods (2005:17). Dzidienyo and Oboler also insist that:

the decennial census report brought to light the extent to which Latinos are now immigrating in significant numbers to parts of the country such as Georgia and North Carolina, where African Americans have historically been the predominant minority (Murphy et al 2001; Fink 2003), forcing those regions to contend with and address racial issues that to date were restricted to other parts of the nation, such as New York or California (2005:17).

In addition to these shifting demographics, Dzidienyo and Obler also note (Mindiola et al 2002) “the 2000 census showed that together, these two groups of color outnumbered non-Hispanic Whites in the five largest U.S. cities, namely, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia” (2005:17-18), which is also a historical occasion.

Public Schools’ Demographics

PG County Public Schools constitute the “second largest school district in Maryland and the eighteenth largest in the United States” (Hornsby 2003:40). It is also consistently second to Baltimore City schools in lowest achievement scores in the state (Anderson 2006). Prince George’s second place status to Baltimore presents a worrisome contrast for school and county officials and residents, particularly since Baltimore is a smaller working class city that is also referenced to as the heroin capital due to the high rates, beginning in 2000 by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration¹³ and CBS news¹⁴. The enrollment data for PG County Public Schools for 2003-2004 indicated the system had approximately 135,756 students. The race categories used for demographic documentation were American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, White, and Hispanic. The “enrollment by race category...was 77.9% African American, 9.0% White, 9.4% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.5% American Indian” (Hornsby 2003:40). According to data provided by *Great Schools, the Parent’s Guide to K-12 Success*, 2005-2006 school data indicate that out of the 198 public schools in PG County, demographic breakdown by race/ethnicity for the county compared to the state of Maryland are indicated in the table below:

**Table 2-5
County Demographics for All Prince George’s County Public School Students**

Race/Ethnicity	Research Site ‘Diversity	County	State
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¹³ For comprehensive information on drug use, statistics, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, see <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/index.htm>.

¹⁴ For full article see <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2000/07/30/national/main220037.shtml>.

	Middle School'		
Black (Not Hispanic)	68%	76%	38%
Hispanic	27%	14%	8%
White	3%	6%	49%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	3%	5%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	<1%
Free or reduced lunch	50%	43%	32%

<http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/md/other/1068#students>

The above chart compares racial/ethnic demographics for my research site to the larger PG County and the entire state of Maryland. The free or reduced lunch category also presents important data to examine as a marker of economic class. These statistics will serve as a bureaucratic guide for contextualizing race, ethnicity, and class in PG County.

Fieldwork Site and Researcher Positionality

Diversity Middle School (DMS)¹⁵ is in Henton,¹⁶ Maryland and inside of “the beltway”, (highway 495) that encircles Washington, D.C. by running through Maryland and Virginia. DMS is a little over five miles from the District line. Although the school boundaries expand past neighboring areas and some students are bused from some more distant neighborhoods due to school zoning and busing practices. Many of the areas in

¹⁵ Diversity Middle School is a pseudonym for the name of the middle school where I did my research.

¹⁶ Henton is a pseudonym for the city of the research site in Prince George’s County.

which students are bused are closer to the District. Compared to these vicinities, Henton is one of the farthest areas from border.

There are single family homes in the neighborhood surrounding the school, most of which are ramblers or split foyer style, built between a span of the late 1950s until the late 1960s. Instead of garages, the majority of these homes have a single driveway and/or carport. The neighborhood is lined with trees and a park provides green space for residents. Bordering the neighborhood on two major streets that run perpendicular are older garden style apartments in need of painting with limited green space. Although the neighborhood homes can be described as modest, the garden style apartments are a stark contrast as toys and clothes can often be seen on balconies of the few apartments that have them.

There are a number of shops and service places such as cell phone retail and automotive services, fast-food dining such as McDonald's, Wendy's and Bojangle's, and a discount grocery store along this corridor. A metro station is a little less than a mile away. The neighborhood is very quiet except when school is about to start or has been dismissed for the day. People can be seen at the bus stops daily; women, some with infants and toddlers, and teenaged boys or young men. What remains constant in my observations of the bus stops is that the people waiting are always people of color. This information has class implications based on which groups use public transportation, who can afford to buy and maintain an automobile, and the kinds of housing that is available. This is significant because of how people conceptualize the Black middle class in Prince

George's county as well as how class is understood by many to be simply how much money one makes and what one is able to purchase. Although there are many homeowners in this neighborhood, it is clear that housing, both single family homes and apartments have stark differences in comparison to more affluent parts of PG County. The types of resources and commodities within the parameters of Henton also point to certain types of class implications.

DMS, tucked away in the neighborhood of Henton, was established as part of a new housing development project in 1959. It is a three level building with temporary trailers serving as classrooms in the back. During my research there were approximately 980 to 1,050 students, 400 of which are in the English as a Second Language Program (ESOL). There were a total of 86 staff members, 65 of whom were teachers. All four administrators for the 7th and 8th grade levels were African American, three males and one female. At the entrance to the school, the interior walls and display cases are filled with depictions of notable African Americans and positive quotes. As I observed the children and talked with staff, the labels and descriptions that emerge about the students is "predominantly Black and Brown" or the dichotomous "Black and Latino", "Black and Hispanic" terms used to describe the population. Although PG County PS does not mandate for all schools to be on a uniform policy, students at DMS wear uniforms which strictly enforces the khaki pants and two different shirt colors, differentiating 7th and 8th grades. Students are not allowed to have bags in class or on their person after locker time

is finished. Student population information indicates that children are coming from five PG County communities and originating in fourteen countries.

DMS, its school system, and the county, were not new places to me. I moved to PG County in August of 1999. I taught middle school for the county from 1999-2003 and from 2002-2003 taught at DMS. I continue to reside in PG County today. What follows is a personal account of anecdotal evidence and methodological context which is significant because it supports my theory of positionality. I come to this work with multiple subjectivities and two of the most salient ones is my position as a former educator and being an MGUS born woman.

Before I taught in PG County PS, my first year of teaching was with Hampton City Schools in Virginia. It had its joys and challenges. The demographics were closer to being more proportional between Blacks and Whites, the Latino population at the time barely existed, and the Asian population although small, was growing with several of the students being biracial with Asian and White heritage. The students of not outwardly apparent working class families inserted themselves in material middle class culture by wearing name brand clothes and having the latest electronics and music. Pattillo-McCoy suggests that "...youth use their own bodies and the accessories that adorn them as status markers and symbols of identity 2004:290). The ability to have commodities, despite how they are obtained and at what cost, and regardless of occupation or educational attainment, often distracts from actual wealth accumulation and income stability and flexibility. Pattillo-McCoy also argues,

People use material goods to level the playing field, buying things they often cannot afford in order to give others the impression that they can. African Americans use material goods as symbolic affronts to the power of white (2004:290).

Class status for students in the most immediate and basic forms are determined first by what material goods one visibly has and then by where one lives.

Parents were overly-involved and some white parents, regardless of class, were excessively critical and some overtly prejudiced to Black teachers. The majority of teachers were White and the administration at this school was both Black and White. The students were the best students a first year teacher could have ever dreamed of. They worked hard, were well behaved, and I only had two disciplinary problems the entire year, one of which included a minor altercation in my classroom. The “fight” was not really a “fight” but involved two students who pushed each other and wanted to look big and bad but in truth, did not actually want a physical altercation. This school had a strict no fighting policy that warranted a ten day suspension for all parties involved, which I believe explains the few physical altercations, suspensions and other disciplinary acts. This discussion of the past lends a certain comparative context in which I initially had for Prince George County and teaching.

When I accepted my first teaching job in PG County I was twenty three years old, fresh out of graduate school and armed with one year of teaching experience. I moved to Maryland without a plan or a job and got hired and placed at the alternative middle school, a last chance facility for students with suspensions and expulsions, the Friday before the first day of school began.

When I began teaching in PG County, I had no information about the county or the schools. I was encouraged to be among a number of people of Black people and so many people of African descent in positions of authority. The entire teaching staff and administration was Black. The superintendent at the time was Black and female as well. The students I taught were students who attended the alternative school as a last resort. Most were U.S. born Black and Black with roots from the Caribbean and Africa. There was a growing number of Latino students, mainly from Central America, a total of five white students over three years, one biracial American Indian and MGUS born Black male student, and one Korean male student. Although many of my middle schoolers should have long been in high school, I worked with students who experienced what most would consider adult life at an early age or things that many adults had not and will never experience. I had an 8th grade male student who was an alcoholic, an 8th grade female student that was a heroin user, a 7th grader whose mother had confirmed she had 6 abortions, an 8th grade female student that would run away to the District to do sex work, students who sold drugs, two male students who wore ankle bracelets (issued by judges to track their location) due to juvenile offenses, and a number of students that were on prescriptions for ADHD, bi-polar disorders, and depressions.

There were fights every day. We had emergency buttons in our rooms. One fight was so out of control it took three adult males to pull a girl who was about five feet one inch tall off of another. Other fights yielded blood and pulled hair. When a group of students were taken to participate in “Scared Straight” a fieldtrip to a jail as a

preventative measure for students to be swayed not to go down that path, Mike, one of our students knew three of the men in the jail, one of which was his cousin.

There were other stories. There were also a number of homeless students. One was being raised by his young father who was a graduate of Howard University. My staff and I had a hard time reconciling how an “educated person” could possibly be homeless. A little less than half of the students had grandparents raising them and as well as at least four students who lived in households with five generations under one roof. One year, one of my 7th grader’s families was in a well-publicized missing person’s case. His grandmother was abducted and murdered by her much younger boyfriend. The boyfriend was later caught in her car he had stolen. Some students were sensitive; other used this as a jonin¹⁷ opportunity. I include this information as examples of some of the challenges that existed when I began teaching in the county.

At this school, each classroom teacher was supposed to have a teaching assistant, but because I knew how to “handle my classroom” my helper was placed on other assignments in the building. These stories characterize my first introduction to PG County and are used to show some of the challenges that exist. Although there are also positive stories of students helping each other, accounts of students who improved in their academics, and students I later learned that went on to college, there was a lot of misery that challenged the majority of these children. These pressing realities that Black

¹⁷ “Joinin” is a well known category of insulting another person in parts of United States Black culture. See Talkin and Testifyin – Smitherman or urban dictionary www.urbandictionary.com for more information. For information on other forms of verbal competition in United States Black culture, see Kelley 2004.

children experience and what teachers are faced with are a persistent theme that describes and stereotypes what it means to be Black in PG County and in other settings where there are populations of Black and Brown children that few trainings or research interrogates. Discussions of these themes are rarely dismantled, especially in the context of a PG County. What is interesting is that in talking with other educators, despite PG County's reputation for being the largest Black middle class county, it is also talked about and treated as an "urban environment."

Like all researchers, I have baggage. I came to the county with my own sense of Blackness and middle classness based on my personal background, based on television and other aspects of media, from my recent college experience at a historically Black university, and from my first teaching experience in Virginia. I had to mature, nuance, and navigate through all of the complexities that came with this new teaching experience and this did not come through any type of training or support. It is extremely important to recognize the ethnographer's ability to create meaning and to be reflexive about perspectives and bias that are brought into the research. I also view myself as a native anthropologist and argue that it is critical to explain what that means to this research (Jones 1995; Narayan 1993; Slocum 2001).

My fifth and last year teaching (fourth year teaching in the county) was at DMS. When I came to this school, it was considered one of the "rough" middle schools. A few months before I began teaching here there were a number of incidents of serious misbehavior including teachers' cars being vandalized and students setting the elevator

on fire. After my arrival, there were a number of fights; a number of truant students not coming to school at all or leaving the school during the day and strangers having entree to unmonitored access points in the building. This was the same year of the nationally known D.C. sniper, not long following the events of September 11th. The students already had a period of being confined to the building and restricted from all fieldtrips, especially to DC. Prior to the sniper all outdoor activities were cancelled until the end of the school year. This had a profound effect on the school as student and teachers were literally unable to leave the building except to come and go for the day. This crisis produced a lot of tension for everyone as people looked forward to leaving the building and doing ‘normal’ school activities outside of the classroom. After my last year of teaching at DMS, there was a highly publicized student stabbing on school grounds. This was a “recon” school which meant that the Maryland State Department of Education had it on a special list scheduled for reconstitution. Schools on this list had a time limit to get its act together in terms of numbers of licensed teachers, attendance and suspension rates, and test scores or it could be subjected to being taken over by the state or be shut down. With that said, this school was being closely monitored.

While teaching, I noticed that many of the conflicts in the classroom, in the hallways, during lunch, and in other classes often started off with name calling or jonin. Almost every time, a slur about skin color, hair texture, ethnic or cultural issues, accents, “ethnic sounding names”, and about what someone had or did not have was involved in the confrontation between students. As I attempted to address these problems, I was able

to look deeper into how students self-segregated themselves and observed it was the greatest insult to talk about or confuse someone with being from Africa or African. This was the fire starter for students who were from the English-speaking Caribbean and had dark skin with noticeable accents or for African students who tried to blend with MGUS born Blacks. The confusion of the mistaken identity of Caribbean students with African students increased the wedge between these two broad groups and this led me to believe that there was intentional and associated negativity about Africa because in these cases the students with Spanish accents or Spanish names did not get the brunt in the same way; to the contrary, they were exoticized (Morris 2003).

These findings are significant because they reveal subtle processes about how whiteness operates within a space that has few whites. Students strategize how to distance themselves as far from the perceived social bottom of Blackness which in this case is anything associated with Africa - the quintessential equation of Blackness, and to attach to any other option (Morris 2003; Whitten and Torres 1998). If there is an invisible scale, I hypothesize that U.S. born Blacks, because of their history of racial mixing and their status as American, are perceived to be by some immigrants of African descent as well as by themselves, to be socially closer to a standard of whiteness or perhaps socially farther away from a standard of African-ness. Latinos, even those of African descent, are perceived to be in a liminal space that offers options often because of their surname, their ability to speak Spanish, and their phenotype that is often viewed as

somewhere in between Black and White or as intriguing because of varying physical characteristics of skin color, hair length and hair texture (Bailey 2001; Duany 2005).

While I worked at DMS as an 8th grade science teacher, several incidents occurred among students where race, culture, and belonging became topics of discussion. I kept a journal of these events. Quite often students used physical features to describe each other and themselves and were quite interested in how other students racially identified as well as how I identified. I broke up a fight between two boys, one identifying as Black and the other as Puerto Rican, where in the midst of the fight the Black boy called the Puerto Rican boy a ‘white boy.’ The Puerto Rican boy was dumbfounded because in no way did he identify as being white and after speaking with them both, he talked about his Puerto Rican Blackness. Two of my Latina students, one identifying as part El Salvadorian and part Guatemalan – “Maria” and the other identifying as Dominicana – “Kathy”, were best friends until Kathy noticed that Maria’s mother was only speaking Spanish around her and was saying negative things not knowing she was “Spanish” too. She confided in me about how this tension was brought to the classroom and their common friendships. This information also opened my eyes to the wider conflicts between “Blacks and browns” and resentment around perceptions of “being Black” in PG County. Betancur researches relationships between African Americans and Latinos and argues that there are several factors that impact rapport. He argues,

Factors such as location, mix, and makeup of groups, histories, group size, time and conditions of entry, intensity of interactions and community building can produce different outcomes as can experiences that Latinos bring from their home countries, the timing of their immigration, the nationalities and classes involved in the mix, and their

level and forms of incorporation into the U.S. economy. Dynamics differ, for instance, according to who is the numerical majority, who is the most organized and in what terms, and the role of each group in the local economy (2005).

Betancur also suggests that for African Americans, tensions arrive when they are no longer the only “minorities” in an area and become in competition for resources (2005).

Maria, who had only been in the United States for a few years, was using my computer during lunch when she told me that she had a picture of her grandfather and it shows that he “looks Black.” One of my students, “Michael,” whose parents were from Barbados was tormenting another student “Yemini,” a recent immigrant from Nigeria for being “African” and having a distinct accent. I asked him where his parents were from and he proudly and defiantly answered “My parents are from Barbados.” When I asked where he thought his ancestors came from before they were in Barbados, he said “Not Africa.” Yemini, who had self-shortened her name from her longer African moniker was mainstreamed in regular classes because at the time we did not have an ESL (English as a Second Language) Program. After my “help” with this situation Yemini was eternally grateful, although the harassment continued when she was not in my class. Again, misconceptions and stereotypes about Blackness and ties to Africa were heavily at play (Morris 2003; Whitten and Torres 1998).

There were more instances that happened throughout this year teaching. Two students appearing “Black” were in a verbal altercation arguing about skin color and hair texture. “Chris*,” the student dishing out most of the derogatory remarks described himself as Indian (American) and not Black, however, he could not identify what tribe or

nation to which he belonged, but was emphatic that he “was not Black or mixed with any Black”. Jones, who authored *Black/Indian Relations*, argues that for some individuals who are of discernable African descent and American Indian heritage, many will deny any Blackness and focus only on other parts of their racial heritage (2001).

In the spring, a school dance was held and “Hortencia*” a student from Nicaragua said she was not going because ...”they were just going to play Black music and not our music”. She also corrected someone who had described her Puerto Rican friend as “light-skinned” and told them, “She isn’t Black, she’s Puerto Rican!” In my mind, this was a teachable moment so I inquired about what she meant about what was Black music was and what was our music. She thought about it for a while and stammered in her answer but came up with “Salsa and meringue is our music and rap is Black music”. I pushed her a little more and asked her where salsa and meringue originated, if she knew about its African influences, and if was this truly the music of Nicaragua. She did not know about its African influences. I also asked her if she knew Black people existed in Latin American and she hesitated but said yes (Chasteen 2004; Whitten and Torress 1998).

Overall, I had pretty good relationships with the majority of my students. Many came and spoke to me privately about issues they were having. Most of the students inquired about how I identified racially as many tried to claim me as their own or find some type of connection. This was extremely important to them as this continued as what I considered an obsession for the entire year. When I would not answer, they would try to guess, saying that “You know you Spanish but you don’t want to admit it” or Ms.

Washington is half White, half Black” or Ms. Washington ain’t Black but she sounds like it when she gets angry”, marking for them an association with phenotype, behavior and racial identity.

The teacher part of me would like to say that this obsession with my particular phenotype was for some students, truly a way to forge a connection. Perhaps if they did not learn in my class or feel respected, the way I looked would not have mattered as much. The anthropologist part of me observes that Whiteness and anything associated with being closer to it, entices people’s curiosity. Whiteness in the United States makes people wonder about and attempt to reconcile anything that is not a clear distinction between white and Black, especially in the United States (Davis 1991; Davis 1997; Duany 2005; Marx 1998). Perhaps for students who see themselves in between this binary, such is the case for many Latinos, biracial, and self-acknowledged multiracial individuals, may feel the need to categorize me.

With Teachers

There was a white female teacher who referred to the kids as “You African Americans”. Some of the students and an administrator that knew about the situation expressed that they felt that every time she said that in her particular tone she really wanted to say “You niggers”. Some of the students were most upset about that fact that they were not African Americans but Caribbean Americans or Latinos and she kept referring to them all in one category. I am not sure how she identified me but she approached me one day in the parking lot and said “Yeah, these classes can be rough with

all these Black kids and because I'm White, but I know my stuff and I know how to handle [them]." I was caught off guard so I just looked at her. There were rumors of her being an alcoholic and I smelled alcohol on her so instead of attempting to have an intellectual conversation about what her statement meant, I simply reported the encounter to an administrator. This is a prime example of why teacher support for cultural competence and sensitivity, among other important aspects of transformative teaching is critical. When discussing White teachers and diverse schools, Howard argues that,

"inadequate preparation of teachers to deal effectively with increasing diversity, curriculum that remains Eurocentric and monocultural, political manipulation of ethnic and racial fears and hostilities, and resistance from educators, school boards, and communities to face the realities of their changing populations (1999:2-3) as key issues.

A different teacher, a self-reflexive, older, White woman shared an embarrassing learning experience with me. During the December holidays she asked a South Asian student with the last name Mohammed if he would be offended if they had a Christmas party and he told her that he was Christian. She said "I just assumed because of his name and because he was Indian that he wasn't Christian". For many of the teachers, the categories they used to talk about students were Black, African, and Latino (used interchangeably with 'Spanish'). When I asked one of the administrators this year what the breakdown of the Black Latino population was this year compared to when I was there he responded "I really don't know because I can't tell them apart".

There was a MGUS born Black female teacher who was notorious for mispronouncing student's names, especially the Spanish names and would ask several of the kids "You African or something, where did you get that kind of name from?" She

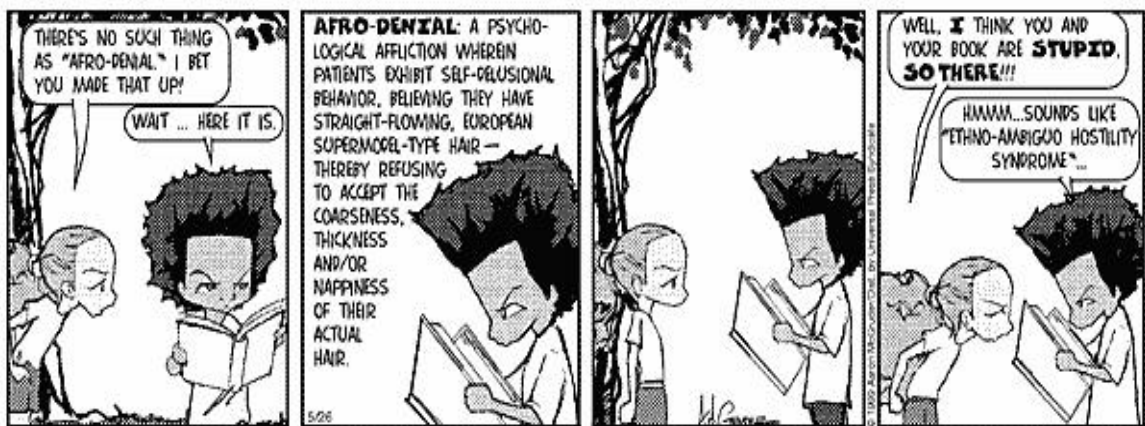
would continue to say the names the way she wanted to even if she was corrected. She interrupted my class one day because she had to pull students for a special program. As she was reading her list she stopped dead in her tracks on one particular name. She read it extremely slowly and over-pronounced the African American name and in her attempt to make a joke this professional said “D-A-G what kind of African name is this? Where did yo Momma get THIS name from? You supposed to be African or something”? The girl was so embarrassed because she was singled out and the African students tried to become invisible. Some of the students laughed but many of the students resented this woman always destroying their names and taking every opportunity she could to embarrass them.

During my research here, the Latino population soared, not just at my research site, but in the county as a whole. Several students were identified in the school database as being of a different race/ethnicity other than how they self-identified and how they were identified based on phenotype. This seemed to be the case with some students who were immigrants or children of immigrants who were of African descent and/or had one parent that was White. In these cases, the parents marked the children as White or as Hispanic. There was evidence of this for one bi-racial Black/White student who was categorized as White, another student with roots from Jamaica being marked as White, and most of the Afro-Latino students being delineated as Hispanic. This was also true of some students who identified as Hispanic but not of African descent, but were phenotypically not what is considered White in the U.S. or perhaps in their home country. They too were marked as White (Duany 1998; Duany 2005; Waterson 2006). This

seemed to be the case for approximately 10 students for whom I had access to this information. For many, the United States rules of hypodescent are new, although in their home country there are distinctions of race based on phenotypic characteristics and class (Davis 1991; Duany 1998; 2005; Fears 2002; Waterson 2006). Particularly in Latin American, there are racial intermediaries that are based on skin color and other physical characteristics and class and are widely accepted (Duany 1998; 2005). Alternately, many have quickly navigated United States racism and as a strategy to fight against oppression, they have consciously chosen to employ as best as possible, a new racial identity, one that does not work as easily in the country of origin or heritage or here in the United States.

The historical way in which Blackness is socially constituted along with the predominance of students of African descent, class diversity, and the pathways of immigration to the county, all make PG County Public Schools a very promising place for interrogating the social construction and diversity of Blackness.

CHAPTER 3– LITERATURE REVIEW



There is not one body of work or discipline that exclusively informed my dissertation project, but many. How Blackness is socially constructed is not (re)configured as a linear process nor (re)conceptualized as a one-dimensional model, so it was impossible to draw on one distinct scholarly terrain to interrogate this construction. The following sections highlights a diverse and interdisciplinary literature review situated in broad topical arenas such as the use of language, Blackness, Whiteness, race, and racial and ethnic identity, as well as issues in education that focus on identification, diversity and multiculturalism have helped inform my dissertation project. A plethora of information on achievement in education, especially along lines of race, is present in the literature, however; multiculturalism and diversity as it related to students of African

descent have been the focal point in the scholarship on education that I have sought for my project. This literature informs my analysis of anecdotes in the previous chapters and ethnographic data throughout the dissertation.

Although this project does not constitute a historical venture or scholarship on Diaspora, it was absolutely necessary to situate this project within these bodies of literature to establish a framework for understanding how all of these topics mentioned in the literature review inform my dissertation project. This panoply of research that I draw on in unpacking my data and for building theory is essential for the transformation of my research to this dissertation. In turn, my research has implications to add to the fields of history and Diaspora studies in addition to anthropology and education by adding new theoretical frameworks for exploring Blackness as a diverse and complicated ever changing process that cannot be explored during the twenty-seven, sometimes twenty eight days of Black history month. This is not a knock against designated time to honor Blacks. Black history month is important, but is also constraining because only so much can be examined in that small amount of time. It is imperative to examine how race, ethnicity, gender, language, citizenship, immigrant status, sexuality and many others intersect at the all levels, but particularly within education so we can understand how the schooling of our students and the training of our teachers can be revolutionized. It is also critical to analyze how teachers influence students on these issues. Teachers may be contributing by offering uninformed or unexplored perspectives or by not addressing issues at all.

Race, Blackness, and Diaspora

One of my goals is to explore the meaning and use of racial and ethnic terms as a tool to unpack the construction of Blackness and to reflect on the different ways that negotiation processes between the autonomy of self-identification and group membership are present. Another goal is to offer ideas about next steps for this research and possible solutions for both pedagogy and conflict resolution. Although there has been some interesting theory building on “segmented” and “strategic” modes of incorporation and assimilation for immigrants and minorities into United States society (Portes and Zhou 1993; Neckerman et al 1999; Lacy 2004) and the scholarship has its place and usefulness, I am not interested in using assimilation models for investigating constructions of Blackness. I am more interested in how notions of diaspora and transnationalism can be applied as tools for unpacking this. There is far more value in going deeper to understand how experiences of racialization processes vary for different people of African descent with different connections of concepts of home and within communities of color. Classic and contemporary assimilation models sustain a focus on how people strive to blend into the white mainstream. However, this is not a useful model for investigations of areas of minority-majorities. Of course this is all relative to where people fit in to the larger schemata of the United States, but on the local level, where I am interested in research, the assimilation model is not as constructive.

A vast body of literature deals with how race, specifically Blackness, is conceptualized, problematized, and practiced throughout the African Diaspora (Davis 1991; Skinner 1993; Whitten and Torres 1998; Waters 2001). Race, having been established as a social construct with no biological merits, is in fact a keen political and experiential reality. In discussing the African Diaspora, it is a reality due to both forced and voluntary migration and is very much attached to subject positions that are almost always tied to race, Blackness, and social positioning (Drake 1993; Harris 1993; Skinner 1993). In order to connect the notions of race, Blackness, and diaspora, I would like to address how some scholars utilize, interrogate, and challenge these concepts.

The works of Davis and Omi and Winant lend historical accounts of race and Blackness in the United States, citing conceptualizations, laws, and consequence of racial mixing and so-called miscegenation (Davis 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). They unpack laws of hypodescent and the present day implications for the African descended in the United State. In addition to describing how this impacts people of African descent, this work provides a framework for understanding how all people of all backgrounds in the United States are impacted by and operated under embedded ideology of hypodescent. These historical analyses of race in the United States and the inquiry of this entrenched ideology into the national fabric has been more than helpful in establishing a framework for constructing Blackness.

Dzidzienyo and Oboler were two of the first scholars to put an anthology together about examining historic and present day relations among African Americans, Afro-

Latinos, and Latinos, being intentional about interrogating inter-minority relations (2005). They explore how Blackness is constructed and experienced across the Americas.

Dzidzienyo and Oboler argue that

...the presence of Afro-Latinas/os among those identified as “Hispanics” has been publicly neglected, that Latinas/os are now the largest statistical minority in the nation is, a significant milestone in U.S. history – given the extent to which U.S. politics, culture, and race relations have all been so indelibly marked and understood in terms of the white/majority/Black minority paradigm (2005:17).

Dzidzienyo and Oboler and the other scholars in this edited edition, elevate the discourse of the changing demographics and the constructions of racial labels and categories in a nuanced way that speaks to and informs my work (2005). As stated in the previous chapter, this information impacts tensions that exist between Black and Brown communities in PCG and turns the attention toward dynamics among people of color and away from a Black/White binary and a United States/developing nation dichotomy. Furthermore, the absence of African descended Latinos in discussions of PG County Blackness in itself is one way constructions of Blackness take place.

Johnson draws on the use of performativity “to interpret various sites of performed “Blackness” (2003:7). He argues that “...Blackness offers a way to rethink performance theory by forcing it to ground itself in praxis, especially within the context of a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, homophobic society” (2003:9). While Johnson refuses to limit Blackness by privileging one definition, he discusses how authenticity is performed and is used as a measure of what Blackness is supposed to be. He also shows how the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality heavily influence

the construction and performance of any notion of 'authentic' Blackness. Particular signifiers and their intersections become invested with social meaning that mark Blackness in defining ways (Johnson 2003).

Jackson examines the negotiation of race by building theory through the lens of a self-made dichotomy of "sincerity" versus "authenticity" (2005). Jackson presents interesting concepts for examining Black identity, but the dynamism he takes in contrasting sincerity and authenticity is also a jargon laden and an arduous process for any academic to comprehend. Furthermore, I find it problematic to address Blackness in New York and the subject of hip hop without problematizing the complex and multicultural and multiethnic nature of Blackness in this space. He completely eliminates discussions of Afro-Latinos.

In shifting issues of race toward diaspora, a number of scholars present multiple ways of characterizing and defining the complexity of it. Harris defines the concept of the African diaspora as including the following:

"the global dispersion (voluntary and involuntary) of Africans throughout history; the emergence of a cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition; and the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa. Thus viewed, the African diaspora assumes the character of a dynamic, continuous, and complex phenomenon stretching across time, geography, class, and gender (Harris 1993:3-4).

Therefore, the Diaspora is a highly contested phenomenon that needs to be nuanced in different ways (Harris 1993; Hunwick 1993; Shyllon 1993; Walters 1993; Brown 2006; Harrison 2006). Skinner argues that "relations between peoples in diasporas and their

ancestral homelands are complex and full of dialectical contradictions” (1993:11). He identifies three major premises to discuss diaspora:

First, there is anger, bitterness, and remorse among the exiles – and often among the people at home – over the weaknesses that permitted the dispersion to occur. Second, there is conflict when the dominant hosts attempt to justify the subordinate status of the exiles, and the latter, in turn, refuse to accept the status thrust on them. Often the dominant groups display contempt for the homelands of their victims, and the latter feel constrained to defend the countries from which they or their ancestors came. Third, there is often an acrimonious debate among the exiles themselves, and between them and their host and ancestral communities, as to whether the exiles should return to their homelands” (1993:11).

Although the vast literature on diaspora for people of African descent explores how this particular event or series of events was heavily impacted by the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, there are a number of scholars who argue that there is not a single way to engage in African Diaspora scholarship and more specifically challenge that discourse(s) on diaspora for people of African descent need to be nuanced and rearticulated in a more complex way (Walters 1993; Harrison 2006; Yelvington 2006).

Lukose argues that “the framework of diaspora has been so strikingly absent from the anthropological literature on immigration and education in the United States (2007:408). She defines diaspora as “...that subset of relations and transformations focused on identity formations of migrant communities” (2007:409). Although I agree with Lukose’s assertion about the lack of scholarship on diaspora in the anthropological canon on United States’ immigration and education, I would not limit a viable definition solely to migrant communities because the term migrant causes much contestation. Would one not legitimately be considered part of a diaspora if he or she did not identify

in that way or 'generationed' out of immigrant or migrant status? If diaspora is about connection to a homeland, either imagined or real, but the person was not physically apart of that initial displacement, does the concept of diaspora not apply? Wright's stance on diaspora speaks back to this definition as she views diaspora as "...a formation in which many subjectivities exist that cannot be organized into thetical and antithetical categories... (2004:12-13)."

Present discussions of Diaspora include not viewing a uniform African Diaspora but in fact several African Diasporas that are distinct from one another, including an African European Diaspora and African Asian Diaspora that is often not incorporated in emblematic African Diaspora discussions and conceptualizations (Harris 1993; Hunwick 1993; Shyllon 1993; Walters 1993; Brown 2006; Harrison 2006). Harris situates his research in the east African slave trade to parts of the Middle East and to India (1993) which is largely obscured by scholarship on the West African slave trade and where these Africans were relocated. Hunwick also brings to light the African Diaspora to "the Mediterranean, the Middle East and South Asia...beginning some eight centuries before the transatlantic slave trade and not ending until several decades after the latter was halted" (1993:289). Shyllon (1993) and Brown (2006) direct our attention to the African Diaspora to Europe and discuss how it is positioned in London. This discussion is important for opening up space to all possibilities of an African or Black diaspora as well as room to consider relevant debates.

How Diaspora is historicized is through the use of phenotypic difference and behavioral characteristics that were used to biologize race and justify the enslavement and transportation of African peoples to the Americas. Racial ideology also structured social difference, power, and inequality, and subsequently Blackness has been marked as the social bottom of many societies throughout the Americas (Davis 1991; Davis 1997; Whitten and Torres 1998). This hegemonic lens allows race to appear to illuminate identity more often than anything else. Whether people acknowledge Diaspora or not, the legacy and experience of it have propelled the idea that race is a core marker of identity. In other words, in a multigenerational U.S. context, Diaspora is being use as both a racial essentializing phenomenon, but also as a political vehicle for group solidarity rendering historical ties. Because the concept of race and the characteristics that have become associated with it are so engrained in society, many people have been socialized to make assumptions based on what they see; phenotype equals race and that is what is seen first. People have been marginalized because of this, but also able to organize in solidarity in response to this.

The racial topography in the United States is unique from other places such as Latin America broadly, and South Africa, in that historically, racial intermediaries between Black and white were not rendered visible as laws of hypodescent were legally executed (Davis 1991; Omi and Winant 1994; Lopez 1996). There is a conflict of views for people of African descent. MGUS born Blacks participate in the legacy of United States historical definitions and laws of hypodescent by ascribing to the rules of what it

means to be Black while many immigrant populations from the Caribbean, Latin America, and parts of Africa grapple with their own racial paradigms and understandings of Blackness from home once in the United States. There is often conflict as the racial models for immigrants of African descent to the United States are almost always antithesis to the one-drop rule (Omi and Winant 1994).

Many scholars have researched race and racial theory. Academics have taken a historical look at the concept of race and the hierarchical ranking of the 'so-called races'. Many factors contribute to the distinctive racial landscape in the United States. Enslavement and colonialism with a predominant Protestant influence and legally binding laws defining races and prohibiting miscegenation contributed to this setting. To counter this oppression, African Americans employed unique strategies of resistance ranging from the Underground Railroad to the activities of Civil Rights Movement to the continuous development and ever changing cultural forms spanning from technology, literature, art, music, social and religious networks, as well as the heritage of historically Black colleges and universities. Racial experiences in the United States historically and presently are distinct from other places, although diasporic peoples also share commonalities (Ellis 1998; Fernandez 1998; Rose 1996). These differences and commonalities make for unique encounters when people from the United States, particularly Blacks, have any type of cross-cultural exchanges with other people from the African Diaspora who are not from the United States or are from parts of the United States where racial experiences and processes were more flexible and vice versa.

In all of its complexity, academics have nuanced race by examining it not in isolation, but by scrutinizing it as it intersects with class, gender, sexuality, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and culture. Anthropology once played a significant and nefarious role in hierarchically positioning distinct races, even measuring their crania and positing that Blacks were not fully human (Blakey 1996; Gould 1996). But today anthropologists recognize that race has no biological merit and is purely a social construct, thus leading to a “no-race’ posture and an approach to intergroup difference highlighting ethnicity-based principles of classification and organization” (Harrison 1995:47). However, this no-race posture is also problematic. It leaves unanswered the near-universal location of Black people at the bottom of social hierarchies, the association of Blackness with negative stereotypes, the racialization of phenomena that have nothing to do with race, in short, the social reality of continual racism and inequality. The no-race posture also easily falls prey to conservative claims that we live in a color-blind society and programs like affirmative action or voting rights and civil rights laws should be outlawed and dismantled (Omi and Winant 1994; Gotanda 1995; Guinier and Torres 2002).

Naomi Pabst situates her discussion of ‘Blackness’ in a discussion of ‘Mixedness’ (Pabst 2003). She posits that “questions of Black/white interraciality are also questions of essentialism, authenticity, difference, and belonging (2003:188). Pabst asks the question of “...how one can wind up precariously perched in a racial category, at once interpellated into the category yet at the same time deemed an inappropriate occupant of it” (2003:188). Her research articulates how “discourses of difference within Blackness”

have omitted “mixed-raced Blackness” (2003:189). Her work is an interesting and important concept to use as a lens for examining how Blackness is experienced in PG County Public Schools as she examines facets of Black identity such as being of direct bi-racial parentage¹⁸ or recent mixed heritage. She asserts the following:

These discourses are all cognizant of the magnitude of overarching systems of white domination and the legacies of overt and covert racism in which we all remain enmeshed, and have insisted on the continuing importance of Blackness as a political category. At the same time, these respective treatments of Black difference also testify unapologetically to the ways in which Blackness is regulated and homogenized such that marginalization within Blackness becomes not only possible, but also a bona fide form of oppression. For the exclusions and hierarchicalization of Blacks within the category of Blackness precisely reifies dominant power structures most Blacks seek to dismantle (2003:189).

Pabst too, is concerned with the way that Blackness becomes homogenized and essentialized from both outside of the group as well as from inside of the group. To sum up the importance of interrogating how a Black identity is conceptualized, renegotiated, and practiced in a way that speaks to its facets of multiplicity, I draw on Michelle Wright’s stance on diaspora. “Any truly accurate definition of an African diasporic identity, then must somehow simultaneously incorporate the diversity of Black identities in the diaspora, yet also link all of those identities to show that they indeed constitute a diaspora rather than an unconnected aggregate of different peoples linked only in name”

¹⁸ ‘Direct bi-racial parentage’ is a concept I use to loosely define an individual who has parents being identified as belonging to two separate racial groups and not accounting for other mixed heritage that may be apart of either parent’s lineage. The purpose of this is to not be exclusive of or reductionist to people who identify as being bi-racial or being an interracial couple yet is meant to inform people that some view being ‘mixed’ or bi-racial in other ways besides having two parents of distinct racial groups.

¹⁹ “Recent mixed-heritage” like “direct bi-racial parentage” is a concept that is used to nuance the notions of being mixed and to also explore that being “mixed” is not limited to having two parents from two racial groups.

(2004:2). Based on this, my view speaks to the importance of integrating multiple identities and experiences of people of African descent into discussions of Diaspora in a non-essentializing approach, but in a way that supports working through the struggle and marginalization of people who have historically and presently been relegated to the social bottom globally.

To deconstruct Blackness, Whiteness and white privilege must be included in the discussion. Whiteness is understood as an invisible, normative, phenomena through the systematic oppressions of people of color are being rendered visible in the literature (Brown et al 2001; di Leonardo 1994; Roediger 1994; 2002; Davis 2003). All other racial categories exist in relationship to what whiteness is and is not; therefore, this information is integral to the discussion of the creation of difference, the making of race, how identity construction is assisted, as well as how members' resources becomes "commonsense knowledge" (Fairclough 2001). Fine asserts the following:

...whiteness is actually *coproduced* with other colors, usually alongside Blackness, in symbiotic relation. Where whiteness grows as a seemingly "natural" proxy for quality, merit, and advantage, "color" disintegrates to embody deficit or "lack." ...whiteness and "color" are therefore not merely created in parallel, but are fundamentally relational and need to be studied as a system; they might, in statistical terms, be considered "nested" rather than coherent or independent variables. The institutional design of whiteness, like the production of all colors, creates an organizational *discourse* of race and personal *embodiment* of race, affecting perceptions of Self and Others, producing both individuals' sense of racial "identities" and collective experiences of racial "tensions," even coalitions (1997:58).

In addressing the historical production of whiteness a comparative reflection of the Americas must briefly be included. The point of whiteness and its equivalence to power, normalcy, and a linkage to respect was birthed in the United States. Whiteness as a

dominating concept was created as a justification for systems of confiscating land from Native Americans, enslavement of Africans and Native Americans (although the enslavement of Native Americans was not as successful) and later African Americans, among other countless atrocities including rape, maiming and other torturous acts, murder, ruining families, and genocide.

When whiteness was constructed in the United States, it meant White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant (WASP). Many Europeans were barred. People of southern and eastern European descent as well as the Irish were excluded (Roediger 1994; Ignatiev 1995; Guglielmo 2003). People not of Protestant religion were excluded (Brodkin1998). The phenotype of true whiteness was characterized by skin color, blond, light-colored eyes, primarily blue, and other 'Nordic' features coupled with being from certain regions and of particular religious denominations.

The system that preceded slavery was indentured servitude. Not only were these indentured servants Europeans, but Africans. As the idea of capitalist gain came into existence, slavery replaced indentured servitude. The slave trade and its justification for it spawned a hierarchy that placed a particular kind of whiteness at the top and all others below it, with Blackness at the bottom, eventually allowing for certain people go through the process of becoming White. Slavery was a phenomenon that engulfed all of the Americas accompanied by ideals of Whiteness that stabilized and normalized the consciousness of all people.

As horrific as the legacy of slavery and the embedded issues after its abolishment are, some experiences in various parts of the Americas and the Caribbean were different. The religion that predominated in different countries or regions influenced the experiences of slavery. In most of Latin America, due to colonization by [Catholic] Spain, Portugal, and the French, slavery and its abolition, issues of miscegenation and slave treatment, were handled differently than in areas of Protestant colonization. Still inhumane and barbaric, there were differences of treatment that impacted present day internalization of Blackness (Martinez-Alier 1989). The visibility of the offspring from miscegenation was widely prevalent and accepted more in Latin America. This situation in many areas has led to alternate assimilation patterns such as in blanqueamiento (Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005; Whitten and Torres 1998), where the whitening of the race, both culturally and through intermarriage is encouraged. Latinidad, the commemoration of a national identity obscured anti-Black and anti-indigenous sentiment (Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005; Whitten and Torres 1998). Perhaps because of this, the concepts of whiteness and Blackness for some people of color in these areas are viewed differently, even though a hegemonic standard of whiteness remains.

There are several reasons for this different experience that fell under the auspices of the Catholic Church. One, the Catholic Church in all its righteousness believed that all people were human, including slaves, and had a right to receive the Holy Sacraments (West 2000). Because of this, slaves were given rights that were not attainable in Protestant colonized areas. Some enslaved people were allowed to marry, one of the

seven Holy Sacraments, in some instances, with legal recognition, and once married had protection of not being separated by being sold apart. This was believed to allow for more contented and harmonious slaves.

Secondly, one of the tenets of the Catholic Church is not to have pre-marital sexual relations. There were numerous sexual unions not only between Europeans and Africans and Europeans and Native Americans, but also between Africans and Native Americans, so at a point, many enslaved people were encouraged to marry. In following with the Catholic doctrines against fornication the Church the main reason for this is because they knew that the slave masters were having sex with the enslaved African and Native American women and other Native women that they were in contact with, whether by rape or consent, usually the prior, and for a time, made allowances for marriage to exist between European men and African and/or Native American women.

Thirdly, in the eyes of these Catholic colonizers, miscegenation was seen as a way to increase labor, a possible way to deal with race relations and as a strategy for eventually, whitening the race, which is an embedded concept in the national discourses of many part of Latin American and the Spanish Caribbean (Howard 2001; Marx 1998; Torres-Saillant 1998; Whitten and Torres 1998).

Unlike Catholics in southern Louisiana and throughout Latin America and Catholic parts of the Caribbean, the Protestant colonizers in what became the United States had instituted policies making interracial unions illegal until 1967, some of which were and not formally removed from until 2000.

In most of the southern states, various laws were passed making it illegal for members of different races to marry; these were known as miscegenation laws, like the South African Immorality Act. Interracial marriage was prohibited and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in "Pace v. Alabama" (1883). That decision was not overturned until the United States Supreme Court ruled in "Loving v. Virginia" (1967). At that time, 16 states still had laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Typically a felony, miscegenation laws prohibited the solemnization of weddings between races and prohibit the officiating of such ceremonies. Sometimes the individuals attempting to marry would not be held guilty of miscegenation themselves, but felony charges of adultery or fornication would more usually be leveled against them. While miscegenation laws were outlawed in the United States in 1967, those laws were not completely repealed in individual states until November 2000 when Alabama became the last state to repeal its law... 'In November 2000, after a statewide vote in a special election, Alabama became the last state to overturn a law that was an ugly reminder of America's past, a ban on interracial marriage.' Yet as the election revealed -- 40 percent of Alabamans voted to keep the ban, many people still see the necessity for a law that prohibits Blacks and whites from mixing blood.²⁰

This legacy and experience of slavery can yield different perspectives on whiteness. In addition to the long-held legal ramification in the United States pertaining to miscegenation, the census racial categories after the 1920 census removed the category of 'Mulatto'. A problematic term because it is derived from the Spanish word for mule, the sterile offspring of a donkey (Blacks) and a horse (White or European) that is unfit to reproduce, in other words, an accident or a mistake (Whitten and Torres 1998). This term was not removed because of the derogatory meaning behind the word, but because the blurring of racialized lines between Mulattoes and the Whites per the one drop rule (Davis 1991; Hunter 2005; Lake 2003). There needed to be a better way to keep Whites at the top of the hierarchy. Unlike the usage of the term mulatto in Latin America, no

²⁰ For general information, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miscegenation>, but also see • Newman, Richard (1999). "Miscegenation", in Kwame Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.: *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 1st edition, New York: Basic Civitas Books and Pascoe, Peggy (June 1996). "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of "Race" in Twentieth Century America".

titled intermediaries were wanted in the United States, so Blacks could never come closer to whiteness in title. Again, because of issues like these, living with different notions of whiteness may yield different interpretations of what whiteness means and the power that is associated with it. However, it can be assumed that the existence of universal notions on whiteness promote the importance of whiteness.

There is validity in this information on the people of color moving into ambiguous whiteness. Many of the Latin American countries with historical, widespread slavery, and a clear, visible legacy of African influence in the people, in the culture, food, music, and religion, have demographic statistics that show otherwise. Images of a country, where some type of whiteness prevails, are what are eluded here:

Some of the nation's 35 million Latinos scribbled in the margins that they were Aztec or Mayan. A fraction said they were Indian. Nearly forty-eight percent described themselves as white, and only 2 percent as Black. Fully 42 percent said they were "some other race." Race matters in Latin America, but it matters differently... Jose Neinstein, a native white Brazilian and executive director of the Brazilian-American Cultural Institute in Washington, boiled down to the simplest terms how his people are viewed. "In this country," he said, "if you are not quite white, then you are Black." But in Brazil, he said, "If you are not quite Black, then you are white." (Fears 2004:1).

Fears also interviews a woman from Brazil on racial concepts:

At her small apartment in Washington, D.C., Maria Martins quietly watched as an African American friend studied a picture of her mother. "Oh," the friend said, surprise in her voice. "Your mother is white." She turned to Martins. "But you are Black." That came as news to Martins, a Brazilian who, for 30 years before immigrating to the United States, looked in the mirror and saw a morena--a woman with caramel-colored skin that is nearly equated with whiteness in Brazil and some other Latin American countries. "I didn't realize I was Black until I came here," she said. That realization has come to hundreds of thousands of dark-complexioned immigrants to the United States from Brazil, Colombia, Panama and other Latin nations with sizable populations of African descent. Although most do not identify themselves as Black, they are seen that way as soon as they set foot in North America (2004:1)

This is especially true for many of my research participants, particularly for the youth in my study. Encounters of being interpellated as Black have sometimes been confusing for them when their racial and ethnic identity is constructed in opposition to a Black identity, regardless of if they are of African descent. For many, that part of their history has been shunned or hidden. For others, it is a part of their sense of self, but because of how Blackness is constructed by various participants and how boundaries are firmly set in place, students have a difficult time grappling with the many negotiations they are constantly making.

Especially for marginalized people, central to the construction of Blackness and innermost to how institutions function and produce implicit and explicit knowledge, are understandings of whiteness, or perhaps better stated, an acknowledged reality of whiteness. People might not be aware of the processes of whiteness but understand the reality that it functions in a particular way that informs their experiences, shapes their identity, and is personified in structured institutions. Hunter, whose research has focused on African and Mexican American women, brings to the discussion of whiteness and racism the issue of colorism (2005). Hunter explains how this process began by situating her research in a historical context,

The long history of skin color stratification for both of these groups [African Americans and Mexican Americans] has its roots in their colonization and enslavement by Europeans. Europeans and white Americans created racial hierarchies to justify their subhuman treatment of the people of color they colonized and enslaved. This was the beginning of the ideology of white supremacy. The alleged superiority of whiteness, and all things approximating it including white or light skin, was the rule.

This ideology is the very element that divides people and sustains a color hierarchy today. This long lasting history of violence against people of color, in particular against women of darker color through these ideological images of whiteness as a normative standard of beauty, intelligence, culture is evident not only in the media but through normalized everyday discourses.

Class

There are a number of scholars of color who initiated and advanced the scholarship on African Americans and class. In particular, many of these intellectuals have elevated the discourse of middle-classes of color, particularly the Black middle-class, in response to the virtual silencing of this phenomenon by majority scholars who choose to devote attention solely to interrogating communities of color as the underclass (Dávila 2004; Kelley 1994; Mullings 1997; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Prince 2003). This body of literature, which examines people of African descent in cities with unique histories of Black middle class expansion, allows me to situate my fieldwork in PG County, the largest predominantly Black and middle class county in the United States, within these established frameworks.

Class, like race, is a highly contested term. Pattillo-McCoy defines middle class in the following,

“a notoriously elusive category based on a combination of socioeconomic factors (mostly income, occupation, and education) and normative judgments (ranging from where people live, to what churches or clubs they belong to, to whether they plant followers in their gardens. Among African Americans, where there has historically been less income and occupational diversity, the question of middle class position becomes even more murky (1999:13-14)

Pattillo-McCoy highlights that concepts of class are complex, especially for people of African descent. Class position for people of African descent appears to often be attached to a value system with intentional efforts to fight for middle-class belonging. Graham writes about the identity of an elite class of Blacks that is connected to generational status and wealth, skin color and other physical features, and exclusive organization membership that has strict guidelines for who can belong (1998). Briscoe writes novels about the Black middle class in PG County and the exclusive neighborhoods in which they live and the activities they enjoy (2003; 2006).

In her theoretical framework for particularizing class, Prince specifically demonstrates that class is not merely the amount of money one makes. She argues the importance of examining “the broad impact of labor on the human experience is central to any discussion of class” (2004:67). She refines the discourse on class by characterizing the Black middle-class in Harlem. She cogently lifts up the ethnic and cultural diversity and relationships among Blacks in her study (2004). In her book “Constructing Belonging,” Prince disrupts notions of a uniform Black experience. She writes,

Interactions between African Caribbean and African American peoples in Harlem can be characterized as both cooperative and conflictual depending upon the period and the issues and personalities involved. “West Indian” Immigrants developed distinct institutions and separate spheres of social interaction, but at the same time they intermarried with African Americans and were significantly involved in most Black

liberation movements. Whether through contentious or amicable relations, African Caribbean peoples have been a central and consistent element in economic, cultural and political developments in Harlem (2004:23).

Diverse African descended experiences in shared space is an important aspect of any discussion about the African descended in the United States, especially with regard to class.

Dávila explores the cultural politics of space for Puerto Ricans in New York's urban East Harlem. She examines issues of class and consumption to situate this discussion within issues of racial and ethnic identities (2004). Critical to her research is investigating the relationships that African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and other Caribbeans and/or Afro-Latinos share not only with space but through distinct histories that are racialized that make their mutual space and interactions, and methods of incorporation into U.S. society have important implications for class and racial/ethnic relations (2004). Dávila puts attention on the lack of scholarship on the Latino middle-class and draws on intellectual works on class and gentrification about Latinos but also meaningfully uses the studies on the Black middle class as an approach for her work (2004). She examines concepts of class and the importance of cultural capital used by others and describes valuable tenets for interrogation by listing the following:

“(1) the importance of appreciating internal diversity, (2) their ambivalent position to ethnic- and racially specific communities coupled with overt and covert racism that often motivates relocation and interest in these very communities, and finally (3) the continuous conflation of racial and class identities mediating the relative value of status” (2004:15).

The first tenet is one that warrants further exploration in any work on communities of color. How people conceive of internal diversity and how class impacts this conception is critical to examine. This concept will be discussed in more depth in the analysis chapters.

Kelley's book, *Race Rebels* begins to recover and explore aspects of Black working-class life and politics that have been relegated to the margins" (1994:4). He argues that "race, particularly a sense of "Blackness," not only figures prominently in the collective identities of Black working people but substantially shapes the entire nation's conceptions of class and gender. Part of what *Race Rebels* explores is the extent to which Black working people struggled to maintain and define a sense of racial identity and solidarity" (1994:5). This is an important foundation for exploring middle-classness for people of African descent. Some argue that the because of how hard the Black middle-class has to work, how it is unequal to white middle-class status (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Bullard 2007; Shapiro 2003) in addition to its close proximity to the Black working-class and perhaps its recent middle-class status, the issues that Kelly addresses are imperative to the conversation. This has tremendous implications to how Blackness is experienced by people with different class locations.

Finally, in terms of discussing class and how it impacts education, Knapp and Woolverton (2004) argue for discussions about class to be infused into classroom curriculum and pedagogy. Their position is that social class should be integrated into curriculum because "social class contributes to an increasingly differentiated pattern of schooling over time and that this differentiation is one determinant of educational

outcomes' (2004:675). This is one of the few articles that calls for the educators to talk about class in this way and as a form of multicultural education.

The literature on class, particularly on the Black middle class, directly impacts my project for several reasons. The first is because it helps set the context and significance of doing work in PG County, a place that is often viewed as 'urban' with 'urban youth' and 'urban issues', but is in fact the largest predominantly Black middle-class area in the nation (Barbaro and Williams 2005; Cashin 2007; Chappell 2006). Scholarship on class also helps frame why PG County attracted MGUS born Blacks and continues to draw immigrants of various backgrounds, as a destination for achieving, or at least participating in the American dream of middle-classness. Lastly, this body of literature assists in understanding the implications this puts on constructions of Blackness by addressing different locations and experiences of Blackness for African descended people, based on class position.

Education and Multiculturalism

There is much scholarship on the achievement gap and Black students, especially Black males; however, little work addresses Black identities and relationships in the United States in secondary public education institutions. In her important study of power and whiteness in institutions, Fine notes that "Schools and work, for example, do not merely *manage* race; they *create* and *enforce* racial meanings" (1997:58). Schools are

important to examine because of how education influences and informs identity construction, relationship development, and how students may carry these formations into adulthood. The United States public school system is a major socialization vehicle for national ideology and citizen-making, both deliberately and indirectly, through the reproduction of social norms and practices that contribute to understandings of race. Polluck writes that "...schools are institutions where people encounter, struggle with, and reproduce many such received systems of difference and inequality" (2004:32).

The publication of the *Negro Self-Concept*, was birthed out of a conference in 1963 at Tufts University to "explore the various dimensions of Black self-concept, to delineate ways in which the schools could enhance the self-images of Black children, and thereby increase their academic achievement and emotional growth (Banks and Dresden 1972:xi)." James A. Banks and Jean Dresden Grambs wrote the *Black Self-Concept* as a contemporary response to this work and examine the effects of racism on the development of Black identity and how public schools damaged the identities of Black children (1972). The primary focus and goal of this research was to "stimulate continuing examination by educators [and others] about the school's role in enhancing self-perceptions and identities of Black youth" (Banks and Grambs 1972:xvii). Also addressed is the push among Blacks to reject their old identity much of which was positioned by Whites and the tenets of Whiteness and to develop a newly self-constructed identity (Banks and Grambs 1972). Although dated, what makes these works remarkably interesting is that almost four decades later we are still having very similar conversations

regarding the impact the educational system has on people of African descent and on the constructions of identities.

Multiculturalism has been conceived of in a number of different ways and there have been some notable elevated interrogations of multicultural education (Cousins 1999; Jewett 2006; Ladson-Billings 2006). Banks and Banks define multicultural education as,

a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. One of its important goals is to help all students acquire the knowledge attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with people from diverse groups to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good (Banks and Banks 2004:xi).

They argue that historically, multicultural education “is directly linked to African American scholarship that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries” and the existing materialization of it “emerged out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s” (Banks and Banks 2004:xi). Banks examines concepts in multicultural education to bring about school reform in a model he calls “The Dimensions of Multicultural Education” which addresses areas in “content integration,” “an equitable pedagogy,” “prejudice reduction,” “the knowledge construction process,” and “an empowering school culture and social structure” (2004:5). Another key feature of this edited compilation is the focus on situating multicultural education in a historical context.

Heath draws on the use of ethnography as a tool for examining multicultural education through the lens of community (2004). She historicizes immigration, employment, public housing and neighborhoods and its impact on classroom dynamics. Like, Heath, Ladson-Billings grounds her work in history. She uses critical race theory

to investigate the terminology and generic appropriation of the words “multicultural education” (2004). She applies this line of inquiry onto curriculum, instruction, and assessment in schools, particularly for “Black and Latino” students (2004). Both of these scholars speak to the need to implement qualitative methods in addressing issues in education as a means to contextualize the information that quantitative studies on minority youth and achievement give.

Along these lines of the innovative and strategic research of Heath and Ladson-Billings, Root examines how conventional racial labels impact children who are “mixed race” and addresses how the implications for this may affect teaching about race (2004). Again, this type of inquiry is absent in hallmark education research on youth of color and has real implications for reconceptualizing educational discourse broken down by broad racial and ethnic categories.

John Ogbu, one of the first anthropologists in the study of academic achievement, success, and school performance as it relates to minority students in the United States, writes, “Schools contribute to the academic problems of minority children intentionally and unintentionally because they operate according to the norms of American society and according to the norms of the communities in which they exist” (Ogbu 1987:319). In his research, he addresses the following:

...there are problems arising from cultural difference between minority students and school personnel. The failure of school personnel to understand and respect minority children’s culturally learned behaviors often results in conflicts that obstruct children’s adjustments and learning...minority children also have an

obligation to understand and accommodate school culture. It is a two-way thing (1987:319).

I am not so much concerned with “achievement” and measurements of “success” as I am interested with how the discourse and behaviors around racial and ethnic identity may impact achievement and academic success. My research has the potential to impact the learning environment and pedagogy for both educators and students, particularly students of African descent. I am focused on how these issues get circumnavigated in discussions of education in PG County Public School.

Ogbu’s work and his construction of a “Cultural-Ecological Theory of Minority School Performance” was revolutionary in both fields of anthropology and education and “considers the broad societal and school factors as well as the dynamics within the minority communities” (Simmons 1998:155). However, identity is absent in the discussion. Ogbu discusses power relations between groups, not within groups, nor where there is a minority- majority as in the case of PG County Public Schools. His theory is difficult to apply to a minority-majority and deficient in tackling the role of minority teachers who teach minorities. His work separates the experiences of Latinos and Blacks and does not address his concept of “involuntary minority” in terms of Latinos from an ‘involuntary’ African Diaspora legacy. In fact, all people who assign themselves to a Black American (U.S.) identity may or may not be involuntary minorities, and Ogbu’s work does not address this, does not account for class, gender, or sexuality, and fails to speak to the diversity of Black Americans regionally, religiously, or

the degree of and experiences of recentness of mixed heritages. His work does not nuance classed experiences and racial and cultural experiences, perhaps due to people being able to celebrate and explore other facets of their Black or minority identity may have. The lack of this perspective can be seen as essentializing people and their experiences.

Nancy Lopez (2003) addresses the experience of race, gender, and educational inequality as it relates to these two markers of identity for children of Caribbean immigrants who struggle to incorporate an American identity. She works under a race-gender framework that examines race and gender as processes and focuses less on ethnicity. Lopez advances the discussion of identity in education and achievement gaps by investigating the lived experiences of what she terms “race(ing) and gender(ing)” and how that relates to the significance of education to this constituency of second generation immigrants.

One of the few studies that has been conducted on problematizing racial identity in education has been conducted in a California school by educational anthropologist Polluck (2004). She examined how “mixed” youth label themselves and others by asking how they racially identify and identify others. This is the first research that I have encountered that addresses this type of ethnographic work in schools surrounding issues of multiple and/or shifting racial and ethnic labels and identities through the analyses of everyday racial discourse.

Another key study that has been one of the few on race labeling and inquiry is by Jody Cohen (1993). Her research takes place at a high school with a majority African American student body, but with a multiracial staff and predominantly white administration (1993). Cohen addresses her subject position as a white woman in her research site and asks the question “How do we define race in the context of multiculturalism?” (1993:290) and “How are African Americans unified and diverse as a racial/ethnic group?” (1993:292) while giving students the space to describe who they are racially and ethnically. From an interview from her ethnographic data, Cohen analyzes the way a female student chose to describe herself in terms of her racial identity. The student was very descriptive about her American Indian heritage [as an African American] and Cohen grapples with if “she is offering an “extenuating circumstance” [as she cites how Zora Neale Hurston parodies many Blacks for doing] or highlighting the complexity of naming racial identity” (1993:293-294).

Sociologist Beverly Tatum investigates self-segregation among groups in racially mixed schools and racial identity formation in adolescence. She writes that,

As children enter adolescence, they begin to explore the question of identity, asking “Who am I? Who can I be? In ways they have not done before. For Black youth, asking “Who am I?” includes thinking about “Who I am ethnically and/or racially? What does it mean to be Black (1999:52-53)

She also argues that all children in adolescence experience questions of identity but because Black children are viewed by the world in color, they must also contend with these questions in racialized terms. (Tatum 1999).

Much of the research on education and identity issues has been limited to discussions of broad pan-ethnic categories and relating demographic information to achievement statistics. This research has been interesting up to a point but does not problematize diversity or delve into identity and how identity contributes to school climate. Moreover, this literature does not examine how in seemingly uniform racial, ethnic, and/or cultural groups, relationships and the lack of them affect the learning environment. Many discussions reify notions of race and homogeneity.

Identity, Multiculturalism, and Diversity

Identity has multiple dimensions, including the ways that people self-identify themselves and also how people get identified by others (Baker 2004). Identity is not static, but constantly in flux. Age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion, region, nation, travel, education, and their intersections are just some of the phenomena that contribute to identity. In some circumstances some components of identity take primacy over others. For example, in a group of people with similar phenotype, race may override gender. In other cases, some aspects of identity, such as being Christian and a gay Black male, may appear to render people inauthentic or incompatible to others trying to identify them in more “neatly” bounded categories. Yet, some markers of identity, especially “race” make lived experiences in the face of history and hegemony more

powerful, sometimes stigmatizing and less negotiable facet of identity than others. This is certainly true for people of the African descent.

Anthropologist Lee Baker examines identity in a United States context to “illuminate the way culture, power, and history structure society in ways that shape and impact the everyday life of all Americans” (2004:2). Baker “focuses on cultural processes at work as people negotiate a self-identity within an American society that routinely misidentifies people based on a set of cultural categories that are often viewed as biological” (2004:2). It is vital to examine identity from an ethnographic and historical perspective that situates people within the larger structure of socialization vehicles in which identity is constantly shifting and being negotiated. Drawing on Baker’s work on identity (2004), Polluck’s ethnographic research on race labeling in education (2004), and Tatum’s research that examines racial issues and identity in multicultural educational settings that are often not explored (1997), my project will contribute to social science and educational research by breaking down broad racial and pan-ethnic categories to examine the social construction of Blackness in a seemingly uniform Black space. Also drawing on educators concerned with multicultural education such as Lisa Delpit and Sonia Nieto, my work will further the discussion of this body of literature by using anthropological methods to scrutinize the complexity of identity, Blackness, and its importance to how it is implicated in education and the learning environment.

Scholars have talked about identity in terms of its transnational and oppositional forms (Fouron and Glick-Schiller 1990), in terms of color-blindness and countering it as diversity and multiculturalism (Guiner and Torres 2002), and among issues of broad multicultural education (Delpit 1995; Nieto 1999). Much literature explores how Blackness is conceptualized throughout the Diaspora (Cothran and Jackson 2003; Simmons 2001; Stephens 1998; Torres-Saillant 1998; Whitten and Torres 1998) and the consequences and realities of cross-cultural exchange within the Diaspora (Bailey 2001; Cothran and Jackson 2003; Meade and Pirio 1998; Wucker 1999). However, Blackness in discussions of diversity and multicultural issues in education has been largely ignored. The category of Black has largely been used as a broad, uniform group without being interrogated as diverse and multicultural.

In the literature and in reality, multiculturalism symbolizes different levels of significance to different people occupying unique social spaces. Gordon and Newfield argue that "...as the term 'multiculturalism' has appeared more and more frequently in current social and cultural debates, its meanings have become less and less clear" (Gordan and Newfield 1996:1). Gordan and Newfield raise important questions about both the positive and negative implications this ambiguous term offers, masking inequity with another seductive, yet problematic idiom, and the limitations it has as a viable practice to countering structural social problems.

According to Gordan and Newfield, "Multiculturalism had established itself as a major framework for analyzing intergroup relations in the United States..." (1996:1).

Often times, this framework maintains an ideal of color-blindness, avoids race, avoids history, and makes culture its focal point. Multiculturalism in this sense masks inequality when in reality there is no real power sharing because the very essence of difference and the various historical and contemporary investments people have in its production and sustainability has not been addressed. Multiculturalism as this type of agenda is not transformative as "...the "multi" in "multiculturalism" frequently refers to the multiple "others" knocking on a central gate of power (Rose 1996:424). Employing principles of color-blindness that cover inequity and injustice versus deconstructing principles of othering, under the guise of multiculturalism, allows continuous unanswered knocking on that central gate of power. In countering the idea that multiculturalism erases difference and is color-blind, hooks asserts that "Respecting diversity does not mean uniformity or sameness" (hooks 1997:405) and part of this respect is by acknowledging "that we all suffer in some way but that we are not all oppressed nor equally oppressed" (hooks 1997:405) instead of reducing experiences. A multicultural agenda in a predominantly Black school system with an increasing population of immigrants is not comprehensive or affective if Blackness is not viewed as a multicultural issue within itself.

"The interpellative name may arrive without a speaker – on bureaucratic forms, the census, adoption papers, employment applications...The bureaucratic and disciplinary diffusion of sovereign power produces a terrain of discursive power that operates without a subject, but that constitutes the subject in the course of its operation" (Butler 1997:34). Butler demonstrates how power in this way, the power to name, is naturalized. This

supports how Black as a homogeneous group is naturalized. Multiculturalism in this way can be understood as an interpellative name that functions in disguise and without critical application. As the state supports initiatives to invest in pluralism by promoting the rhetoric of multiculturalism, power players such as government, corporations, and public education among others, devote energy into stratagems of diversity training and management, many times with good intent. Davis asserts that “many of the current strategies that propose to make marginal cultures visible and accessible tend to reproduce ideologies of racism, as well as male dominance and middle-class privilege” (Davis 1996:40). Davis refers to the power that multiculturalism (and other approaches) has in that its name resonates change and it looks progressive on paper, but it sustains the core of the power structure that continues to marginalize people. The power structure in a predominantly Black school system continues to marginalize its students.

Together, all of these scholars have informed my dissertation project and impact how I examine my data. This body of scholarship helps me to unpack issues of race and Blackness by interrogating a multitude of intersecting issues and frames how I am looking at race as processual and contextual. Situating social constructions of Blackness within historical frames of concepts of race and Diaspora are critical. Understanding the multiple layers of class positioning and how concepts of income, occupation, and commodity acquirement, coupled with conceptions of ‘acceptable’ behavior and values are integral to discussing constructions of Blackness. Examining what has been researched in the field of education concerning Blackness also helps situate my project in

scholarship on multiculturalism and diversity in education. Lastly, exploring how multiple identities aid in constructing Blackness and how it is practiced, performed and experienced has greatly informed my research.

CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY



This project examines students' and educators' discourse and practices on Blackness and Black identity in a predominantly Black (in a United States context), yet ethnically and culturally diverse space. Hirschfeld argues that the field of anthropology neglects research on children and how they are crucial to theory building (2002). I am analyzing a public middle school to interrogate the social construction of Blackness as a way to understand the rules and ideology that inform racial experiences and the crafting of racial selves for students of African descent in the PG County Public School system. Race talk and race(d) activities are the central representations that I am examining; therefore, the

use and choice of language people employ to describe themselves and others as well as the activities in which they choose to engage will be central to my analysis. The role of language in creating social realities and identities, and more specifically, creating Blackness and Black identities, is key in this project.

While I was collecting data in the field and throughout my writing phase, I was also engaged in reality. My graduate work stipend, for which I was extremely grateful, ended after my third year in the program and I did not receive a grant to work solely on my fieldwork and dissertation writing. So throughout my fieldwork experience, I worked two jobs, commuting to work in Baltimore and back to another job in PG County, while helping to care for my older cousin I lived with who had a long war with breast cancer. My theoretical approach was not limited to academia, but enhanced by my everyday encounters with people who work in and with communities of color, who fight for equity, and who challenge ideologies that focus on repressive knowledge and hegemony. I center the research on African descended people and focus on diversity in opposition to reifying broad racial categories. I employ language that nuances diversity and draw on scholars of color to help build my theoretical framework. In addition to the participants at my research site, this project was informed by the people I interacted with on a daily basis throughout this process, people who talked about issues of race and what being Black meant to them, people who denied the pertinence of race, and people who talked challenges within communities of color when it was not popular or easy to do. Moreover, there were many people who knew about my work and talked to me on a regular basis

about my progress. These relationships and encounters are just as authentic as a part of the research process as the ones from my research site.

Conceptual Aspects

First and foremost, I refer to what some may term as “informants” or “research subjects” as research participants (Bernard 1994; Hume and Mulcock 2004; LeCompte and Schensul 1999). The people who allowed me entree into their world for seventeen months were actively engaged in this dissertation research. They were not mere informants.

As a conceptual aspect of the methodology, I understand that using broad named categories and binding people to such categories are problematic. I realize that how “American” is used in a United States context supports the notion that the U.S. has a monopoly on the word as well as the on the Americas. I am also sensitive to the fact that there are many African Americans recently emigrated from Africa and this term has been heavily contested between the “old” African Americans and the “new” ones. Furthermore, I am also aware that because “African American” is often used synonymously with Black American or Black in the United States, many immigrants or descendants from the Caribbean and Latin America reject that categorization because they do not associate themselves as American or with the negative stereotypes that are connected with being African American (Fouron and Glick-Schiller 1990; Waters 1999).

To respect this complexity and for the purpose of my research, I use the term “Multi-generational U.S. born Blacks”²¹ in lieu of the more commonly used phrase “African Americans”. I tend to use the term Black to encompass a broad category of African descended individuals. However; I also honor the use of the term African American when someone identifies himself/herself or others in that way.

I use the term Latino/a²² instead of Hispanic because 1) it is more inclusive and 2) the term Hispanic draws attention to the Spanish heritage and detracts from an African and indigenous, as well as Asian heritage. The term ‘Latinos/a’ is not synonymous with Spanish-speaking, but encompasses the areas occupied by the French, Spanish, and the Portuguese, including people who are a part of the Asian diaspora to these places. However, for the demographic that I am examining, Latino/a primarily means Spanish-speaking. This includes both immigrants and U.S. born people who trace their lineage to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama, and/or other Spanish-speaking countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I am also aware that there are Spanish-speaking people who are from the Caribbean. The discussion of Caribbean people is not limited to English-speaking areas solely and is not meant to divorce those parts of Latin America from their Caribbean-ness

²¹ I am using the term “multi-generational U.S. born Blacks to denote people of African descent who are descendants of multiple generations of Blacks in the United States in efforts to nuance the term African American which can legitimately be used for numerous people with different cultural and national paths.

²² For more information on the terms ‘Latino/a’ and ‘Hispanic’ see <http://media.www.theticker.org/media/storage/paper909/news/2005/10/31/News/Latino.Vs.Hispanic.Battle.Of.Synonyms-1781241.shtml> and http://www.allied-media.com/Publications/hispanic_latino_label.htm.

or vice versa²³ In some instances, the term ‘West Indian’ is used to denote the English-speaking Caribbean, if a specific Anglophone Caribbean country is not declared and if that is how one describes himself or herself. Again, I honor whatever term a person uses for self-description and/or to describe others, but for my own constructs and as a means to organize my data, I use the terms in the manner in which I have just described. This discussion reiterates the fact that categories are problematic but in order to have the discussion and the research be of use, these categories are necessary for contextualizing lived experiences. Below anthropologists Trechter and Bucholtz emphasize the importance of using categories that people use to identify themselves:

It is important to recognize, after all, that to invoke an identity category is not necessarily to fall into the trap of essentialism or reification. It may simply be sound anthropology. As scholars, we cannot do without identity categories because speakers cannot do without them. If we are to do ethnographic justice to the people we study, we must use the categories that are meaningful to them, not rejecting or ignoring such categories but accounting for them, historicizing them, and analyzing how they are put to work in interaction (2001:8).

My intention in utilizing these categories and also drawing on the categories that various people use is in no way meant to essentialize or reduce people and their experiences, but to honor them and the fact that much care and consideration has been taken into this research. I have an obligation to the people who participated in this project and respect their multiple subject positions and experiences. Equally, I strive for my work to be held to an accountability standard that acknowledges these nuances and sensitivities for people

²³ For more information on the connection of the Caribbean and Latin America and areas this covers, see the mission statement of the Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology at <http://www.essex.ac.uk/jlaca/mission.htm>.

who hopefully will be impacted by this work as well as the body of scholarship in which it will contribute. As Tatum simply puts it, “My dilemma about the language to use reflects the fact that race is a social construction” (Tatum 1999:16) Racial and ethnic categories are recalcitrant to observation, use, practice, and bureaucracy and we as academics have a responsibility to continue to unpack race in all of its complexity.

Another conceptual aspect of this dissertation project relates to the use of the capitalized B when referring to Black people and Blackness. For participants in my research and for many people globally who identify as Black, as well as for me personally, “Black” is not merely an adjective or a color. It is a legitimate marker of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity for many and deserves the recognition of being a proper noun. I capitalize Brown and White as well.

My research reveals, do not feel connected to a homeland other than the United States and do not see themselves as choosing African American over Black when given a choice. For others, their identity of being Black or part Black is just as important as being Panamanian, Nigerian, or Dominican, which gets capitalized. Still for some, being Black emerged from the “Black is Beautiful movement” and this is the identity label that is meaningful to them (Byrd and Tharps 2001). This movement was important because it symbolized a re-articulation of Blackness and how it was viewed and internalized; therefore, Black has particular meaning and consequences for how people of African descent were able to publicly utilize their own agency to resist the centuries of negative

ideology and rhetoric surrounding what it meant to Black. Regardless of the reason for the use of “Black”, it is capitalized in this research.

Conceptual Framework

The following columns are constructed to help organize and visually represent the bodies of knowledge which informed my project, the collected data, and analysis process. The categories describe how the construction of the framework began. There are three major groupings expressing the foremost components that worked together to interrogate the social construction of Blackness in my research site. These categories are: Academic Knowledge, Personal Knowledge and Experiences, and Ethnographic Knowledge

The first aspect of this conceptual framework was tackling the academic knowledge, figuring out what I knew, what knowledge and research I did not know, and then deciding what was relevant. I worked on a literature review of broad topics that I felt intersected to support my dissertation project. This is outlined in detail in the literature review in Chapter 3. The first task was to examine major theories on race and Blackness. Within this body of literature, I was compelled to go deeper into issues of diaspora and identity for people of African descent.

Another important area is one that examines how race and Blackness is discussed in the literature on education. Within this scholarship, subjects of achievement, diversity, and multiculturalism are most prominent, but for my purposes, I opt not to spend time exploring matters of achievement and test scores and how it relates to various racial

groups. This has a huge impact on how notions of Blackness in schools are constructed; however I feel it would lead my work into another direction as a main focus is to break down broad racial categories to investigate the complex processes of constructing Blackness via other means.

Archival and historical data for PG County along with literature on class, in particular, on the Black middle class was vital in contextualizing my research site. I also situate what is currently going on in the county into my discussion by way of current county demographics, crime, local major institutions, housing, and employment. Within all of this scholarship, I looked for indicators of authenticity and how language is an important strategy in the racial project of constructing Blackness or any other maker of identity.

In the last part of this section, I take into account literature on native anthropology and on Black feminist anthropology (Jones 1995; Narayan 1991; Slocum 2001). I do this to ensure I know how I am situating my research into a larger network of scholars, yet also to be aware of the critiques of each. Together, these pools of intellectual resources make up the academic knowledge that informs “Reading, Writing, and Racialization”.

The second aspect of this conceptual framework is reflecting on how my subject positions and multiple identities and experiences impact my work (Jones 1995; Narayan 1991; Slocum 2001). I am not a neutral robot in the field but bring to the research a multitude of perspectives and connections that is both complimentary and problematic. Alongside of the academic knowledge in my schemata, I interrogate my own standpoint,

how much of this conflicted with or added to this particular research and with the research of others. Outlining my positionality allows me to better consider and articulate my own negotiation of identity as native/insider from multiple locations, not only as a researcher of African descent, but as a former teacher, as a resident of PG County, and as a person coming to the research with a particular way of thinking about Blackness and “Black space”. This also allows me to analyze how my phenotypic characteristics, class and educational position, age, and gender positively and negatively impact the research. Additionally, I examined the strategies I utilized to accomplish the ethnographic research. These first two aspects of the conceptual framework, establish the context in which to situate the ethnographic data yielded from the fieldwork.

The ethnographic data culminate in the conceptual framework of the project. In conjunction with the two other categories, this is the where the data are organized and coded to answer questions that reveal processes of how Blackness is constructed in PG County Public Schools. Together, these are the three central groups of knowledge that provide structure to this research writing process.

Table 4-1
Conceptual Framework Table

Academic Knowledge	Personal Knowledge and Experiences	Ethnographic Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race and Racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blackness ○ Whiteness ○ Diaspora 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a woman • As a U.S. born Black woman • As an educator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What it means to be ‘Black’ • How people describe

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identity ● Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Race ○ Diversity ○ Multiculturalism ○ Gender ● Class ● Archival and Historical Data for PG County ● Authenticity ● Language ● Black Feminist Anthropology ● Native Anthropology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As an educator in Prince George's County Public Schools ● As a resident of Prince George's County ● As a alumni of a Historically Black University (predominantly 'Black' space) 	<p>themselves and others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activities that represent race, ethnicity, Blackness ● Tensions between groups based on racial/ethnic identity ● Awareness about Black diversity ● Adult views/concerns ● Student views/concerns ● Views about Prince George's County Public Schools
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Research Design and Schedule

Previous Research and Pre-phase Work

Diaspora presents an inimitable space for the development, expansion and contestation of identities and space. My academic research primarily focuses on race, identity, and the social construction of Blackness within the African Diaspora in educational contexts. I am looking at how people exhibit agency to create strategies to adjust and respond to constants shifts in identity and in varying locations of cross-cultural exchange.

My previous research began with a comparison of the historical contexts of race in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and in Latin America in opposition to the United

States. I conducted a historical investigation of how ethnicity within the African Diaspora has been negotiated in cross-cultural interactions between African-Americans and Afro-Latinos and/or Afro-Caribbeans through travel during the 17th through 20th centuries. I authored a research paper examining the orders of discourse that inform discussions of identity for various newcomers to the United States in relation to U.S. whiteness as a global phenomenon, incorporating interviewees' perspectives from Brazil, France, Kenya, Puerto Rico, and Bahrain. I did text analyses on these interviews to explore how language was used as an instrument in everyday discourse to sustain an ideology of normative, complex, social racial orders that normalize race and whiteness. This focused on how frames and scripts were used in racialized terms as markers of identity. I also examined how these texts were determined by larger orders of discourse and ideological power, attempting to understand how racial identity and negotiation is distilled through how people talk.

I participated in a Rapid Ethnographic Field Assessment Workshop hosted by the United States Park Service in El Paso, Texas. This experience afforded me the opportunity to be trained in rapid ethnographic field methods as well as engage in ethnography with three diverse groups of people who share resources along the Camino Real but maintained distinct cultural and ethnic/racial ways of identifying, regardless of similar phenotypes and a sharing of the Spanish language.

The data presented here include information gathered during preliminary investigations in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, which focused on informally

interviewing people about identity, color, varying racial paradigms, concepts of Blackness, and impressions of these issues in the United States. My earlier research also explores Blackness as a gendered experience for Caribbean women, specifically Dominican women in the United States. This research dealt with a comparative analysis of how historical and contemporary racial politics in the Caribbean inform the negotiation of identity processes once in the United States. This latter focus involved exploring the frameworks of Blackness that women were operating with or against. I examined what it meant to be Black and Caribbean for women who migrated to the United States and examined how and when transnational identities were constructed and/or incorporated or trumped a Black identity. Some of these findings were presented at a conference entitled Caribbean Migrations which was held in Toronto, Canada.

In addition, I have researched immigration issues pertaining to identity and identification processes in the United States, by interviewing adult immigrants of the African descent in Baltimore, Maryland, PG County Maryland, Washington, DC, and San Antonio, Texas. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and text analyses of interviews in PG County and Baltimore, Maryland with MGUS Blacks about defining Blackness in response to the article Mariah Carey: America's Most Misunderstood Black Woman: The Story Only We Can Tell featured in the 2005 April edition of *Essence* magazine, a prominent magazine for African-Americans. My research explores how historical constructions of Blackness inform contemporary self-definitions and create present day spaces of solidarity and contestation.

I worked as a project assistant for my advisor, Dr. Sabiyha Prince, in research pertaining to race, gender, class, police conduct and gentrification in Washington, DC. This was a direct link to my interest in PG County because of the connections between the two histories, the flow of people back and forth from the District and the shared resources of metropolitan area.

As a final point, I interned with Empower Baltimore Management Corporation in Baltimore, Maryland researching empowerment zone initiatives that promote economic development and community mobilization and revitalization for residents in the Empowerment Zone. The research in which I was engaged in here helped me to think about class issues and tensions that exist in PG County, as well issues that impact predominantly Black communities and also the Black middle class.

I am currently doing race and equity research with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's RESPECT group that deals with issues of race, gender, class, power, and other forms of oppression as well as promoting educational forums and events on various issues. I am also working with Associated Black Charities research on high school completion and college entry for African American students in Baltimore City Schools. All of these experiences have afforded me the opportunity to understand the political implications and the persistent social reality of marginalization that people of color, particularly people of African descent in the United States, continue to experience presently. This previous research and pre-phase work sets the context in which I establish

a framework to examine how Blackness is socially constructed in education in PG County Public Schools.

For some time, I had been having both formal and informal conversations about race, ethnicity, and education in PG County with educators, administrators, and residents for other projects and as I began to construct my dissertation proposal. As part of the pre-phase work, I continued to conduct unstructured interviews with former co-workers and contacts that work or worked in PG County as well as with people who lived in the county, in order to begin to frame my research questions. In November of 2005 I emailed and scheduled a meeting with the principal of Diversity Middle School and began to contact former co-workers to discuss my research plans. I researched the protocol to do research in PG County and began the IRB process at American University.

This longitudinal research was conducted in three phases over a span of 17 months June 2006 through June 2007, not including pre-phase work. During preliminary mapping and fieldwork in January of 2006, I began to map the school to become familiar with the new administration, new rules, including grade level color-coded uniforms, the newly established ESL (English as a second language) program, and the overall change from when I taught at this school several years before.

I strengthened preexisting relationships and forged acquaintances to gain acceptance with educators, administrators, and staff who I was meeting for the first time. I did informal observations in several classrooms and during lunch duty to begin to listen to what both students and adults was talking about, what activities they chose to

participate in, and to explore how to read school culture as a text. Drawing on the work of Polluck (2004), I began to analyze the discourse of “race talk” and what I term as “raced activity²⁴”. Race activity is used to define the various ways students and adults participate in activities that may be understood as a marker of a racial or ethnic identity that is raced or as an allegiance to a particular racial or ethnic group. During this time, I conducted semi-structured and un-structured teacher interviews, did participant observation, and performed an initial text analysis of student journal entries shared by a teacher who had his students write journal entries about their identities. I examined the quotes to see how racialized discourses emerged out of the larger narrative from how students’ wrote about their identities. I conducted the participant observation by being present in two classes, an English class and an ESOL co-teaching class where many students were students of African descent. I also began an initial gathering of historical data about PG County, both through archival and oral history.

Although this was an on-going phase beginning with phase one, I used the summer months of June 2006 through August 2006, while school was not in session to continue to organize data and examine the historical context of PG County’s growth as the largest predominately Black county in the United States, the paths of immigrant groups in the Diaspora to this area and the out-migration and displacement from Washington DC. This was conducted both by archival historical research, census and county demographic information, and through the use of oral histories with people who

²⁴ “Raced activity” is a term I use to categorize cultural activities and associations that people racialized.

live in the county and who work or have worked in the PG County School System. I examine factors such as race, class, and gender, work and affordable housing, educational opportunities, and the historical and present migration patterns from Washington, D.C. and from other places into PG County.

In phase three during the months of August 2006 through June of 2007, I continued to collect data at DMS as in phase one; however, during this time, I conducted more in depth teacher and student interviews, and teacher surveys and focus groups, and continued participant observation. I identified staff people to interview beginning with people I knew and then off of their recommendations. I also interviewed staff who worked closely with students outside of the classroom.

I interviewed and held two focus groups with roughly 45 percent of staff at DMS. Surveys were administered to the majority of the staff and approximately 51 percent of the staff completed them. These adults were from diverse backgrounds in terms of race/ethnicity and how they chose to identify, gender, where they were born and grew up, educational backgrounds, and positions at the school. In my analysis, I use these surveys to read the data against my smaller sample of my student and teacher participants. I taped and transcribed all formal interviews and the two focus group sessions with educators, and analyzed the transcriptions. I chose approximately six open-ended questions to ask during a 50 minute focus group.

The following table describes the number of adults in the building by job description. I have detailed how many staff members participated in an interview, focus group, and/or survey.

**Table 4-2
Staff Breakdown by Position**

Staff Category	Total	Interviewed or Focus Group Participant
Administrators	4	4
Teachers	58	23
Guidance Counselors	4	1
Support Staff	16	9
Total	82	37
Surveys Completed	42	

In my initial proposal, it was my goal to engage one-third of the staff. I exceeded this data collection in getting closer to fifty percent of staff involvement in surveys and oral participation, making for what I believe more voices and stronger data.

My original plan was to shadow four teachers, two men and two women, three of which identify as Black or African American and one as White. Three of these four teachers were co-teachers and one conducted classes with two of the teachers, with a larger portion of their students transitioning from special education and ESOL classes. One teacher is an ESOL class teacher. My plans to shadow these specific teachers changed as one left the school and one transitioned into another class. Toward the middle

of my research, I spent the majority of time in classes with a female social studies teacher who described herself as African American with a Caribbean father.

I interviewed 12 students including one focus group held with two sisters and their father. These students consisted of boys and girls who are predominantly of African descent, multi-generational U.S. born Blacks, students of West Indian/Caribbean descent and Indo-Caribbean descent, those of ‘recent African descent’²⁵, and Latino/as of African descent, Eastern European descent, and of Asian descent. I then spent time in several classes, one being a social studies class where I observed, volunteered, and co-taught a couple of lessons dealing with culture. I ended up spending the most time shadowing this class as the teacher was very open to having me there and the students were also happy to have me.

This chart reveals some information about the diversity and the backgrounds of the students I interviewed. I use this chart to organize the ages, grades, sex, of my student participants, as well as the racial/ethnic codes their parents have ascribed to them versus how they describe themselves. I also ask about where they were born and ask questions about the birthplace origins of their parents and grandparents. There is also one parent on this chart. Like any categorization system, there is always overlap, always contested positions and/or shared space. This table is no different, but for the confines of this dissertation I utilize this chart as a tool to give minimum information about each student and share maximum data on each in the analysis sections.

²⁵ I use the term “recent African descent” to refer to people who are from Africa or who can trace their roots back to Africa within three generations.

Table 4-3
Student Interview Chart

Student Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Grade	Age	Parent Code	Self-Identify	Birthplace	Birthplace of Parents, Grandparents
1. Shana	Female	8 th	13	African American	African American	U.S. – Washington, DC	Parents: Washington, DC, Ohio Grandparents: ? (One white grandparent)
2. Brent	Male	7 th	12	Asian/Pacific Islander	Trinidadian	Trinidad	Parents: Trinidad Grandparents: ?
3. Amel	Female	8 th	14	Hispanic	1.Black 2. Spanish ²⁶ 3. American, Dominican, and Black	U.S. PG County	Parents - Dominican Republic Grandparents ?
4. James	Male	8 th	15-16	Hispanic	Dominican	Dominican Republic	Dominican Republic
5. Sanna	Female	7 th	13	Asian/Pacific Islander	Indian/Guyanese	PG County	Guyana
6. Sari	Female	8 th	12	Asian	Indian/Guyanese	PG County	Guyana
Parent Mr. Patel	Male	N/A		Asian	Indian/Guyanese	Guyana	India
7. Zaria	Female	7 th	12	African American	Mixed (Black and White)	U.S. PG Maryland	
8. Yu	Male	8 th	13	Asian/Pacific Islander	Vietnamese	Vietnam	Vietnam
9. Ivonne	Female	8 th	14	Hispanic	Mexican	Vera Cruz, Mexico	Vera Cruz, Mexico
10. Mara	Female	8 th	14	White	White	Albania	Albania

²⁶ Many individuals use the term “Spanish” to denote being from or having origins from a Spanish-speaking country without a connection to Spain.

11. Rob	Male	8 th	14	African American	Black	U.S. PG or Washington, DC	
12. Miguel	Male	8 th	14	Hispanic	Columbian/ "Spanish"	Columbia	Father and grandparents: Columbia/ Mother and grandparents: Soviet Union
13. Ana	Female	7 th	13	?	Black and White	Maryland	Parents: Maryland and Oakland, California; Grandparents: Maryland and Georgia; Great grandparents: Italy and Hungary
14. Patricia	Female	8 th	13	African American	African	U.S. Montgomery County, Maryland	Parents-Ghana Grandparents –Ghana and the Dominican Republic

During the course of my research, I conducted interviews with the students and both current and former educators of PG County Public Schools also asking about what and how their parents and other influential relatives and friends inform their notions of identity. I continued my interviews with the larger Diaspora community as a means to contextualize the phenomenon of identity politics in PG County, honing in on African-descendent Spanish-speaking populations specifically. I believe that African-descendents from Spanish-speaking populations occupy a unique social space in the discussion of

identity because of their ethno-linguistic heritage and because of how race and Blackness is experienced in their native countries. I also believe that through various processes, English-speaking African-descendants and Spanish-speaking African descendants are made to grapple with being divided into categories of Black or African American and Latino(a)/Hispanic with no discussion of overlap or multiple identities (Waters 2001, Lopez 2003, Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005). In my research site, for some students of African descent, often times coupled with physical markers such as long or straight hair and/or the ability to speak Spanish, easily made one “non Black” or “less Black” or at least deflected some of the Blackness. The cultural aspect of linguistic difference contributes to this. In the United States, the ability to be bi-lingual, more specifically, capability to speak Spanish is a salient differentiation in determining Blackness and is a significant marker of non-Blackness and being authentically Latino/a (Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005). This is an important issue to address throughout my data collection.

Research Paradigms and /Theoretical Approaches

A number of theoretical approaches have been useful in the analysis of my data. This dissertation is grounded in interpretive and critical paradigmatic approaches that are situated in critical race theory and diaspora studies. Interpretive models are concerned with examining structures created from shared understanding grounded in specific historical and social contexts (LeComte and Schensul 1999). Interpretive approaches read

culture as texts and explore webs of meaning based on structures (Geertz 19xx). I use this approach to examine the various ways and knowledge people have for self-identifying and classifying others racially and ethnically. I also use this method to pay particular attention to racialized language and racialized markers of identity that is assumed to be common discourse and shared within specific contexts. I employ this tactic to understand what activities, situations, and language use evoke spaces of contestation, incorporation, and/or solidarity when constructing notions of Blackness.

Critical approaches explore how power is constituted and how people are positioned as 'other' and denied access to resources that could change their status or subject position (LeComte and Schensul 1999). This approach is essential because it reveals evidence of incipient racial and ethnic tension within the school and within the location of Blackness. Utilizing this trajectory offers a way to pay close attention to power dynamics embedded in daily discourses. This reveals who gets to partake in various opportunities and how people are participating in the construction of Blackness, who is allowed to distance themselves from this notion of Blackness and who is not, and overall spatial relations within the school.

Coupled together, both methods seek to uncover the significance behind patterns of data and variation among people. This theoretical framework informs the analysis of racialized discourses that emanate from the ethnographic research as well as evaluate meanings from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other data that can be interpret for

meaning such as various school activities and social settings (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, Fairclough 2001, McClaurin 2001).

For some, projects on identity and racial constructions in addition to doing research within generalized “same” groups yield acrimonious disputes about what is good and significant research. Black feminist anthropology, native anthropology and critical race theory are integral to this research. For me, these three independent theoretical arenas are cogent. All these praxis situate race and race theory, as dismantled by issues of power relations, history, and hegemony, as key points of inquiry; however, Black Feminist Anthropology takes it a step further and “...asserts that by making a complex intersection of gender, race, and class as foundational components of its scholarship...” (McClaurin 2001:15). This approach also importantly places African-descended people and diaspora at the center of the research. Black feminist anthropology also render native anthropology and the examination of race as a gendered experience as central to creating theory (McClaurin 2001). Although some scholars nuance the concept of native anthropology as a dichotomy of native versus non-native (Narayan 1993; Bunzl 2004), Black feminist anthropology addresses the historical and contemporary marginalization of Black or African descended scholars in the academy and studying other Black or African descended people, regardless of the realities about diversity of racial, ethnic, and national mixtures, among others that make up “Black” people.

In spite of the rich and often times ignored diversity among us, a thread that people of color that are African descended share, especially in the United States, is the

legacy of racism that has in some shape or form, influenced and impacted ourselves and our communities. Black feminist anthropology draws on being able to take this knowledge coupled with our personal experiences as Black women to serve as a unique lens in developing our research projects. The ability to do this may become an imitable bridge with our participants and may provide the potential to read our data in particular ways with endogenous insights that others lacking these experiences as Black woman may not be able to do in the same way (but also see McClaurin 2001; Rodriguez 2001; Simmons 2001; Slocum 2001).

Analytical Framework

This table illustrates how I began to piece the analysis of my dissertation together. I scrutinize which data collection methods to use and why they are the best ones for my unit of analysis and unit of observation. I organized and coded my data to situate my analysis within themes and sub-themes that emerged out of the research.

Table 4-4

Analytical Framework

Data Collection Methods	Unit of Analysis		Themes/Sub-themes that Emerged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Review • Participant Observation • Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Structured ○ Semi-structured ○ Unstructured • Focus Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students • Educators 	<p>Analytic Strategy: Coding the data and developing themes →</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenotype • Group Association (Who you hang with and why) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gangs ○ Language ○ Concepts of “Ghetto” ○ School Activities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Written Documents 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Music/Popular Culture • Race vs. Ethnicity vs. Nationality or National Ties • (Mis)conceptions about Africa
	Unit of Observation		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race Talk • Raced Activity 		Tools of Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Review • Soft Discourse Analysis

Data Collection Methods

Participant Observation

Participant observation is at the heart of most, if not all cultural anthropological research, especially in education, and was central to my research project. Participant observation or ethnographic fieldwork is the process of gaining access into a community and establishing a comfort level with the people there so that observations can be made without (as much as possible) people altering their daily lives (Bernard 1994; Edgar and Sedgwick 2002). In this research project, participant observation is one of the most important research method used as it allows me to differentiate between what people say and what they actually do. It permits me to observe the experiences in which these educators and students participate and serve as a lens to view how Blackness is socially constructed. Moreover, it helps me understand how identity for students of African descent is practiced and constantly shifting without my presence as a researcher being a

barrier to their daily activities. Participant observation is also a critical tool for me to tailor my other research methods, such as my interviewing and survey instruments.

Everyday I was at Diversity Middle School, I signed in at the front office and spent some time there and in the hallway in front of the office, which was also adjacent to the entrance of the building. The buses let the students out in the front of the building and as students entered the building they would pass the office to go into the cafeteria which was across from the office or directly to their classes if they were late. I usually did informal hall duty or informal cafeteria duty as a volunteer for staff to have another adult presence. Other times, I waited in the front office, observing staff, students, and parents, even police officers, that came in for various reasons. I did participant observation in the front office at various times of the day as I began to find the exchanges here as important as in the classroom. The school ran on an A-day/B-day schedule, so depending on the day and where the class met, I was either in a classroom, the media center which also served as the library, or with the in-school suspension teacher. There were three lunch schedules and most days I would also observe students and staff in the cafeteria. Several times during the school year, I was able to observe after school extra-curricular activities such as step-team practice, basketball practice and a girls group mentoring program. In addition to these opportunities, other venues where I did participant observations on a one-time basis were the science fair where I served as a judge, the honor roll assembly, the talent show, the Black history month program, and during a fire drill.

Interviews: *Structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and informal interviews*

While conducting the research, I applied different methods of interview techniques ranging from formal structured interviews to informal interviews. Initially going into the field, and whenever I could, I tried to schedule formal interviews. I had a set list of questions (see appendix) that I wanted all participants to respond to but more often than not, I had to reorganize the questions based on the time limit, the tone of the session, and location of the interview. Many of my formal structured interviews became semi-structured and unstructured where I started the interview using my list of organized questions but by allowing the participant to lead the conversation and go into necessary depth of explanation, the interview many times went in a different, but important trajectory.

Many of my interviews with students did not follow traditional ethnographic rules. There is a lack of research on ethnographic methods on research with children (Hirshchfeld 2002) and traditional, researcher neutral, ethnographic methods are homogenized and problematic to use with research with children. Hathaway and Kuzin argue that

“The use of participant-observation has proven to be an indispensable tool for conducting research among children. However, because of the power relations between adults and children, we are not allowed to participate as “players” or “friends” but were obligated to act as teachers and guardians. This obligation is in fact a privilege in that we feel that that we learn more from the children than they learn from us (2007:45).

I experienced this to be true as a former teacher. I immediately went into teacher mode when establishing rapport with the students. Children need a sense of validation and feedback, especially from adults. I could not simply ask questions without providing some type of positive response. Children will not respond to total neutrality. During a couple of times during student interviews, I also used opportunities for teachable moments to help guide a student through their thinking on serious misconception about race by facilitating questions. I felt that I would be doing a further injustice to students who were seeking guidance on these topics but not getting the support they needed.

My research topic and my presence in the school were for the most part, well received an enormous of support and interest. On several occasions, staff came up to me and inquired about my project and initiated conversations about race and Blackness. To my advantage, this was often times during lunch or their planning period and provided an ideal opportunity to go into an unstructured interview where I was not prepared with my list of questions. This tactic yielded important information and often times lead to another interviewing session, allowed me to revisit and reorganize my list of organized questions and tailor them to be of better use in later interviews. It allowed me to get information from people that I might not have sought out and expanded my rapport with others in the building by this level of contact.

There were also opportunities that arose where someone I had not intended to interview asked me about my research or where they heard me talking to or interviewing someone else and inserted their comments. If appropriate and if it was acceptable with

the initial person I was engaged in conversation with, I invited them to continue to comment and/or asked to set up a time with them to continue our discussion later.

Most of the interviews that were scheduled with staff took place in their classrooms, the teacher's lounge, or in an office. These are places where the adults suggested and felt most comfortable. Interviews with students primarily took place in the media center/library in an office with a glass window, or at a table near the office if there were not a lot of distractions. Some of the student interviews also took place in the meeting room in the guidance counselor's office adjacent to the main office which also housed two additional staff offices with windows and doors. I took care to ensure the comfort level and privacy of the student but also scheduled our interviews in close proximity and visibility to other staff members so both of us would feel safe and comfortable. There were a couple of interviews where I opted to have a staff member present when I felt that the location of the interview felt too isolated and might not have met the conditions of both the student and me feeling comfortable. My goal was to always balance privacy, safety, and comfort when in one-on-one situations. This of course is not standard ethnographic practice where anonymity is a primary factor. I of course use pseudonyms for students in the write up of the dissertation; but it is critical that encounters with students be visible for the comfort and protection of both the research participant and the researcher.

For interviews with staff, I solicited their permission verbally on the audio recorder but also had an informed consent form available if they wished to read and sign

the document. Students had to have a signed informed consent from their parents. Unfortunately, the middle school culture at this school had a high rate of students losing papers and forgetting to bring signed documents back so this excluded several students who staff and I believed could be huge contributors to this research.

In many of the interviews, I was compelled to disclose my racial identity to some who could not reconcile the way that I personally identify with the way that I look and the manner I pronounced non-English words, particularly Spanish words. Simmons writes,

“The perpetual tensions between sameness and difference of place, position, personal identity, history, and global processes are critical points of entry for understanding and making sense of ethnographic particularities by any anthropologists, but they become even more determining for Black feminist anthropologists (2001:83).

I had mixed feelings about this process. On the one hand, especially for the adults, I felt like they were taking the time to answer my questions, to open up and reveal personal information about the delicate topic of race and where they locate themselves and others. I had much respect for people’s time and their willingness to do this not only for the opportunity to talk about these issues but also because they knew this was my dissertation work and they supported me, even people who I did not previously know. Irrespective of difference of opinions, ways of identifying, and if I felt they were just being intrusive, I appreciated what they offered as research participants and I felt obligated to answer the few questions they had of me. On the other hand, as I have often felt in my everyday life, I felt that I can be judged by the way I identify and take care in articulating how I live, experience, and participate as a Black woman. I explained in less

jargony terms that I understand from my own experience, that being Black is being mixed from the historical location and subjugation of the African descended lineage in my family. My parents who are culturally and ethnically different and come from different class backgrounds are multigenerational U.S. born Blacks. They talked openly about tracing the various racial and ethnic mixtures, both recent and not so recent in our family, but were firm with being identified as Black. I have the luxury that many Blacks do not have in tracing my family origins five generations back on both my mother's and father's sides of the family and through oral history, pictures, and written documentation, have a sense of the diversity within my own Blackness. Often times, this is a different way of expression than people are accustomed to and have been afforded and I am sometimes sensitive to my explanation being criticized. Sometimes with adults, I also find myself becoming impatient with the common curiosity of what and who I am and the limits that are put on being Black whether is it about class, education-based, values-base, or phenotype-based. In fewer instances, I have been criticized for not exploring other aspects of the "mixed" part of my identity more and for supporting the U.S. concept of hypodescent where I ascribe to being Black.

My response in this situation is that I live life as a Black woman, my family has experienced racism and I have experienced racism and though I am aware of the privileges that having light skin yields as well as for what some might interpret as having a mixed or ambiguous phenotype, like my parents, I draw on the space of solidarity within the diversity of Blackness. Those other categories are not useful to me in my

personal experiences or here in the United States where we are still very much racially divided, largely depending on phenotype which clearly marks me as non-white. But in these instances, I remind myself that this is what my research is about and questions to me are simply more data and support for this type of research in schools. All personal questions to me were not meant to be insulting or pejorative but as a way to draw a connection, especially if someone thought I was not Black or perhaps assumed I might identify in the way that they do.

With the student participants, as it was when I taught, I really believe kids that want to ask me questions about myself are inherently curious, constantly in the process of being mini-ethnographers and researchers, and are always trying to make a connection. Learning about others expands their knowledge base and allows them to learn about themselves. One of the things that was hard for me to reconcile when I was in the field was that I was there as a researcher and not an educator. I fought to remain neutral ethnographer but many times lost to the inner teacher in me and made these questions into teacher moments, facilitating the answer through questions back to them about why this was important, and how they came up with their summations. I smile as I write this because these kids were truly awesome and many of us [adults] do not understand how we really have an opportunity and an obligation to assist and prepare students to change the course of racial and ethnic tensions for a new tomorrow. Their inquiries and level of analysis can be so powerful but the institution of education is not equipped with nor invested in facilitating these critical discussions.

Sometimes I would not answer the students directly. I wanted them to think for themselves. Other times, if appropriate, I would share my pan-Africanist²⁷ views of us all being connected. I never denied my Blackness; I just made room for the conversation to be more than a simple un-interrogated category that has no overlap or divides people. In a few instances, I did the same with adults.

Overall, I did not find my physical characteristics as a hindrance to the research (Banks 2000, Rosada 2007; Simmons 2001), but as an asset. Some of the research participants found it interesting that I, however they categorized me, was doing research on Blackness and were willing to engage in the research. As discussed further in the analysis chapters in interviews, participants immediately drew comparisons to the color of my skin and the texture of my hair in making assessments about measures of physical Blackness and comparisons to other people. In these instances, I was careful to record how I looked on that particular encounter. This process was valuable in analyzing how people use phenotype and position others in determining “authentic Blackness”.

Focus Groups

Focus groups, a kind of interview within itself, but with a group of people expose information from several people at a time. Shared responses and information given are

²⁷ When I use Pan-Africanist, I simply mean a connection of people through a historical link to Africa and the African Diaspora. For more information on Pan-Africanism, see Brock and Casteneda 1998 and Meriwether 2002.

often time in reaction to the dynamics and answers given in the room. I held two focus groups, a formal focus group with a team of teachers in a classroom, and an informal focus group in the teacher's lounge where I began talking to two teachers and two more joined in the conversation. The formal focus group began as a round robin session where each went around answering the questions. Soon after the topic of race and Blackness entered the discussion, there were multiple but respectful voices competing for discussion which made for important data but a challenging transcription. The informal focus group that organically, but aggressively formed by itself, yielded the same kind of fervor in talking about race and Blackness. In both cases, because the number of people involved was small and because of the will to talk about the topic, I did not have problems managing the focus groups or the speakers. I did have trouble managing the time because the conversations were so powerful that time seemed to go by very quickly.

Surveys

I went into the field with the desire to talk to and observe as many people as I could. My goal was to reach out to at least 1/3 of the school and I found myself easily exceeding that number throughout my 17 month tenure. A part of me felt torn that I could not interview every single person at the school and capture everybody's thoughts and experiences on my research topic. Somehow, even though I knew that my sample would be representative of the entire school population, I felt guilty that I would have to

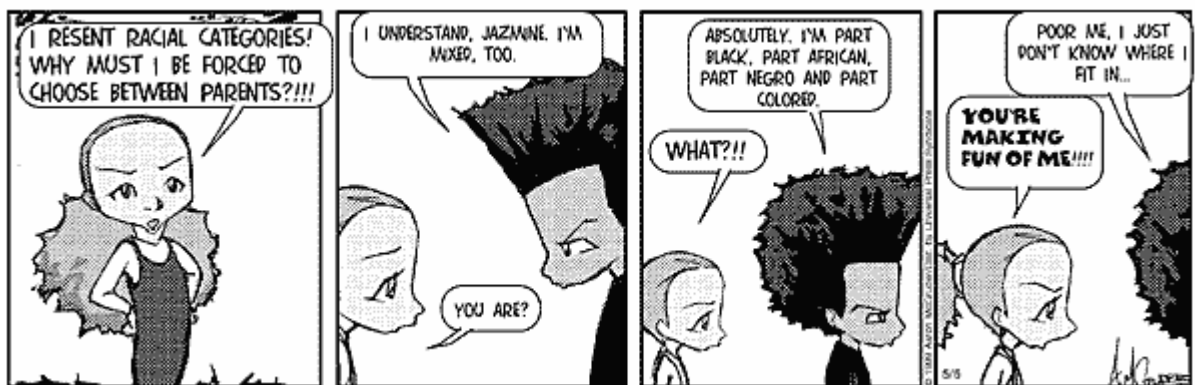
exclude some people from my research off. Toward the end of my research I found myself adding on to the number of interviews and the places I could conduct participant observation and it began to get really stressful. I never intended for a survey tool to be a prominent aspect of my research design, but incorporating one survey to staff toward the end of the fieldwork offered a way for me to get more data and to reconcile within myself that people who I had not reached out to were able to be participants in the research. I opted not to give a survey to students because I thought their spoken responses and the setting in which I observed them were more useful to me, although I still felt like I could have interviewed every student in the building. “The term survey can be confusing, because a survey is both a research design and a method of collecting data. Survey instruments can be and often are incorporated into other kinds of studies, including ethnographies” (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:69). For the purposes of my research, the survey was used to compliment the data already obtained, to perhaps give people who had not participated an opportunity to do so and to also give staff the privacy to write responses to questions they might not have been comfortable discussing or honest about. Because the time of staff was so limited, I disseminated this survey (see appendix B) during a staff meeting to ensure majority participation and offered a raffle ticket for a \$40 gift card to a restaurant (outside of the county because high end establishments for the most part, do not exist in the county) to people who completed their surveys.

Written Documents

I reviewed written documents and bureaucratic forms that the school board and the school disseminated to staff, students, and parents to look for markers of racial discourse. I also viewed the section on PG County Public Schools that comes out weekly in the Washington Post newspaper. A couple of educators shared samples of students' journals with writing about culture and identity and where they fit in with me. I was also able to analyze the written portion to class presentation for the social studies class in which I spent the most time observing. These projects were on cultural artifacts that were important to the students, their family, and their culture. The students had to bring in the artifact, give a presentation, and write a paper. I was present for the presentations and examined the papers the students wrote.

My approach for analyzing the data is by one, applying theories of scholars who do work on diaspora and transnationalism who purposely center people of African descent and women at the center of their research as well as elevate the intersections of race and other forms of oppression and two, by incorporating what I call a "soft" discourse analysis, which interrogates racialized discourses by applying concepts of these scholars. I term this as a "soft" discourse analysis because this method does not scrutinize the technical issue of syntax and repetition as does some traditional discourse analysis techniques. The choice for this is because a major goal of this project is for my work to be accessible to a wider audience of educators and non-academics.

CHAPTER 5 – PHENOTYPE AND NAMING



The symbolic power of phenotype is a ubiquitous theme throughout the ethnography of DMS. In *Blue Veins and Kinky Hair: Naming Color Consciousness in African America*, Lake historicizes the context and origin of phenotype as being a negative and devalued reality for people of African descent and the consequences of it.

Divisiveness around hair and skin color is not limited to African Americans in the United States. Slavery, racism, and racial miscegenation were replicated in African and in all areas of Latino America and the Caribbean. Europeans held power in Africa and over the African Diaspora, and while exploiting political and economic structures, they disparaged the African body in physical and ideological terms. Africans on the continent and in the diaspora responded by internalizing negative representations of themselves and used all means possible to recreate themselves in a European image (Lake 2003:73).

During most of the interviews, people regardless of race or ethnicity, length of time in the United States, class position, age, and gender, rely on images of the physical body and interpellations by others to talk about race and Blackness. In this section, I introduce 1) Ms. Cramer, a parent-liaison for the school, who works primarily with Spanish-speaking parents; 2) Patricia, an outspoken, seventh-grade honor roll student; 3) Miguel, a popular eight-grader, who also is on the honor roll; 4) Yvonne, a small-framed seventh-grade honor roll student who is in the same class as Patricia; and 5) Amel, a boisterous eighth grader that is recognized for her open commentary on race and to some degree, sexual orientation.

Ms. Cramer

Ms. Cramer is the parent liaison for the entire DMS. A thirty-something, female who identifies as being both African American and Puerto Rican, Ms. Cramer does not consider herself bi-racial or mixed but as both. She also identifies as being Latina which reconciles the inclusion of her Blackness. She self-identifies that her Puerto Rican lineage like many, is also African descended but unlike some other Puerto Ricans, she celebrates this heritage.

A question that seems so simple to some, yielded complex responses. When I asked “how do you racially and ethnically identify”, consider the following staff member’s response:

Ms. Cramer: It’s interesting you should ask because I tell people this all the time. Society sees me as an African American woman ...I am but I am also Latina but I often I

take people a back when I start speaking Spanish because I don't look your typical Jennifer Lopez or their ideal of what a Latina should look like so, but I don't think I pick and choose. I do know that later on in life because I leaned toward the African American side growing up, when I got in college I was like I have this whole other part of my heritage that I've been neglecting. Because society saw me as an African American female, that's how I operated until I got to college.

...When I go to New York people come up to me speaking Spanish. People recognize me for what I am. I don't have any trouble in NY its just out here you know, where they have distinct idea of what a Latina should look like and if I say I'm Latina they automatically assume that I'm Dominican. Which is crazy because there are Puerto Ricans as dark as Seal but you know it just goes to show how ignorant even some Latinos are.

This question leads to a much longer response but one of the interesting references Ms. Cramer continuously makes is her sense of time and place in relation to her phenotype. She makes the distinction throughout the interview of age and location in terms of what it was like spending time in New York in comparison with PG County and life in Puerto Rico. She discusses what it was like being a child, going to college, and becoming an adult with more room to form her own ideas and to reach beyond parameters set for her as a child. Her use of "here" and "society" become interchangeable with "working in PG County" at times because for her, experiences of being both African American and Puerto Rican, both African American and Latina are not at odds in New York and in Puerto Rico. From her perspective, it is not scrutinized in the same way.

She parallels the way the media has the ability to racialize, colorize, and authenticate what it means to be Black or Latina with how this process takes place. This process does not go without being contested in PG County and in this particular public school. Ms. Cramer also indicates that her experiences help her to relate to students. She

references her phenotype throughout the longer transcription as an obstacle for others in seeing her the way she sees and understands herself. However, to challenge how race, ethnicity, and nationality are often times bifurcated she endorses “Seal”, a famous British singer and song writer born to Nigerian and Brazilian parents as quintessentially “Black” because of his skin color and because he is often assumed to be from Africa because of scars on his face from a skin disease that people often confuse with so-called ‘tribal markings’. She uses this as an example of Puerto Ricans being able to range in phenotype, while many people ascribe and relegate the combination of dark skin and being of Spanish descent only to the possibility of being Dominican. By making this comparison she brings authenticity to the notion that one can be both Black and Latino, a conception not widely discussed. Obloer and Dzidzienyo argue that

The increasingly marked presence of Afro-Latin Americans and Afro-Latinas/os in their respective public spheres throughout the hemisphere provides opportunities for a deeper and more focused discussion of comparative studies of blackness and its various meanings in the Americas. In particular, it allows us to transcend the traditionally accepted but now outdated Latin American/U.S. binary paradigm in the study of racism and the understanding of the flow and counterflow of racial ideologies in the hemisphere. Undoubtedly, Afro-Latin Americans and Afro-Latinas/os alike can potentially play a critical role in bridging the divides between African Americans and other Blacks within the United States (2005:28).

Ms. Cramer’s interview supports a critical need for more research on how Latinos of African descent experience identity, Blackness, and Latino-ness in PG County and the impact this has on both adults and students. Continued research in this area has implications for strengthening cross-cultural/ethnic/racial relationships, particularly among students.

In addition to school politics, Ms. Cramer feels like she is over-worked as one of the few fluent Spanish speakers in the building. The assumption by staff is to always let her deal with anything “Spanish-related”. She does not complain, but expresses concern that with the growing Spanish-speaking population, resources need to be put in place to serve the changing demographic. If she is absent from work, the Spanish-speaking students and their parents do not get served. Consideration needs to be taken into account of about how to integrate services of this nature into a predominately “Black” school that like the rest of the United States, privileges English. This example illustrates the ideology that Blackness in the United States is often marked as monolingual and English.

“Why We Always Gotta Be Ramirez or Gonzales?”

Ms. Cramer explains how she relates to students who are grappling with a dual identity. She shares an observation of a comment made by another Latino adult.

Ms. Cramer: I observed Mr. Oscar with one female student. He assumed her name would have been Ramirez and her last name was something like “Dwayne”. She [female student] was like “Why we always gotta be Ramirez or Gonzales?” So I guess she gets that a lot as well.

Ms. Cramer uses this example to demonstrate how students get identified not only by other students but by adults in the building as well. She also points out strategies individuals employ to resist constructions that others have made for them. The student in which Ms. Cramer was referring was showing frustration that her ethnicity had to be

linked to a Spanish surname to prove her authenticity. The student's response was a form of challenging Mr. Oscar's construction. Ms. Cramer could relate to the student because in addition to her phenotype, she did not have a Spanish last name either.

Patricia

I met Patricia, a smart and outspoken student with an A average, in a 7th grade social studies class which I spent a lot of time observing. Patricia is a beautiful girl who has dark brown skin with a flawless complexion for a middle-schooler. Her hair is chemically relaxed and she alternates between wearing her hair straightened and wearing braids. This class has open conversations about race and culture and the teacher makes sure that the students have a space to explore their own backgrounds. One of the things that brought her to my attention was her participation level in a class discussion about culture. Patricia made statement about speaking five languages and being Ghanaian and Dominican. Since the ability to speak more than one language is not connected with the national identity of what it means to be American here in the United States and often times, is understood as a marker of non-Blackness, I thought Patricia would be a good person to speak with individually. I was also intrigued about the history behind how and where the Ghanaian and Dominican sides of her family met and united.

Patricia is not only engaged in class, but is one of the first students to return her permission slip to participate in an interview. She is able to coherently answer questions with ease and confidence when we talked about issues of race and others' perceptions. In

a lengthy response, Patricia explains her interesting and complex family background, by self-identifying as Ghanaian with Dominican grandparents.

A: Where are your parents from?

Patricia: Ghana

A: Didn't you say one of you parents are from the DR?

Patricia: Yes my grandmother is half Dominican...

A: Explain. So your mom's parents are...

Patricia: My mom's parents are half Dominican and half Ghanaian. And my mom's mom's husband is Dominican.

A: So your grandmother and your grandfather...

Patricia: Well my grandmother is half Ghanaian and half Dominican but my grandfather is all Dominican.

A: And so your mother is...

Patricia: Part Dominican and Ghanaian.

A: And your father is...

Patricia: All Ghanaian

A: His parents are...

Patricia: All Ghanaian.

A: Well how did they go from the DR to Ghana?

Patricia: Well my grandfather I guess took a trip to the DR where he met my grandmother. My grandmother was in the DR and came but my grandmother's father was Ghanaian. Then my grandfather met my grandmother on his trip and got married.

A: Okay..your great grandfather or you grandfather?

Patricia: my grandfather...

A: So he's Ghanaian?

Patricia: No he's Dominican.

A: But I thought you said he took from the DR to Ghana?

Patricia: He took a trip to DR from Ghana...and met my grandmother who is Ghanaian. Her mother was Ghanaian and Dominican....

A: This is a really fascinating story...you should write down your family history. So why did your grandfather take a trip to Ghana from the DR?

Patricia: At first he wanted to go to the US, but he thought he couldn't get through easily so he said "let me just go to another continent". So, one of his friends told him about this place called Ghana so he decided he would take a trip there. And they started dating....

A: So do you speak Spanish? Does anybody in your family?

Patricia: My mother speaks a little. I can pronounce the words.

A: Okay...so what is the language in Ghana?

Patricia: Twi.

A: Do you speak Twi....Fluently?

Patricia: Yes.

A: Okay, so did your grandfather speak Twi?

Patricia: Some but he was more into the Spanish culture I guess.

A: So your grandmother spoke both Spanish and Twi? That's how they were able to communicate?

Patricia: Yes. But they both spoke English.

A: Okay that makes sense.

A: So on your grandmother's sides are they Black Dominicans?

Patricia: Um, yeah I guess.

A: So what languages do you speak?

Patricia: I speak a little bit of Ga, Twi, and English.

A: Okay. So that's three languages....I thought you said in class you speak five languages. Maybe that was a different class.

This discrepancy in the number of languages she said spoke initially gives me some insight to how she might answer questions later. She is a smart, highly motivated student that aims to be the best and perhaps some of her answers may reflect an aspiration to say the "right" or most pleasing answer as seen later in the interview. Bernard suggests "when informants tell you what they think you want to know...that's called deference effect" (1994:231). Bernard argues that this is done not to offend the researcher (1994). I offer that it may also be done to impress the researcher through the embellishment of information.

A: So how do you personally identify?

Patricia: I guess I call myself a Dominican Ghanaian-American. But that's just what I call myself. I don't call myself a Black person because I don't see myself as a color.

A: Do you want to talk a little bit more about that?

Patricia: Why I don't call myself a color? Oh. I don't call myself a color. I don't believe we should be notified as a race but we came here as human beings not as to judge people as a color. We came here as human beings and through slavery, we became Black people. I don't call myself Black because I feel it's sort of a derogatory statement towards me.

A: What makes being called Black derogatory?

Patricia: Cause its something...well it generated from other words like the n-word and colored which white people used against us in a mean way. So I don't prefer to use that as a way to describe myself.

A: What would you prefer them to call you?

Patricia: Just a human being I guess...

A: Well that sounds good...but I think in reality people don't always treat each other

nicely but...I don't know... I can definitely appreciate what you're saying...but like on forms when you take tests, when you register for school you have to check something...

Patricia: Yeah, usually I just put African American.

At times throughout the interview, I feel like Patricia was trying to impress me with her self-acknowledged ability to exist above racial categories and the color line. She is one of the smartest students in her class and may have put pressure on herself to answer the question in a way that she thought might be what I wanted to hear, but later contradicted this comment about not seeing herself as a color. Her initial posture on not identifying a color sounded like a well-rehearsed speech.

Patricia's family story is an interesting one, revealing another space for diaspora exploration. What is also important to note are her statements, "*We* came here as human beings and through slavery, *we* became Black people. I don't call myself Black because I feel it's sort of a derogatory statement towards me". Her statement enlists the use of "we" and slavery in a U.S. context, an experience that often divides Africans and African Americans, contributing to an ontology that creates different and often times competing experiences of Blackness. I cannot determine if she means that this production impacts all people of African descent, whether or not they are from a legacy of transatlantic slavery or if she is invoking solidarity with multigenerational U.S. born Blacks (Meriwether 2002). Either way, I am underscoring the significance of Patricia's conceptualization of being associated with a Black racial label and her comprehension about initial white interpellation of the name, being negative due to the history of slavery. The fact that as a 7th grader, she is grappling with labels as a system of stratification which positions her on

the bottom speaks to the way that Blackness may be constructed for many and the importance of developing curriculum and culturally sensitive pedagogy to educate students at this grade level. Her parents may have also discussed these things with her.

Even within the possibility of living in a colorless and raceless society, Patricia's assertion of not viewing herself as a color is in conflict with filling out bureaucratic forms where she is compelled to check African American. This, coupled with the proverbial trope of Black genotypic indicators, often expressed as hair texture, skin color, and facial and body features, is yet another way Blackness gets constructed (Duany 2005; Lopez 2003; Waters 1999). Perhaps skin color is not so much an issue in this case, because dark skin and being Latino often purports Dominicaness, as seen in the case of Ms. Cramer's and later in another educator's, Ms Tahira's interview, but Patricia explains that other Latino students with lighter skin and longer hair do not accept her as authentic because of how she looks (Banks 2000; Byrd 2001; Rosado 2007).

A: Do you think the other Dominican students or any other Latino students....do you feel accepted by them when you share your heritage?

Patricia: Most of them don't even believe I'm Dominican because I don't have the long hair...because a lot of them have the long hair and so they don't believe me.

Patricia does not incorporate absolutes in her response by saying all. She says "most" and "a lot of them" and again reaffirms the shift away from dark skin color for Dominicans and other Latino/a students to use a focus on hair. "The long hair" trumps other features as authenticity for a realm outside of Blackness.

Fairclough, however, believes that language and social experiences are indelibly related (2001). Relating this to what I deem Patricia's understanding of herself and others, to be, he argues the following,

Even when people are most conscious of their own individuality and think themselves to be most cut off from social influences...they still use language in ways which are subject to social convention. And the ways in which people use language in their most intimate and private encounters are not only socially determined by the social relationships of the family, they also have social effects in the sense of helping to maintain (or, indeed, change) those relationships (Fairclough 2001:19).

Regardless if Patricia is able to challenge racial labels or able to incorporate her Dominican heritage into her identity without being questioned, she will almost always be forced to concede to these social conventions in which Fairclough speaks. Her quest is almost always met with repercussions of authenticity tests.

Miguel

Miguel, a thirteen year old, eight-grader who is also on the honor-roll, well-liked by his teachers, and one of the most popular boys at the school, like Patricia talks about his family's complex history and racial/ethnic make-up. His father, a Columbian ex-political figure, was educated in the former Soviet Union where he met his mother. After a short period in the Soviet Union, they moved to Columbia. Miguel was born in Columbia but shared that because of some undisclosed reasons, the government was after his father and an assassination was ordered for their family. The family then quickly relocated to the United States when Miguel was almost seven.

A: So how do you describe yourself? I'm sure people ask you all the time about where you are from and what your background is.

As I began most of my interviews, I wanted to give Miguel an opportunity to identify in a way that was most comfortable for him. I also made the assumption about people questioning him not necessarily because of how he looks but because his last name was hyphenated with a Spanish name and very long Russian name that I could not pronounce. His last name, coupled with his phenotype of caramel skin color and fine curly hair usually worn in braids or corn rows, make him stand out from other students and adults in the building.

Miguel: Well I don't get to tell the story. Like when my friends ask me it's like too much and I don't feel like talking. I just say like my mom is Spanish, she's from Columbia and my Dad is from Columbia too because he's *Blaxican*...

Root asserts that "society's vocabulary for race relations, the experience of being racialized, and the attempt to break free from concepts embedded in vocabulary requires some new terms" (2000:125). Miguel employs an unconventional term to reclaim the power that has been taken from him by not being able to tell his own unique story. The ability to self-name and to reinvent oneself exemplifies power (Rose 1994, 1996; Lee 2000; Fairclough 2001). Root also contends that,

"It is important to think about the meaning and origin of the terms that we ensue to refer to ourselves. New terms are necessarily being created by multiracial people as a step toward empowerment... It is a proclamation of existence (2000:125).

To clarify his reference to "Blaxican", which I am more familiar with its use referring to someone who is Black and Mexican, I use my assumption to ask him to further elaborate about his father being Black.

A: Your dad's Black?

Miguel: Yeah he's Black but he's...yeah Columbian too.

A: So does your mom consider herself Russian?

Miguel: Yes.

A: So, she's not Spanish [Miguel's term]?

Miguel: I tell them she's Spanish because then they'll start questioning and I don't feel like talking.

A: So is she white?

Miguel: She's like, she...you know the Spanish color skin? It's not white-white.

A: So you're saying she wouldn't be considered White?

Miguel: You can tell when it's a White person but my mom...(he shakes his head)

A: Tell me. Explain to me how you can tell if a person is white person?

Miguel: You can tell...by the hair. White people's hair usually.... it's like perfect. It's like long and it doesn't get nappy and stuff. And then my mom's her hair kinda gets *nappy*. *Her hair is like Spanish hair like yours.*

Miguel separates the possibility of having a Spanish identity with a White one as well as a Russian identity having the same standard as being White. Jacobs-Huey argues that “for native scholars, an awareness of cultural rules for verbal and non-verbal engagement can be essential to negotiating cultural legitimacy and trust” (2002:793). Because Miguel relates the texture for Spanish hair to the epithet of “nappy” and because he initiates the comparison of his mother’s hair to my hair, I continue on this trajectory of his assessment.

A: Is she like my complexion or she's lighter?

Miguel: She's like your complexion.

A: Okay so when people ask you and you don't feel like telling them... all this really interesting...do you tell them you're Black or you tell them you're...

Miguel: I tell them I'm mixed. It's like mixed with Black and Spanish...

A: I know you had standardized tests last week, when you had to check off something on a form what do you put...Like if they ask you, are you checking Spanish, [his term] are you checking White..?

Miguel: They [Someone directed this] said that's Race 5 and that's Spanish...

Miguel positions his Russian mother in a realm of non-whiteness as he does “Spanish” people. He equates hair and skin color as determining factors for race and uses my hair texture as a measurement to confirm that his mother could not be white. He also

characterizes “long hair that does not get nappy” as being “perfect”. In Ingrid Banks’ book *Hair Matters* (2000) she defines nappy as being “kinky” or “tightly coiled” hair or hair that is not chemically relaxed or altered with heat to become straightened. She also documents how the term nappy is defined and how it has been conceived of as a derogatory term and confined to Black communities. Banks discusses the following,

Hair matters in Black communities, and it matters in different ways for women and men. For Black women in this society, what is considered desirable and undesirable is measured against white standards of beauty, which include long and straight hair (usually blonde), that is, hair that is not kinky or nappy (2000).

On the one hand, Miguel’s ease with the use of the term and connecting a disparaging epithet for Black hair with his mother asserts his familiarity and comfort level with terms used in Black communities. On the other hand, perhaps his status as being “mixed” as he describes himself (not as Black and White but as Black and Spanish) and his status as coming from a Spanish-speaking country measures his gauge for so-called nappy hair differently than MGUS born Blacks and others might consider.

Regardless of his complex explanation about his racial heritage and how he identifies, Miguel is compelled to identify himself as Race 5 – Hispanic on bureaucratic forms. His response to the question leads me to believe that someone, whether it was another student or a teacher, influenced his decision to mark Race 5, which helps construct what true Blackness is and is not. Later in the interview, when Miguel is asked about Mr. Ponce, a teacher who self-identifies as Black, being from Panama, he identifies him as “just” Black without any nuance as he did for his own self-description.

A: So do you feel like people understand you can be both Black and Spanish? Like for

instance, Mr. Ponce, he's both. Did you know that? He's from Panama.

Miguel: I thought he was *just Black*.with an accent or something.

In rereading Miguel's articulation about Mr. Ponce, he did not expand on what "just" Black meant, but his statement made it clear that one way to construct "just Black" is usually being a monolingual English speaker with no accent. Mr. Ponce also has dark skin and other phenotypic signifiers that do not readily indicate the possibility of different racial/ethnic heritage that many use to inform difference. This undoubtedly contributes to the notion of "just Black".

Hair is often understood as a political and cultural statement (Banks 2000; Bryd and Tharps 2001; Lake 2003). In the school, many of the male Latino students from Central America will wear their hair longer and slicked back with gel. Many of the male students of African descent will wear their hair in corn rows, bushes (afros), or braided. These styles seem to be almost equal to low or close hair cut styles. Miguel has dark brown hair that is straight in texture with some apparent curls, that shoulder length but always worn in braids or corn rows and talks about his brother wearing an afro. Although he does not ascribe solely to a Black identity, he understands that "doing hair" and braiding or plaiting, and wearing afros to be something that Black people do. The link between hair and Blackness troubles Miguel's initial assertion of being mixed. He acknowledges that his father is a Black Columbian.

A: I like your braids. Who does your braids for you?

Miguel: My Mom...Because when she was in Columbia there were *Black Latino* people. So she learned how to cook like them, how to braid...plait, how to do all this stuff. I didn't know my moms know how to do hair until my brother, like when we first moved here, had grew his hair out, and I didn't know I *thought Black people only did that*.

Yeah, my grandmother taught her the whole thing...yeah my dad's mom.

Miguel immediately identifies a connection between race, Blackness, and hair and the ability to “do” and to “wear” hair. He makes assumptions that being “Black” is being able to do particular things with their hair in which he had previously omitted his brother from being able to do. Without any feedback or questioning from me, he instantly explains his answer about his mother having the ability to braid his hair while looking at my hair. Miguel introduced new terms of “crisp and rough” to describe Black hair.

A: When you go out in public, like when you go to the mall or the movies, do you feel like people treat you differently because they feel like you're Latino or you're Black, do you feel racism or discrimination?

Miguel: Well sometimes. It's like a joke though. You know how they [Blacks] say that Latino people like tacos and stuff and sometimes my friends be like they assume that and I don't really like tacos. And then my Latino friends assume that I like chicken and I don't like none of them. So I usually eat like Spanish food like plantains and rice. That's the food I eat.

Miguel: ...One time when my big brother was growing his hair *like an Afro*, at first people didn't think he was *Spanish* because *his hair could get crisp and rough* and stuff. And one time this kid came up and said you can't grow out your hair like that you're not Black. And then it's like yes I am. And then it's like *you're not from here and you're not Black*. And then the fight broke out. And that's the only one I've seen when my brother got upset. That's it.

Earlier in the interview, he discussed the capacity to be both Black and Columbian and mixed. He discusses how people on both sides, Black and Latino make assumptions about food and racial identity, particularly Blackness and how he attributes his dietary preferences to “Spanish” food. He jumps back and forth about issues of hair as he says his “brother was growing his hair *like an Afro*” indicating that is was not an authentic Black hairstyle. He also reveals important information about Black authenticity and territorial issues that some MGUS Blacks and other English speaking Blacks have about

hair texture and origin of birth that positions certain African descended peoples out of the boundaries of what it means to be “authentically Black”. The data also reveal information on how the lack of history about African descended peoples and diaspora are absent in public education.

This interview with Miguel demonstrates that Blackness, as well as race, ethnicity, and nationality, is not static. Miguel drew on different terms, sometimes synonymously to refer to race/ethnicity in talking about himself. During the interview he employs the terms Black, Spanish, mixed Blaxican, Latino, Black Latino. What I am suggesting here is that Miguel uses terms to create boundaries around Black and non-Black subjectivities based on the phenotypic markers such as skin color, hair texture and hair style (lending a directive for group association) yet attempts to incorporate himself on the edges of these boundaries. I am in no way suggesting that educators can overcome the enormous amounts of racial and cultural cues that one receives from media and popular culture, family, and everyday life experiences, but I wonder how one would be prepared to facilitate a conversation about this if it came up in class or if it initiated an altercation between students. A teachable moment would be lost and the opportunity to enhance how youth conceptualize race and equity would be gone as well. There is a vacuum of information and the curriculum does not assist in disseminating this information nor does it allow students to learn about themselves.

Yvonne

Yvonne, a seventh grade female student who spoke up in class one day explained that people always question if she is really Mexican. She is a small student, smaller than most in the class and in her grade level. She is on the honor roll and began learning English in the first grade when she came to the United States. In an interview, she shares with me that she was from Vera Cruz and was excited that I knew it was on the Mexican coast. She was also pleased that I knew about la quinceanera, a special Mexican traditional party given to girls who turn fifteen years of age. She discusses what school has been like for her concerning people asking her about herself.

A: Well you said something really interesting in class, one day when we were talking in class about culture and how people misidentify you. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Y: People usually think I'm like mixed...

A: What do you mean by mixed?

Y: *Like Black* or half-Black or half-White. Or they think I'm Dominican they don't think I'm Mexican because I don't look Mexican. They think that all Mexicans look the same and they don't.

A: Okay. Well from where you are on the coast, they had a lot of African people there. Do you have any African ancestry?

Y: I don't know. I think I do.

A: Have you been back to Vera Cruz since you left?

Y: No, but we are going for my cousin's quince.[shorten word or slang]

A: Oh a quinceanera! Are you going to have one?

Y: Yeah.

A: Are you excited?

Y: Yeah [Big smile].

Jacobs-Huey also argues that displaying “competence in African American speech varieties in terms of use and interpretation” is critical in gaining entrée and helping research participants feel comfortable (2002). I extend this position to include that competence in pronouncing words in what may be the native language of a research participant. In this particular research, the ability to correctly pronounce and know the

definition of Spanish words was important in connecting with Spanish-speakers. This proved to be true in this interview and during participant observation in a class with other Spanish speaking students.

A: Ok so you have two years. So do you remember people looking very different in that part of Mexico?

Y: Yes.

A: So you've seen Black people in that part of Mexico.

Y: No. I don't. But like um my family doesn't look traditionally Mexican. My grandmother looks Dominican or Cuban.

A: What does that mean to look that way?

Y: I don't know. [laughing]

A: What do Dominicans and Cubans look like? What do people think they look like?

Y: Like African-American. But then are like White Cubans and like White Dominicans and stuff.

A: When people misidentify you, how does that make you feel or what do you think about that?

Y: I think about my ancestors were they like and where they came from.

A: Do you try to teach them that there's not one way to look Mexican?

Y: Yeah.

A: Who usually says that to you? Is it other Latino kids or...

Y: No, it's like everybody. When I meet someone new they usually think I'm not Mexican.

A: What do your parents say about that? Do they get treated the same way? Is their hair curly? Are they darker?

Y: Yeah. My mom at work... there is this guy who always thinks she is Dominican. And she tells him she's not and he doesn't believe her.

A: Wow. So do you ask your parents what your ancestors were like?

Y: No. Um, but since I...the way that I and everyone look I guess there has to be some African in my ancestry.

Yvonne expresses the frustration with not being considered an 'authentic' Mexican because of the way she looks, but expresses a desire to learn more about her family and is open to the possibilities of her African ancestry. She does not view this possibility as negative. She wants to be able to celebrate her Mexican culture without being in-authenticated and dismissed by other students, particularly Latino students that do not

display phenotypic markers of being African descended. Even within the Latino population at this school and in this part of the country where the largest groups come from Central America, there is a hierarchy which locates Mexicans at the bottom of the social order. Yvonne must contend with this ranking as well as the fact that most people do not accept her as authentically Mexican.

Interestingly, when asked how people identify her, she says as “mixed”. When asked to explain, she relates mixed as being Black and then as Black and White, using Black first in both scenarios. Yvonne, like others, mentions the connection that people have to linking Blackness to Dominicanness and also introduces a link to being what people assume Cubans look like and also point out that those two groups can be racially White. She uses Black and African American interchangeably as do many in this school. For some, a marker for African Americanness is the monopolization of the term Black, when Black is more appropriately a broad, encompassing term. This is yet another means in which Blackness gets constructed and appropriated.

Yvonne finds solace in her friendship with her best friend in the class, Daria, who is of direct bi-racial parentage. Daria’s mother is “Black” and father is “Italian”. She says they became friends because before they met, everyone at the school said they looked like sisters and when they finally met and ended up having classes together, they found that they had a lot in common and formed a close friendship.

Amel

Amel is a student that several staff members who knew about my research encouraged me to interview. She is an outspoken girl, with brown skin, long, dark brown hair, and big brown eyes, many of the staff identified as being of exceptional beauty for her age. Amel, apparently had loud outbursts and a couple altercations informing people about her status as Black that led her to the front office. A couple of the adults who suggested I speak with her were baffled and amused by her decision to exist by her “Black” identity. Staff would tell me stories about how Amel “got into it with some girls or a teacher” who wanted challenged her Blackness and wanted her to identify as Dominican. I must admit, I went into the interview thinking that I would be meeting a miniature Black Panther; however, I did not get the same information when I interviewed her, although the session did yield important data. Amel is very animated and answers her questions using her hands to supplement information and neck gestures and eye movements to emphasize her point.

A: So how do you identify yourself?

Amel: I identify myself...sometimes I say I just say Hispanic because of my parents. But then when they ask me “you look like you’re *more than* Hispanic” I say yeah I am Hispanic, American, and Black.

A: What does it mean to be American?

Amel: American-I don’t know what it means. I just know that I was born in America. That’s why I say American.

A: So if you lived in the Dominican Republic would you still say you’re Black?

Amel: Yeah because that’s from my dad. He’s half Hispanic and half Black.

A: So you separate Hispanic and Black? Can’t you be both? Can’t you be a Black Hispanic or a Black Latina?

Amel: I could say that but since I’m only half of it, it’s like fifty-fifty. Fifty American and fifty Hispanic and fifty....I don’t know how to say all of it together anymore so I just say Black, Hispanic, and American.

For Amel, looking “more than Hispanic” indicates that people have a clear conception of how one looks authentically Hispanic, despite history on the origin of the word, this history of Spanish speaking countries and about people from Spain. Torres-Saillant and Hernández argue that,

“...whatever specific language individual Dominicans may choose to articulate their racial or ethnic identity, they invariably overcome the legacy of denial regarding the African part of their heritage. That change most likely stems from their coming to environments where many of the darker peoples of the earth come together to share social space and fight for equality (1998:145)”.

Perhaps this is true given the Black space of PG County. In addition to her explanation about her background, Amel’s math was off a little in terms of how she attempted to illustrate her racial, ethnic, and national quantum so I encouraged more explanation about what each meant.

A: What does it mean to be Hispanic?

Amel: It means to come from Spanish culture. To be raised from people that talk Spanish that teach you Spanish so. And to be speaked to about it.

This response indicates that spoken language is critical to a racialized identity. We have to remember that language is a choice. This is not always the case for youth, however the middle school years are a critical time for adolescents who are developing who they are and the language to help communicate these identities (Tatum 1999). At this point she chooses not to mention skin color, race, religion, or music to articulate what it means to be Hispanic. In fact, most of the Spanish speaking students do not use the term Hispanic, but first use their country of origin, then “Spanish”, especially in identifying a group of Spanish speaking people, then Latino.

A: So is it just as if you're from the Dominican Republic or from Mexico or from Cuba?

Amel: I think it would be different. From *the way they do things*, it'd kinda be different. The different way they speak to you. I think it would be different from Hispanic parents no matter where you're from but the training will kinda be the same. The only difference to me between...maybe Dominican and Cuban and all that stuff is that I sound different from them. Different words will come out of my mouth.

Banks suggests that "how people view and interpret the world is reflected in their language" (2006:75). He furthers this reasoning by arguing that "cultural differences are both reflected and perpetuated by languages and dialects (2006:75). Amel's assertion that the difference is in the way that ones speaks, is wrapped up in issues of language choice, practice, style, and delivery.

A: Well what about like El Salvador? Because you look different from people that live there?

Amel: Yeah they wouldn't believe...actually they believe that I'm Indian and Black. I think it's a compliment. I don't really get mad about no I'm not this and that. I'll be like no I'm actually Hispanic, Black and American. And they'll be like oh. *They pull my hair and I'll be like yes this is my hair. I got it. And they'll be like "It's pretty then"*.

Amel begins to bring up, as others do later in the ethnography, this connection to the "way you do things" to determine differences in people. Phenotype is still a conduit for determining and measuring Blackness and accessing beauty. She also demonstrates how hair and hair that is biologically hers is marked as an affirmation, not just of beauty but of who she is racially and ethnically and she feeds into that. As she answers the question, she pulls at her hair as was done to her, and swings it back making a statement by jerking her neck and changing her voice to a more confrontational one by saying "I'll be like "yes, this is my hair"." She lowers her voices as she recaps how the one who challenged her on this concedes from their inquiry, "I got it...It's pretty then [only because it is

real]”. This supports how important conceptions of hair become in the constructions of Blackness and of beauty (Banks 2000; Byrd 2001; Rosado 2007).

In thinking about Amel’s explanation for what it means to be Hispanic and her summation about different people doing different things; I use a quote from David Howard, a scholar who researches the Dominican Republic. He writes the following,

Identities are both inclusive and exclusive. The notion of inclusive and exclusive is manifest in the well-worked ruminations concerning Self and Other. The concept of the other errs towards the acceptance of strict dichotomies, the either/or rigidity that pigeonholes West and East, Black and White, right and wrong into binary, non porous categories. Such dualism creates false structures biased toward established philosophies and reductionist analytical frameworks (2001:5).

Amel, in these excerpts, appears to be operating under these frameworks in which she only reifies differences, thus excluding any other possibilities of complexity.

A: Do you think that other kids understand that there are lots of people of African descent or Black in different parts of....

Amel: I think they understand. But I think lots of people try to judge you because you are this and that....

A: Like what. Give me an example.

Amel: Like in this school there have never been lots of racist problems. But time to time there have been one of my friends have been involved in a fight because of race and things...

A: Like what like tell me the details.

Amel: Like she was in a fight and they started going at it and she said something in a funny way and then the Hispanic girl took it the wrong way and thought it was racist. And then they both went at it because she thought it was something different. She took it the wrong way.

A: So it was a Hispanic girl and a Black girl.

Amel: *She nods*

A: Do you feel like people are in their own groups at school?

Amel: Yes I do. Because now, it’s like Black against Hispanic. You don’t notice because we have many dances because we got in trouble. The last dance was in the cafeteria. A Hispanic boy and a Black boy started arguing and they started getting into it. I feel like this school is separated not because of race but more because the issues and problems and everything. But I really don’t think that racism is alive at this school, just drama.

A: So how are most of your friends that you hang out with?

Amel: They're *just Black*. It's really funny. Because I don't really hang out with them. I will have Hispanic friends, but 24/7 at this school you will see me hanging with the Black people.

A: What do your parents think about that?

Amel: They aren't really happy with it. My mom mostly. My dad is like you hang with whoever you hang with because it's your life. My mom be like I shouldn't be hanging around with them because *they* [Blacks] *might bring problems and one day do something and your friends will try to get you into it*.

Amel discusses her choice to associate with Black students. Her use of "just" indicates a social distancing. The assumption is they are from the United States and do not have the complex level of identity that she has. She also expresses her parents' disdain, bordering on contempt, for her choice. Her parents admonish these ties because of the liability that particular kind of Blackness might impose on her and perhaps on them. I query more about her mother since Amel says that she is the main one who does not like her associations.

A: And you mom is Dominican too?

Amel: Yeah.

A: Is she Black?

Amel: No she is *only* Hispanic. And she was born there.

Her use of "only" preceding Hispanic creates a space in which Blackness cannot occupy. She affirms this creation by using the fact that her mother was born there as evidence. At this point, having traveled to and done research in the Dominican Republic, I try to push her on her explanation by using what I know about the history of the Dominican Republic to assist me in my line of inquiry. I was not intentionally trying to do this, but by associating her mother with the possibility of being Black in addition to her status as Hispanic or Dominican challenged the notion of an authentic Hispanic identity in Amel's

conception. She, like Miguel, compares her mother who she ascribes to a non-Black identity to me, this time, using a comparison to the hue of my skin. She further supports her argument by asserting that her mother has [in the present tense] long hair [the ability to grow her hair long] even though it is short now to authentic her racial identity. She also clears up any misunderstanding I may have about being Spanish only being linked to being White.

A: But if you're from the Dominican Republic like 90% of the population is Black Dominican. So is she like...

Amel: She is Hispanic *that I know*....

A: But Hispanic means you're mixed with Hispanic, Indian and Black?

Amel: No Hispanic means you're Spanish.

A: From Spain?

Amel: You're *just* Spanish. You came from a Spanish country. Like the Dominican Republic is Spanish. *It doesn't mean you're Spanish or you're White.* You know English and Spanish. You don't know English at all. You talk Spanish, you understand Spanish and that's all you ever know.

A: What is her skin color?

Amel: Not near mine. *Like yours probably. Light. Her hair is long, but she doesn't keep it long.* She dyed it.

A: Does she have any African ancestry?

Amel: Not that I know of. I know my dad does, like his parents. But my mom she doesn't really talk about it. She just says I am Hispanic, you're half Hispanic and half American.

Amel eludes that her mother's identification as Dominican, as "Spanish" lacks ownership of a Black identity (Duany 1998; Torres-Saillant 1998). It also appears that her mother does not like to talk about her history where Blackness is implicated. In the next few excerpts, Amel code-switches into solely having a Spanish identity. She explains how her ability to speak Spanish draws a conflict when speaking with her [Black] friends.

A: So do you speak Spanish with the other kids at the school?

Amel: Yeah when someone speaks Spanish they will find out *I'm Spanish* and say something. And I say something in Spanish.

A: So the kids that speak primarily Spanish and that maybe are from Central America do they come talk to you?

Amel: They speak to me in English and Spanish. Because not everyone at this school knows *I'm Spanish. It's okay. They can think whatever.*

A: Well your last name, XXX is not Spanish last name.

Amel: Oh no. I don't know where in the world. My dad got that last name. I just found out that's not even the last name I'm supposed to have. I'm trying to find out where that came from.

A: So if you could define what it means to be Black what would you say?

Amel: I don't really know. For me it means that you're parents were from a place that is called you being Black. So that's what you are. I don't even have a definition for the things that I am.

A: Do people treat you as less Hispanic or less Latina because you're still Black?

Amel: They treat me the same. The only thing I don't like is that I have different friends they're from Africa, Jamaica, New York, and all that stuff....when they talk in their language but when I talk in my language it's another situation. I don't talk Spanish at all because they don't talk Spanish and I'm not going to be talking to myself in Spanish. And the friends I have you can see the floors separating. So mostly everyone that speaks Spanish is on the first floor, and I be on the second floor so I don't really speak Spanish up here.

A: Do you find that other kids that are Hispanic but that are also Black and Hispanic like Dominicans and Puerto Ricans do you find them sticking together more?

Amel: Yes. I feel like when it comes to Hispanic versus Black certain groups will stick together. Like gangs or whatever, they'll stick together. They will stick together. They'll be like that Black boy said this or that. I'll stick with you I'll have your back. But I do feel that school is separating when it comes to certain aspects.

A: So what is it like to be a girl in this school? Do you worry about your hair? I see you have two different earrings on, what's that about?

I know that issues of phenotype are impacted by gender inequalities, especially as girls and women are held un-forgivingly to white standards of beauty of body characteristics in which they have no control. I asked this specific question to understand more about the dynamics of gender that play in to social constructions of identity, particularly Blackness, but I also had another motive in finding out information about sexual orientation. It has been long noted that because of intense issues of homophobia in Black communities) gay identities conflict with and held in contempt of an authentic Black identity (hooks 2000; Johnson 2003).

A MGUS born Black woman who works in the front office overheard another staff person suggest I speak with Amel. She immediately inserted herself in the conversation and shared how she saw Amel kissing another girl on the mouth in front of the office and how she called her parents but Amel denied it and resented the trouble this caused her. The woman in the front office spoke in a disapproving tone and insisted that someone needed to talk to her and help her with this and how it “just wasn’t right”.

Williams argues,

“Narratives of Black pathology are one of racist culture’s most enduring legacies. These narratives are both gendered and fraught with representation of Black sexuality. Thus, any discussion that engages popular notions of Black sexuality must reckon with racism’s larger story of Black dysfunction (1997:140).

Although I believe that sexual orientation heavily impacts constructions of many things, including notions of gender, religion, and race, I do not have a lot of data on this. This is mainly because the process of getting approved to do research in schools is so difficult and topics of sexuality are very sensitive in schools, especially at this age level; I did not construct my methodology to intentionally seek out this information. Knowing, this, I ask Amel about gender to see if she would reveal any information about what the woman in the office had solicited. Nothing came out of it except issues of heterosexual interactions and tensions between boys and girls. I do think issues of sexuality²⁸ are important as it does lend significant information about social constructions of Blackness, but because of the parameters of my research proposal and the information presented to

²⁸ For more information about sexuality and constructions of Blackness, see Johnson 2004; Williams 1998.

the school board and on the informed consent forms, I did not feel it appropriate to ask beyond that.

Amel: [Smiling] Yes, I love earrings. And the thing about me is with earrings I don't know I feel like they express themselves. Like I can have a button here and then I can have here a dragon. It's like two different things expressing myself. Tell me when you look at me you can see another thing. Being a girl at [DMS] is hard, you can say that. So much, so much starting things by the littlest things ever in this world it will start. I am a very sensitive girl. I wouldn't get with that. I just want peace basically. And at this school you don't get peace. It's something you do not get at Charles Carroll.

A: It is like girls fighting over the same guy or...?

Amel: It's like girls fighting over the same guy, girls fighting because you said something, girls fighting because they don't like the way you walk, the way you talk. Like...wow. But I laugh about it but it's still something you have to worry about because no one is ever going to shut up and not say nothing.

A: And that's all different types of people that do those types of things?

Amel: Yes, everyone in this school have their drama. Everybody that you gonna talk to. Everyone is gonna say No I sit and do my work and I have perfect grades and life is great here. No, I wish I could hear that but Diversity MS is too much.

A: So what kind of music do you listen to?

Amel: Okay. I watch MTV, BET, VH1, MTV Hispanic. Anything that has a TV show that has to do with music I will listen to it. Then I listen to weird songs like disco and country. They're cool. It's nice to listen to different types of music, when you like it. But I like the song. So yeah, the music kind of here is R&B, Hip-hop, rock, reggaeton, and merengue..then you have Hispanic music and Black music. But I'm not going to lie to you, I listen to Black music more than Hispanic music.

A: Do you think some Hispanic music is also Black music too because of the African influence...drums?

Amel: Yes I really believe that time to time what you hear in Hispanic music and Black music is the same thing. Because basically they are doing the same thing except they are talking English and they are talking Spanish.

In Amel's description of music, she separates Black music from Hispanic music. When she says Black music I am assuming from the list of music genres she spoke of listening to, she is saying R&B and Hip Hop is "Black music" and Reggaeton and Merengue is "Hispanic music". Tricia Rose argues that from the start, hip hop has always been intercultural and transnational (1994; 1996). She suggests that "Hip hop is a cultural form

that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community” (1994:21) implying that is a diasporic multi-cultural form. The music forms native to Latin American and the Spanish Caribbean are marked by the use of drums and other African instruments and many of the artists are visibly Black or of African descent (Chanduvi 1997; Jackson 1985). Amel and others’ view it a bifurcation of Black and Hispanics as two different groups with similarities and are viewed as a creolization or blend. Although later she admits to seeing overlap, Amel still acknowledges clear racial/ethnic boundaries for music but reconciles this through language differences.

I ask Amel if she knows about this history of the Dominican Republic and about how this was the first place slaves were brought in the New World and her response indicated a lack of historical knowledge and a lack of care to know. She continued to talk about her father and added that she they did not know where his side of the family was from but that is “half Black and half Hispanic”, again inciting a separation from being both Black and Hispanic. On bureaucratic forms, Amel says she marks off Hispanic even when given the opportunity to mark Hispanic – Black.

When asked if she had any questions or concluding remarks, Amel’s final summation of the school and the interview was presented in a very grown-up or motherly: “I just know the school needs some help and that even though it is hard to go here, it teaches you a lot of things”.

These are just a few of the very detailed accounts of how students understand and negotiate processes of becoming and unbecoming. When asking educators how they racially and ethnically identify, allowing for the space to elaborate, surveys reveal interesting strategies for self-description as well as standard concessions to narrow identification patterns. Out of forty-one staff members who completed and turned in the survey, here are the responses to the question that asked them to describe their identity both racially and ethnically and to consider at least two generations of their families.

Table 5-1

Staff Survey Responses to Question 1, Describing Their Identity both Racially and Ethnically
1. Black – Trinidadian father
2. Black with some Native American and White several generations ago
3. Black and White
4. Black Creole
5. White-German
6. Asian and White
7. Chinese and Black
8. Black
9. White – European
10. African American
11. White – German, Irish, Scotch, Dutch, Indian
12. Black
13. Black and Black ☺ Native American, 3 generations ago
14. Black and White
15. Black
16. Black
17. Black
18. Asian – Indian
19. Black – American
20. African American
21. African
22. Black – African
23. White – Irish
24. Black African – Nigerian American

25. White
26. Black and White
27. Asian- Filipino. My grandfather on mother's side is Chinese; My grandmother on mother's side is Filipino; My grandfather on father's side is Spanish/Irish; My grandmother on father's side is Spanish-Filipino.
28. Black – Hispanic/Latino
29. Black – American
30. African American/Black
31. African American
32. Black and White
33. African American
34. Black – African American
35. African American and White
36. Black/African American
37. White - German/French/Czech
38. Black – African – Liberian Kru
39. African – West Indian born in a Hispanic country. My family is from Jamaica, Barbados, St. Vincent, and established in Panama. No known intermarriage with other ethnic group is recorded.
40. Black
41. Black African American

Some staff use “Black” to represent U.S. standing as they distinguished a parent not from the United States as their respective nationality. Waters writes about “the invisibility of the Caribbean immigrants as immigrants and their visibility as Blacks” (1999:3) as problematic. Others opt to use both Black and African American and others choose one terminology over the other. Many ignored the call to describe their ethnicity in addition to their race and some followed the directions accurately. This list also lends evidence to how Blackness gets constructed. Most of the staff who marked off African American, with a Caribbean heritage, did not or could not elaborate about past generations. This frequent occurrence speaks to the larger context of how slavery in the U.S. coupled with the legality of defining oneself by hypodescent impacts MGUS born Blacks in how they

define themselves and their ancestry. This also points to how history in this country erases possibilities for African Americans and others in conceptualizing this population as diverse (Waters 1999).

In 1995, *Newsweek* published a cover story entitled, What Color is Black? Science, Politics, and Racial Identity. The front of the magazine featured twenty-four pictures of people of presumed African descent on the cover and the edition was largely dedicated to interrogating Blackness. Over ten years ago this question was in the media. This is significant because people are raising the same questions presently. Morganthau, the author of this article, explained that “Solidarity is hard to find. One third of African Americans polled say that Blacks should not be considered a single-race” (1995:64). In this same issue of *Newsweek*, Ellis Cose authored One Drop of Bloody History: Americans Have Always Defined Themselves on the Basis of Race, Cose discussed how race and Blackness are experienced in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean are not devoid of colorism and have obvious disproportionality on the basis of skin color and who is considered Black (Cose 1995; Whitten and Torres 1998; Howard 2001). This dated discussion in a popular magazine reveals an argument for how generational changes in racial/ethnic terms inform Blackness and has implications for solidarity and tensions for how people choose to identify today.

CHAPTER 6 CONCEPTUALIZING RACE AND PLACE



Class

Davis argues that “Being Black has always involved more than skin tone and ancestry, it also involves class consciousness and ethnic identification (1997:42)”. This is especially true in PG County.

Thomas and Clarke argue that,

race and racialization are not usually considered central issues in academic discussions of global economic and political transformations. Yet, because of globalization today is facilitated by the transmission and reproduction of deeply embedded social prejudices roots in a past characterized by territorial concepts of belonging that both generate and were generated by racial inequality, the contemporary redistribution of wealth has exacerbated historically entrenched racial hierarchies (2006:1)

Many of these issues of “territorial concepts of belonging” that Thomas and Clarke speak of are forged by access to resources acquired or not, largely due to and sustained through power relations and firm ideology about the intersection of race and class.

Issues of class are prevalent throughout my research in developing interrogations about how notions of Blackness are produced and sustained. Disguised in the appropriated and re-appropriated, not to mention overly used term “ghetto” that now has a number of connotations in various speech patterns, all applications of the word have implications of class. “Ghetto”, a highly contested and highly problematic term, has been used as an adjective, adverb, and a noun synonymously to describe a particular kind of Blackness and Black people.

One of the students in the social studies class was explaining what it was like to live in different parts of the world. He immediately used the contrast of “You know, it’s not like ghetto or anything”. I immediately asked what it meant to be ghetto and the response was “dirty, poor, and rat-infested”. I proceeded to ask if that was the only way you could define ghetto and was told, “It could be an attitude, like talking loud and being hard²⁹”. Other definitions I received were related to issues of mentality, style of dress, speech patterns, applying the use of being poor and ghetto in tandem, and noting having morals and values. These answers came from both adults and students, all of African descent. In one interview with a smart and popular Vietnamese boy who is in the 7th grade shared that he believes that all groups can have someone ghetto in them.

In some respect, this notion of ghetto, especially when applied to Black people, may have implications in social-economic standings but also transcends class. In a

²⁹ Being hard is defined as being tough or strong; presenting oneself as not being able to be messed with and/or not being scared of anything. For more in-depth discussion of posturing and performance of masculinity, see Gordan 1997; Hurt 2006; Johnson 2003; Katz 1999; Kelley 2004).

predominantly Black space, such as PG County that has a high middle class population and in a school where most of the teachers believe their students are lower middle class and middle class, ghetto is applied to anyone who does not meet the conformities of acceptable behaviors and practices emblematic of a Black middle class standard. According to research participants, some of these standards are “high morals, and values, especially on education”. It means that parents work hard and participate in school activities and students are quiet and well behaved. Some say that middle class and being ghetto is based on where one lives and what their house or car looks like and some relate it to cleanliness. There are also a number of people and situations in which the term ghetto was used to justify a certain realm of Blackness that appears to have nothing to do with class, but everything to do with behavior and attitude. When discussing concepts of what is “ghetto”, Kelley argues,

“Most interpreters of the “underclass” treat behavior as no only a synonym for culture but also as the determinant for class. In simple terms, what makes the underclass a class is members’ common behavior – not their income, their poverty level, or the kind of work they do. It is a definition of class driven more by moral panic than by systematic analysis (2004:120).

Good behavior, making good grades, conformity to what is deemed acceptable, and not being boisterous are characteristics that research participants identify as defining lines of class positions.

When asked on a staff survey to define class and middle class, most of the responses dealt with the amount of money one makes. Several responses indicate in an economic status between poor and rich while some relate it to a state of mind and hone in

on behavior. Very few nuanced the phenomenon of class or middle class status, but most who took the survey agreed that the students of DMS belonged to the lower middle class.

Table 6-1

Staff Survey Responses to Question 19. What is class? Define middle class.
1. Financial/social status that may be related to level of education
2. A societal reference we use to identify financial status. The middle class is the average American's financial status.
3. Class is where your family is in the money category. Middle class is in between rich and poor.
4. Average people of average means
5. Class is the level you are at in society. Middle class is the people that work all the time and don't have extra money.
6. Working class, generally college educated
7. Class is a social placement designed to separate people. Middle class is just more money
8. Most of the students are middle class but wants to be lower class to fit in with peers
9. A group of people, not rich, not poor just right
10. Where we place people, middle class is where the majority of the populations is
11. Middle class is an economic class that allows the family to save money and buy a few luxury items
12. two incomes
13. Class is a description of social-economic groupings. These people of families that make an average median income based on the national average.
14. Class is a distinction among people. Middle class are people with average jobs/living
15. Educational/financial levels; college degree – suburban life – not struggling
16. A social distinction stratifying people according to income, race, religion, and ethnicity
17. The classification of different people into different categories in regard to their economic and education etc. status
18. Financially able to meet monthly needs
19. Classification based on income
20. Class is an artificial separation based on wealth and position in the community
21. Class – grouping based on socioeconomic status. Middle class is white collar job; house in the burbs
22. A group in which determines where you stand economically and socially. Successful business people.
23. middle class is the folks/families that live in nice non crime ridden areas who don't struggle for food, living paycheck to paycheck
24. A certain standard or category to judge a certain group
25. Class is based on socio-economic status! Middle class is 3 tiered: Low, middle and

high. The Great Middle Class is the U.S.A.

26. I see class as the combination of socio economic status and attitude about education, government, etc.
27. How you behave and handle yourself in certain matters. Not poverty stricken.
28. Societal status, Middle class to me is not rich and above the poverty line.
29. Economic standing. Middle class means you are not rich but definitely not poor.
30. Middle class – enough money to pay all of your bills and still have fun sometimes.
31. Money fact. Middle class is \$50,000 or college degree.

When asked about what class they fit into, most staff said middle class. Two individuals indicated they were in the lower class.

Table 6-2

Staff Survey Responses to Question 20. *What class do you see your students in and which class do you see yourself apart of and why?*

1. The majority of the students are middle class
2. Lower- middle to middle class
3. My students range from low to middle class because they are from the surrounding areas.
4. I think most kids fall into middle class even though they want to be “low”
5. My kids are in the lower working class
6. Lower middle class due to their families financial situation
7. Middle to low middle
8. Middle to low class because we have a large population on free and reduced lunch
9. Middle class
10. Middle class
11. Middle. I think a lot of the parents here make at or above the national median income
12. Not poor, not rich.
13. I do not see my students as a class. I do not discriminate among different races/ethnicities
14. Most of them are from working class families just like me
15. Students are mostly lower middle.
16. lower to lower middle class
17. Most of the kids are low income
18. I see students being on the bottom level of the pyramid
19. Middle class
20. Children can achieve at any class status
21. lower socioeconomic class
22. I see most of the students as lower middle class

23. Students as middle and lower class. Myself middle because of the behavior and beliefs.
24. Lower class. Me middle because I did not grow up wanting for food or housing
25. Low middle class and middle, middle class
26. Economically, lower middle class, but “attitudinally” lower class with a ghetto mentality. Economically, I’m the same but my attitude, values education among other things, more.
27. Some students are middle class, others are the lower to lower middle.
28. low to middle.
29. Middle class
30. We have extreme from welfare to middle class

Both sets of responses raise interesting questions and warrants further investigation into how these conceptions, especially the ones related to behavior, get translated into messages about self-worth and identity to students. Knapp and Woolverton (2004) argue that discussions of class can potentially impact education and advocate that being informed and being able to use a class lens is an important part of multicultural education. I advocate that discussions and other learning opportunities about the complex intersections of race, place, and class be used as training for educators for deconstructing stratification among students and improving spatial relationships within the school.

Ms. Patton

Originally from Washington, DC, Ms. Patton is an eight grade science teacher in her early thirties who has been teaching in PG County for five years.

A: Are you parents from DC. as well?

P: Not necessarily. My mom is from North Carolina and my dad is from South Carolina. But you know, they pretty much lived here their adult life.

A: So how do you ethnically and racially identify?

P: I am African-American. Black. African-American.

A: And what does that mean to you?

P: Hmm that's a good question. Basically to me it just means that my ancestors are of African descent. I know that my immediate ancestors were Gullah people in South Carolina. So I identify with being African, Afro-centric anything of that sort. Not anything deeper than that.

A: Oh. So do you still have family in the Gullah Islands off South Carolina?

P: Yes and no. They are more so in the Columbia, Beaufort area.

A: Do they still practice any Gullah traditions?

P: Not really. They still practice the language aspect of it. But not so much the traditions that I am familiar with.

Ms. Patton's connection to her Gullah ancestry is a good example of unpacking diversity within being African American and even positions this as a particular African American ethnicity that many do not know about or understand. Johnson argues that "black Americans must come to terms with their own differences within black culture" (2003:12). In addition to this, Ms. Patton provides a good understanding of what her experiences have been like teaching in both Washington, DC Public School and in PG County Public Schools, helping to dissect what may appear as simple class issues and differences.

A: So what are the major differences that you see between D.C schools and Prince George's County Public Schools?

P: Hmm. Honestly, Prince George's County is a lot mellower than DC could ever be.

A: What do you mean?

P: Just in terms of the behavior of the students, the behavior of the parents. I mean not to say that Prince George's County is some type of paradise. But it's justit is a lot different. I definitely have an easier time with classroom management here than I ever did in DC. Not that I didn't have it. It was just that much more than a struggle. That much more of calling parents, battling with parents sometimes. Having to convince parents that you are on their side but still have to discipline their children. I think honestly in DC I dealt with a lot of younger parents. That made a difference in a parent-teacher relationship. I really had to convince them that I was there doing my job-doing it correctly. That I just cared about their children.

A: What do you think some of the reasons are for the differences? Is it the age of parents or parental involvement? Is it a class issue? Is it a race or racial or ethnic issue?

P: My impulse response is that a lot of those parents aren't very far removed from school themselves. And I think they still carry their grudges so to speak about their school

experience. Maybe it wasn't positive... it may have been but maybe it wasn't positive. So I think a lot of it is they are just not far enough removed from the high school or the school experience as a whole to have any perspective on it. You know they probably went through battling with teachers. You know we all had our favorite teachers and we all had teachers we didn't like who we thought were unfair. So when they have their child coming home griping about a teacher they're probably thinking back like yeah I remember that they probably did do that, that, and the other. I think that's one part of it. I think also educators just aren't valued in this country. Especially in this area where you don't necessarily have to go to college to do well economically. And I think a lot of them realize that you can go get a job with Metro or you can work your way up in the government. I mean there's just a lot of things you can do other than going to college, in this area, and still make a decent living. And so they don't really value education the way that we do. I don't feel that a lot of them do. I don't think we have the same values that we did some years ago. Especially because college was that rung in the ladder to becoming successful. Nowadays it just really isn't. The economy is not structured that way anymore.

Ms. Patton brings up an aspect of class that deals with well paying occupations with benefits such as working for the Post Office or for Metro, the Washington DC transit system, or in various capacities in the government that do not require a college education. She cites the value of going to college as a value that separates people but not in a disparaging way as was cited by other instances as an example of being apart of a lower class or even "ghetto", but more so as an example of a fact.

The Black Middle Class and Privileging Particular Black Experiences

It has been well documented that the 'Black bourgeoisie', "professional managerial class workers", or the Black middle class had its beginning divisions during slavery when enslaved individuals with visibility apparent white ancestry were manumitted in higher rates than those with darker skin (Herring and Keith 1991:760, Prince 2004). There is still evidence of disparity in access to opportunities and resources.

Herring and Keith provide a chronological account beginning in slavery about how the skin tone of Blacks impact social stratification within the group (1991). They note (Frazier 1957) in the following,

During slavery, these fair-skinned Blacks were at times emancipated by their white fathers. After slavery, their kinship ties to whites gave them an advantage over other Blacks in obtaining education, higher-status occupations, and property. Because the “majority of prominent Negroes, who were themselves mulattoes, married mulattoes”, light-complexioned Blacks passed advantages on to their light children. This process of advantage maintenance by mulattoes lasted well into the 20th century (note Landry 1987). So one’s position in the community ultimately reflected the amounts of “white blood” in his or her ancestry, and patterns of stratification in the Black community included considerations of skin tone (Herring and Keith 1991).

Herring and Keith (1991) argue that over time, as MGUS born Blacks with darker skin complexions began to gain access to education, and some individuals eventually married into this elite group marked by skin color. I extend this argument by including interracial marriages. Some Blacks began to marry interracially and the color of the elite began to broaden as well as myriad access points to white communities. However, this issue of skin color in addition to racism continues to prevail today in the job market, in housing practices, in racial profiling, life expectancy and quality of life, and in determining suitors and life partners.

Thomas and Clarke suggest that “...it is not just the fact that American Blackness holds a place of privilege within the cultural production of race that is notable. What is even more salient about the contemporary post-cold war era is that the process of subject formation, more generally, is primarily occurring through consumption” (2006:26). In other words, this kind of consumption speaks to the kind of “new racism” that Collins

writes about when discussion class-specific gender ideology (2005). She puts forward ideas that represent social distancing based on gender norms that are intricately tied to class:

Under the new racism, these class-specific representations of Black masculinity and Black femininity serve several purposes. First, these representations speak to the importance that ideologies of class and culture now have in justifying the persistence of racial inequality. Within the universe of these representations, authentic and respectable Black people become constructed as class opposites, and their different cultures help explain why poor and working class people are at the bottom of the economic hierarchy and middle-class Black people are not. Authentic Black people must be contained – their authentic culture can enter White-controlled spaces, but they cannot. Representations of athletes and criminals, bitches and bad mothers refer to the poor and/or working-class African American men and women who allegedly lack the values of hard work, marriage, school performance, religiosity, and clean living attributed to middle-class White Americans. In essence, these representations of Black masculinity and Black femininity assail unassimilated Black people, pointing out the ways in which such poor Black people are “untamed” and in need of strict discipline (Collins 2005:177-178).

Some of the strain between Black immigrant groups and others among MGUS born Blacks is based on class position and measures of success which rationalizes outcomes based on and notions of respectability, values, and hard work. These notions stratify particular kinds of Blackness. The conceptions are heavily impacted by several factors including the time period individuals came to the U.S., reasons, for coming, if and where they were educated, degree obtainment, English language acquisition and other forms of social capital (Davis 1991). Waters suggests that ‘Black immigrants from the Caribbean with a particular identity/cultural worldview that reflects their unique history and experiences...which are also different from the culture and identity of African Americans’ (1999:6). She argues that when Caribbean immigrants arrive to the U.S. they are expected to share a Black racial identity devoid of other identities (1999). Their

immigrant status or first generation out of immigrant status informs mainstream white society that they have different attitudes and “values” about work which they internalize and which create competition for resources and perceptions toward them compared to African Americans a defining point of difference. Glick-Schiller and Fouron argue that, specifically for Haitian immigrants, transnational and oppositional identities are firmly set into motion as a strategy against U.S. stereotyping of Haitians as being carriers of disease, mainly AIDS and against U.S. racism against African Americans (1990).

The images of U.S. Blackness that are constructed and maintained daily in which Black and Latino immigrant groups have to contend are racist and gendered. In talking about her concept of the new racism, Collins asserts that applying class and assigning issues of values and morals from other groups adds to division and fuels the fire (2005).

Rejecting traditional racist discourse that sees racial differences as rooted in biology, these representations of criminals and bad mothers, of sidekicks and modern mummies work better in a context of desegregation in which cultural difference has grown in importance of maintaining racial boundaries. Poor and working class African American men are not inherently inclined to crime, such images suggest. Rather the culture in which they grow up, the authentic Black culture so commodified in the media, creates images of criminality that explains the failures of racial integration by placing the blame on the unassimilability of African Americans themselves. The joblessness, poor schools, racially segregated neighborhoods, and unequal public services that characterize American society vanish and social class hierarchies in the United States as well as patterns of social mobility within them become explained solely by issues of individual values, motivation, and morals (2005:178).

In short, these kinds of issues play a huge role in impacting ambivalent class divisions among various Black peoples leading to a sort of Black hierarchy that pits ethnic and cultural heritage and African American middle-classness against Black subjectivities that are created out of poor and working class positions and stereotypes about morals, values,

and behavior. As a survival strategy against historical and contemporary racism, some immigrants groups develop and strengthen oppositional and transnational identities to differentiate themselves and to alleviate societal pressure (Glick-Schiller and Fouron 1990; Waters 1996). Some MGUS born Blacks use their class status to create oppositional identities. Williams argues that,

Western racist discourses routinely construct “Blackness” as a problematic sign and ontological position. In so doing, the architects of cultural and (social) scientific racism historically have represented Black communities, Black families, and Black bodies as the bearers of stigma, disease, danger, violence, social pathology, and hypersexuality (1997:140).

These processes involve engagement in the same system of oppression that utilizes stereotypes and racializes behavior, thus having implications for how Blackness is constructed.

(Mis)conceptions about Africa

“Dang, you’re African? You *really* Black”.

I had the opportunity to interview a female teaching assistant in her early twenties who described her experiences living and working in PG County. Self-described as African, she is also a Muslim who covers her hair. During the interview, she explains that she does not think her religious affiliation or her choice to cover her hair impacts how people view her as Black or African. She does say that because people can not see her hair or only got a glimpse of her hairline, they [people in PG County not familiar with Muslims] do not think of her as African first.

Ms. Tahira: I consider myself African because I am from Somalia. I am Black but I don't really consider myself African American cuz I'm not American. I grew up in... I kind of grew up here [Prince George's County] but I grew up in Kenya also and in Canada so I consider myself African. I know I'm Black ... just not African American Black.

AW: What does understanding Blackness here [Prince George's County] mean?

Ms. Tahira: Sometimes when I came here [Prince George's County] at first, people didn't consider me as being Black. I guess being African American. They usually thought I was Indian until they really found out I was African. They would say You're really African? Aren't you supposed to be dark?

AW: Did you hear that from just African Americans?

Ms. Tahira: No, from lots of people. Lots of people. Black, White, Spanish.

AW: When you use the word Spanish what do you mean?

Ms. Tahira: Hispanics. Like from Latin countries.

AW: Can they be Black as well?

Ms. Tahira: Some of them are Black yeah like Dominicans are Black. Even they didn't know where to place me.

AW: How do hear students describing themselves?

Ms. Tahira: Most students don't say they're African American. They say they're Black.

AW: Do you think people see being Black as being diverse?

Ms. Tahira: I don't really see a lot of people seeing Black as being more than one thing. They don't see it as diverse.

AW: Have you heard anyone say anything negative about being African?

Ms. Tahira: I have heard some negative things about being African. Dang, you're African? You really Black! Your hair is nappy. And then I point out that I'm African but I don't really fit into those categories.

Ms. Tahira uses her personal encounters to educate students about misconceptions about Africans. She interprets that for many MGUS born Black students, being African denotes a special kind of authentic Blackness that does not include them. Although many do not feel a connection to it, students continue to associate antiquated stereotypes incorporated from the media that are and not successfully combated by education. Ms. Tahira also draws on her own experiences and sense of phenotype to include Dominicans in a Black category yet simultaneously allows them to also occupy a space marked for Spanish or Hispanic. Her statement, "Even they didn't know where to place me" affirms an assumed

connection with other people of African descent to a level of understanding of what it means to be Black or a part of Blackness but not in an U.S. Black or African American sense.

In addition to the media being a huge informant of social and cultural constructions which are iconoclastic to facts, what I see here is a lack of educational and pedagogical intervention that aims to engage students and teachers in critically thinking and teaching about race, ethnicity, and history. King's work on curriculum transformation as social action, endorses educational approaches that "clarify the nature and production of culture-centered knowledge in African American (and Diasporan/African) intellectual thought, educational research, and practice" (2004:349). There are plenty of examples and messaging yielded from other interviews and from participant observation that implies consistent stratification among multigenerational U.S. born Blacks and other students of African descent based on a circuitry of stereotypes about Africans and Africa, thus adding to the construction of Blackness (Jackson and Cothran 2003).

Patricia

During my interview with Patricia, (mis)conceptions about others' ideas about what Africans are like were discussed. Patricia's demeanor changes to obvious frustration as she recounts the ignorance displayed by others

A: Do people stereotype what it is to be African?

P: Yeah a lot of people in the school make fun of us because of the way we talk because we have an accent and that because we are African we have to live in a bush.

A: Well you don't really have an accent.

P: I know because I was born here.
A: But the other kids, they give them a hard time?
P: Yeah.
A: What else do they do?
P: They make fun of them because a lot of African girls we get braids in our hair. They make fun of them for those.....They run around making noises with their mouths.
A: Where do they get this from?
P: I don't know....Like one girl asked me do you run around naked when you go to Africa? I'm like are you serious? Like we don't have clothes
A: Now who asks you this?
P: Like anyone who's not African. Basically. Black Americans. Spanish people. White people.
A: Now when you say Spanish people do you mean people from Spain?
P: No like Mexico. El Salvador. South American. Latino.
A: So what do you say to them?
P: First of all I look at them like they are crazy. Cause we don't do anything like that. Then I say where do you get these ideas? They say well that's what we learn...that's what's around them. Well no we don't do anything like that. We have clothes just like Americans.
A: So do adults say things like that?
P: Well not to me but I've heard conversations. Like I'll be in the grocery line and I hear people say things around me.
A: But not in the school?
P: Well not really....Well there is one...I don't want to say this name. There is one teacher who asks questions like that or I should say says racist things to students.
A: Do people talk a lot about skin color and hair texture and what people wear or what they own? That kind of stuff..
P: Not really...not really the girls just the ignorant boys who don't really have home training....They talk about people's shoes. They think if you jone on someone or make fun of someone that it's going to make you more popular.
A: Earlier you were saying something about African girls because they wear braids....but I've seen other girls wearing braids... Can you touch on that.more?
P: I don't know why they say it. Oh they say why you always have to wear weaves in your hair? What in Africa you can't grow your own hair? That's so dumb, I just don't get why they say that..
A: So it's Black boys or just anybody?
P: Boys...any culture or diversity. Just boys. Mostly the girls don't say anything like that. But boys say it a lot. Regardless of what color...boys.

Again, people [students], in this school have a barometer that measures what anything African is and equates it as a separate and unequal type of Blackness. Stereotypes about Africa and what it means to be African is unacceptably reified in the minds of students

and continuously goes uncorrected in the education system. Phenotype, in this instance hair – how it is worn and how long it is, is used as a gage and a marker of difference that devalues and others a group of students, particularly girls. For Patricia, overall misconceptions about Africa come from both girls and boys, but the remarks about femininity are gendered. Issues of hair are equated to beauty and the disparaging criticism about how African female students look come from boys of all backgrounds. Consistent in many of the interviews, like racism, Blackness is gender-specific when it comes to how one looks.

When I ask Amel about what she notices about Africans, she first denies any difference in treatment. She quickly follows up on this statement by explaining that they [African students] might get taunted because of “dress”, “smell”, and they way they “might act”, invoking the racialization and Blackening of behavior again. Amel understands these things to be merely “teasing” and “small”.

A: How do African kids get treated differently here?

Amel: I don't see no difference.

A: They don't make fun of them?

Amel: Certain people do make fun of people. Sometimes it's not even because of where they come from. It might be the way the dress, even though we have uniforms. It might be the way the might dress, the way they might smell, the way they might act...it really is them teasing you about the smallest things.

Mrs. Ekezie

Mrs. Ekezie, who is in her forties, is from Nigeria and is a Prince George's County resident. I cannot disclose in what capacity she works in the school, but she works with students throughout the day. During participant observation, staff often make fun of her

accent both in her presence and behind her back. Sometimes, staff will do this by mimicking her accent. It appears from the few times I saw her in the presence of the “fun”, she went along with it. I had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Ekezie. She makes a firm statement that “We are all Black. There is no difference”. As the interview goes on, she makes distinctions based on values and morals. She says that Blacks and African Americans, [used interchangeably] are different only in these aspects and she does not know where the breakdown started. She shares that because of this, her three children are in private school. The information about the choice for Mrs. Ekezie’s children being in private school, even though they are residents of PG County, suggests that she and others view county public schools as fostering class and racial disadvantage because of the large predominant numbers of Black students and growing numbers of other students of color. Shapiro writes that “Parents define good schools as those where children from high-status families go to school. Class and racial composition becomes a proxy for school quality in the minds of parents as they actively seek out schools for their children” (2004:172). Private schools offer the security of matriculating students whose parents can afford to pay for tuition, often times meaning fewer students of color.

I am beginning to see a clear pattern in the research about belief systems toward Blackness that are sustained by corollaries of behavior, values, and morality. Scholars such as Waters (1996; 1999) and Glick-Schiller and Fourons (1990) have written about this process as a way of creating oppositional identities as a strategy to resist U.S. racism against Blacks. Peery argues that Latinos’ and other migrants and immigrants’ social

distancing from Blackness is due to cue they get about Blackness in the U.S. before they even get here. He writes,

Before migrants and immigrants learn the Pledge of Allegiance, they learn that the African American is at the bottom of the social and economic ladder in the United States. If they wanted to become an American and not join the African Americans at the bottom, then they had to join in the oppression of Blacks (Peery 2005:305).

I am not saying that Mrs.Ekezie is oppressing MGUS born Blacks; in fact she expresses solidarity as one in the beginning of our interview. I am saying that throughout my research and emblematic in other research that examines tensions between MGUS born Blacks and other people of color who are new to the U.S, and to some extent children of newcomers, employ strategic ways for distinguishing themselves from the racist stereotypes that are placed on MGUS born Blacks and accepted as valid through verbal characterization casting them as lazy and lacking morals and values which is an oppressive construction of U.S. Blackness. This social distancing technique is also a construction used between the MGUS born Black middle and upper classes toward the MGUS born Black working class, which will be discussed in the next section.

DMS plays a huge role in fostering an environment that informs these strategies and constructions. DMS has the power to create the space and learning opportunities to have critical dialogue and ensuring that the skills of staff are on an appropriate level to facilitate this.

Alaina

Alaina, is a high achieving, quiet student who is thirteen and in the 7th grade. She was born in Maryland but spent her first eight years in DC and then moved to PG County.

She tells me that her parents are from Maryland and Georgia and her great grandparents on her mother's side are from Italy and Hungary. I initially met Alaina while observing in her social studies class. Her teacher, Ms. Ferris, takes great efforts to infuse cultural opportunities for her students and on this particular day, the class had to bring in a cultural artifact from their family, turn in a report, and make a class presentation. Alaina brought in a scarf that belonged to her Italian grandmother that was worn on her head to enter and participate in Catholic worship services. There were a number of Latino students in this class and because of the shared Catholic history, understood the significance behind her cultural artifact.

When I had the opportunity to interview Alaina, she shared her experience of being "mixed" and talked with a strong sense of identity.

A: Where are your parents and grandparents from?

Alaina: Ok. My grandparents are from Maryland and Georgia and my great-grandparents are from Italy and Hungary.

A: That's right because in class you brought the scarf...So tell me what side is which?

Alaina: Hungarian and Italian is on my mom's side. African-American and Native-American is on my dad's side.

A: So how do you identify?

Alaina: Well people will be like "Are you mixed?" And I'll be like yeah my mom's white and my dad's Black, because I hate going into detail.

A: So who normally asks you this?

Alaina: People who just met me. Sometimes they think I'm Spanish, but I'm not Spanish.

A: You said Native American. Do you know what kind of Native American?

Alaina: My dad's dad was a *little bit Native American he had really thin hair and was light-skinned.*

Alaina, like others, invokes phenotype to demonstrate her father's mixed heritage when she can not articulate specific information about American Indian ancestry.

A: Do you know what tribe?

Alaina: No.

A: So when you fill out a form or something when you take a test what do you put?

Alaina: They put other. That's annoying too.

A: They put other. So what would you put?

Alaina: If they put mixed on there I would use that.

A: So when you have the opportunity to check something off what do you check?

Alaina: I put Other because that's the one they give me.

A: So in this school do you think they're different groups or different cliques where people hang out?

Alaina: Sometimes. Like most of the time I see a bunch of Spanish people hanging together and they usually just stay to themselves. I usually see mixed people. I haven't seen many white people in this school but I hang out with a few. I don't discriminate between the races because then I would miss out.

Lusane asserts,

While many African Americans acknowledge a mixed heritage, they do not necessarily embrace it. In part, this is due to the fact that most African Americans do not live a mixed-race existence or are not viewed as such by either themselves or the larger society. From Louis Farrakhan to Colin Powell, and millions more, skin hue is a heritage marker and racial-mixture is obvious. At the same time, history and the social praxis of race eliminate space, except in limited and generally class-determined ways, for a functional mixed-race existence (2002:165).

I should have taken this opportunity to ask Alaina what she meant by "seeing mixed people" and if she thinks they see themselves in that way, but I did not. However; she gives an interesting and mature perspective that everyone has to be mixed with something.

A: But do you think that everybody is mixed?

Alaina: In some way but you know that everybody's has to be mixed with something.

A: So if everybody is mixed even if they don't show it then how do you see groups hanging out?

Alaina: It's just they can be good friends and still be different. If you are good friends then you don't care what other people are. It's what you are and you don't care they're your friends you love them no matter.

A: so do you know anything about gangs in this school?

Alaina: No, I try to ignore it.

A: But you know they're here?

Alaina: No. But even if I did I would ignore it because I want to keep myself out of trouble so I can go to a good school.

A: Well I interviewed some other students and they were just saying that there are some other people in gangs not that they were in them but that other people joined groups based off of other people that are like them.

Alaina: I do know about them but I don't know anyone in them.

A: Ok so how do you feel about people that are mixed but decide to go with one race?

Alaina: It's their choice, not mine to make for them. They don't have to tell people if they want to be the only person that knows except for their parents then it doesn't matter.

A: Do you think teachers here are sensitive and culturally be to the different students?

Alaina: Some are and some aren't. But even if they aren't and they are it doesn't matter it's all the way they relate with the students. Sometimes they have to get a little bit sensitive to some students because some students may get bothered by the fact that they are getting teased or something.

A: Do you hear other students talking about skin color or hair texture?

Alaina: Not hair texture but skin color just a little bit. It kind of bothers me so I ignore it. That's why I read books a lot.

A: What is your favorite subject?

Alaina: Social Studies. Because I like to learn about the world not just staying in one place. And sometimes I want to be a cook and I need to learn about other countries. A chef.

A: Do you feel accepted by everybody?

Alaina: No but I don't have to. If I am accepted by myself then I don't have to.

A: What other things to do you like to do?

Alaina: I play softball. Sometimes I play soccer but I don't really play soccer anymore but I play it because my mom wants me to get more involved in sports. I love to read and my favorite book is called Color Me Dark. It's about a girl who has to move from Tennessee to Chicago because people in the South are getting lynched. So they start a new life up there.

A: So when does this take place?

Alaina: 1919.

A: What do you like about the book?

Alaina: It shows that some people are light-skinned and show one thing they don't have to act like another thing because they can just be themselves. She says "Are you White? And she says no and she'll say Color Me Dark." I love that book.

A: Do you feel like you can relate to this book?

Alaina: Sometimes. She's not completely mixed, she's like mostly African-American. But I can still relate to it.

Alaina is obviously trying to grapple with her place as a biracial person and within constructions of Blackness. She appears to have a strong sense of self and has an awareness through her own initiative that people have lots of ways of identifying and believes that they have right to make those choices. Pabst argues that,

...the prevailing discourses of difference within Blackness also share a common disavowal, repression, and amnesia about mixed-race Blackness. Very rarely are issues of mixed race treated directly within Black feminism, Black queer, Black diaspora, and Black pluralist discourses, though the issues of color-line crossing and Black-boundary transgression often lurk there awkwardly, unaddressed or inadequately addressed (2003:189).

Alaina also turns to books to read about how other people of African descent have dealt with issues of race, color, and diversity, leading to the need for these issues to somehow be better addressed in school.

While a student of African descent shares what it is like to be of recent mixed heritage or direct biracial parentage and her thoughts about Blackness, we move to Ms. Patton's discussion of how African students navigate through various dynamics at the school.

Ms. Patton

Ms. Patton shares her perceptions about school demographics over the years she has worked at DMS. Ms. Patton talks about various populations as separate, but links the connection between African American and African students distinguishing Blackness in relation to "ties to Africa" as something meaningful and concrete as she reflects on shifting student demographics.

A: So tell me about the demographics for this school since you've been here. And tell me about what you think about the demographics. And tell me what you know about the occupation or class of the kids' parents or maybe you can speak a little to that...

P: I don't think that I could honestly. I know that when I first started here, I think it was the same year you were here, I think there was a Hispanic population but it's not nearly as large it is now. To be blunt, they were way rowdier; there was a lot more gang affiliation going on, a lot more gang affiliation going on. Most of the students who I interacted with were just African-American. As the years went on, I have a lot of students who were just of African descent, you know technically they are still African-Americans,

but you know their ties to the Motherland are a lot closer than ours are. The Hispanic population has just boomed. Our ESL classes now are insane. You know when we were here we didn't even have ESL classes; now we have at least for English-speaking we have at least six ESOL classes. At least six. That's a big difference. Um, in terms of the ethnic make-up we have a lot of students coming from Albania now, which I thought was really interesting. It was very interesting to me.

Ms. Patton nuances the term African American to be inclusive of students from or more closely descended from Africa and makes a point to explain her use. She identifies the diversity in the schools by detailing the English as a Second Language classes as well as providing information about European students that are now apart of the school community. She connects gang culture to the Hispanic population as a distinguishing feature of the school and to some extent, differentiating it from Blackness.

A: And what's that like for the white students to be here? Have you observed anything? Do they tend to stick together or do they have to kind of assimilate?

P: I think they want to. I think it's not even an issue of them having to assimilate with the dominant culture, I think that's just how they grew up. Like, I have students that I don't even teach that you know I just talk to in the halls. Like they cut their hair close, they don't...very few of them I guess subscribe to like that suburban you know punk rock culture. Like you will see a couple of those come through, but by and large they're very urban...Talk like slang like the other kids.

A: Do the Black U.S. born kids get along with the kids from Africa that might be newly immigrated?

P: No. They ostracize them if they can. Depending on whether or not they can, they will. Especially if they are smaller in stature, of course that's always you know like the pecking order. If they are smaller in stature and you know they are like blatantly African, then they definitely pick on them. Well I mean which is funny in that particular class like you were saying, I have one particular boy who will always tease the other young man about his speech, because he still carries that accent. And the other little boys accent is just as strong....

A: Oh they're both from Africa?

P: Yeah. I guess he thinks his is funnier than the other kid. So he's constantly like picking with him.

A: Oh. Where are they from...do you know which countries?

P: No I don't. I want to say Nigeria but I don't know for sure. So he is constantly picking with about his accent which is ridiculous because it's just like you both sound like you're from somewhere else so like why is that a problem? But for him I think it may be more about establishing a pecking order, so he has to differentiate himself somehow...The

gang thing...um this year other than him teasing him about his accent. Well with the Africans they are obsessed with hair. You know the little girls ask all the time is that your hair? Is that your hair? I'm like I could see if it was...you what I mean you know just the littlest bit of hair. It's just like is that yours is that really yours? And the like the boys, they always want to press their hair out. They have this thing where they conk their hair but they perm their hair all the time. The African boys, they perm their hair a lot. I just don't understand it for the life of me but they perm their hair a lot. They were grow it out in a little bush and then they'll perm it. I guess thinking it's going to curl up and then when they realize it's just looking kind of crazy they'll you know cut it or whatever...but yeah they experiment with that a lot³⁰.

A: Do you think being Black is something positive in Prince George's County or in this school?

P: Unfortunately, no.

Ms. Patton indicates that popular culture, specifically style of dress and “slang” are binding practices that help students, particularly the few white students, assimilate into the dominant school culture, but also indicates that for some it is a natural process if students grew up together or are from here [Prince George's County]. I interpret from the data that this assimilation process is most difficult for African students. As a coping strategy, some students try to assimilate by altering phenotype such as hair texture (Banks 2000; Davis 1997; Rosado 2007). Others may stratify themselves in a hierarchy among other Africans by teasing and intimidation practices based on accents and other identifying markers as they may have experienced by other American students and/or other immigrant students who are further in the assimilation process or who have established their identity in the school (Cothran and Jackson 2003; Waters 1996; Waters 1999). These practices have larger implications of participating in and normalizing white racist ideology (Fanon 1967). This is significant information because it appears to be more than just adolescent fun or teasing, but a deeper issue of construction of self based

³⁰ I did not observe this as greatly as described here.

on U.S. concepts of identity, race, immigrant status, and Blackness and African-ness. This also raises more questions about how teachers read and address student interactions and the messages that are given when they are not able to or do not adequately attend to classroom dynamics occurrences everyday.

Patel Family

The Patel family shares interesting ideas about how they fit into PG County as a family of Indian descent with generational ties to India, Guyana, and the United States. I spoke with Mr. Larry Patel, the father, designated by L and his two daughters Sanna and Sari. This exchange was really important in helping to insert the voices of people who are not Black but may be impacted by productions of Blackness in PG County Schools. At this point, I had already interviewed one eighth-grade female student from Albania who revealed without saying the word “Black” that she “guessed she identified as White” and that her parents “did not want her hanging around people who would get her in trouble”. I had also interviewed a boy of Asian descent whose family was from Trinidad whose race is marked off as Asian on the school forms but identifies as Trinidadian. He shared very little information in the interviews. The Patel family gives insightful information leading to understandings of how identity politics and constructions of Blackness uniquely impact them:

L: The only thing I would say is being from a foreign country, being originally from Guyana which is a country in South American country. The Caribbean islands and stuff like that in this particular school there are lots of Caribbean people and West Indians but however the school focuses a lot more on the Spanish periods like Puerto Rico they studied that, Argentina, they studied more of Africa. Nothing is wrong with that but I

don't think it's broken up enough. I'm not going to call schools, but at one of the schools I visited had a demonstration of different countries represented. They had a country flag and the country, Guyana where I'm from they had their flag however they had it in South Africa. Which is a colonist state, because a lot of people think of Ghana and Guyana are spelled different and they stuck it in Guyana. I brought it to their attention and they changed it. The following year, boom they set up the cases and it went right back. To me that is the perfect example that it is not taught enough because if it was taught somebody would have been aware of that. Okay that's not the right country. It's a different country let's post it somewhere else. I think they spread the diversity pretty even, however I think that some cultures are being left out.

A: Do people ever misidentify you or try to put you in a certain box? Or say you look like you're from here or you don't look like you're from here? Do they ever...

S: I always see their first impression is that I'm Spanish. And I'm like I'm not Spanish. It takes me to say a whole rack of times to say I'm not Spanish. Because they choose me to help the kids who are Spanish to help them translate to them but I can't because I'm not Spanish. Yeah it takes awhile for them to realize I'm not Spanish.

A: So for kids who don't know what it means to be West Indian, how do you explain what it means to be West Indian?

S: I'm not sure. I just tell them that I am West Indian.

A: The same thing happens to you [Sanna and Sari]?

S: Yeah they all think I'm Spanish and stuff. I just tell them my parents are from Guyana and stuff.

L: That's a pretty common thing with us because we are actually Indians. My grandparents are from India and then migrated to South America and I then migrated here to America. The kids do go through that a lot but the same thing in my house we don't try to teach our kids of the different race or ethnic. We are humans. So they don't see it as discrimination. We see it because we can identify. We try to let it go and deal with because it's not something we want to do. It's the awareness of people ...Sanna does all the time called Spanish because she is light-skinned. There are four girls and every one of them is absolutely different. They just try to explain to them about Indian culture. We are more of Indian descent, not American-Indian. We do wear saris, that's the dress culture that we use for our things. We use curry, that's in our staple dishes. The girls love that. But again most people, speaking of the school environment isn't aware of that culture. I think in this whole school there are three or four people of Indian descent, so it's much easier to fit into a Spanish group or a Black group or something like that. We don't see it as a problem because we aren't focused on it. We just go along.

Unlike the Trinidadian boy of Indian descent who is identified by school forms as being Asian, the Patel girls check off other. Mr. Patel's acknowledgement to fitting into a "Spanish" or a Black group was interesting. He and his daughters could be assumed to be Black, not just because of their skin color, but because of other features and to some

extent, style of dress and speech. This coupled with the sense of the Caribbean being predominantly Black definitely adds to these perceptions. Instead of contesting these assumptions, Mr. Patel “goes along”. He also cites discrimination from continental Indians who did not have stops in the Caribbean before arriving to the United States. He compares these tensions with the tensions between Africans and African Americans.

A: So do you ever have to explain to people from India?

L: Yes they do. That’s diversity within itself. Indians from India don’t see Indians from West Indian as the same. They look at us as different as well. Kind of in the culture of an African from America versus and American-African the two groups kind of split. But not matter which way you look at it it’s the same. The American African came from Africa, just like the African came from Africa, it’s the same thing as us. But the Indians from India usually goes to the Indian stores or in Indian culture they expect the girls to speak in Hindi and they would begin to talk in Hindi, which in the language, and they would just look at them and then they look at us as parents like why aren’t you teaching them. It’s like why aren’t you teaching them. Because the culture’s not important what’s important is what their education is... Yeah we find in our earlier years, with the kids being earlier we found it was very strainful because many of the different places we would go people would identify you and they kind of put you in that category. That’s why as parents with the girls we brought them up not identifying. I mean we like calypso music, we like Indian music, we go to a lot of calypso festivals. We fly as far as Canada for a festival for our culture you know and come back. Just like anyone else, but at the same token we celebrate all the American holidays and the American culture. As a matter of fact at Christmas we did Kwanzaa. You know we didn’t know that much about it but we did it with some friends of ours just to experience it. And I think a lot of people read into that a lot. And it is important but one of the good things with Prince George’s County is that we have that many differences. It’s not like Montgomery County some of the cultures there are much more separated.

In trying to be open to difference, Mr. Patel shares that they participated in Kwanzaa during the Christmas holidays. I did not ask if they were Christian and if Christmas was something they celebrated or if that too was an incorporated holiday, but I thought it important to know that raced events such as Kwanzaa that are associated with African American culture but that many African Americans do not know about or celebrate may

also add to constructions of Blackness and how it is performed for both people inside and outside of its sphere (Johnson 2003).

There are many factors that impact how Blackness is constructed regarding race and place. The data show how class perceptions play a huge role in shaping Black identities and subjectivities. In addition to class, notions of homeland, specifically Africa, is measured by Africans, MGUS born Blacks, and other individuals. Stereotypes are reified as are the strategies individuals use to fight against them. It is also essential to understand the processes that people who are of multiple ancestries and who are not of African descent experience as a tool for uncovering how Blackness operates and how it is constructed and manipulated. Aspects of race and place that impact social constructions of Blackness are also seen through issues of group association which will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7 GROUP ASSOCIATION



Early in my research, I was observing a class of a former colleague. This teacher is a female teacher in her late thirties from Maryland and self-identified as Black. She was helping me identify students that I might want to interview. I must admit that she put me in an awkward situation. The students were working silently on a worksheet as we were supposed to be having a discreet conversation about the students. At the time, I did not know the students or their names. In the quiet room Ms. Bell belted out "Oh that's *Carlos Gomez. I keep forgetting he ain't Black. His parents are from somewhere...Carlos, where are your parents from? Carlos, a boy with dark skin, a low

hair cut and glasses, very focused on his work, looked startled and embarrassed and mumbled something. Ms. Bell confirmed, “His parents are from Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.” Not only was her outburst unacceptable, but the pejorative manner in which she relegated “his parents are from somewhere” to sound like that somewhere was below a U.S. standard was shocking. This is what Hume and Mulcock write of as “awkward participant observation” (2004:xix). They argue that,

Ongoing internal conflict, between the desire to act upon deeply ingrained personal values and the need to maintain a professional and relativist position as a researcher, tends to characterize the participant observation experience (2004:xvii).

I was torn because I wanted to address this teacher’s behavior as inappropriate and I wanted to comfort the student from his embarrassment. I also wanted to free myself from any association with this teacher and her manner of interaction with the students.

On another occasion, I was interviewing another teacher I used to work with named Mr. Docks. A self-identified Black man who is in his late twenties and from Washington, DC, shared a moment of reflection about students who are siblings:

“Lettie’s brother John goes here now. You know, one day while I was teaching, there was an announcement for all of the Latino kids to come to the cafeteria. They are trying to do some gang prevention stuff. I called certain kids to go. And after a few minutes, John asked me, “so can I go?” I had to think about it for a minute because I forgot that he’s Spanish too...he hangs with an all-Black crew and considers himself Black and that is what I associate him with. Now, Lettie, hung with all Spanish girls when she was here so I associated her with them. But I really thought about that for awhile after that”.

In order to begin an interrogation of the diversity of Blackness and varying understandings of how people conceptualize Blackness, the use of language has to be examined. Fairclough writes about how language functions in sustaining shifting power

relations in social interactions (Fairclough 2001) and how these discourses are informed by what he terms as “members’ resources” (mr) (Fairclough 2001: 20) He defines members’ resources as:

which people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce or interpret texts – including their knowledge of language representation of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs, assumptions, and so on (Fairclough 2001:20).

This serves as an important analytical tool in dissecting the discourse on Blackness and Black identity as well as how this discourse is practiced by different people with different mr sharing space.

The quote from Ms. Bell reflects her reliance on something in her MR that divorces Blackness from Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic – “somewhere” other than here i.e. U.S. and also Spanish-speaking, as well as her struggle to separate phenotype from a non-Black identity that she imposes. The use of language from Mr. Docks’ quote implies that his MR does not typically recognize overlap of the categories of Black and Latino or Spanish, which he uses interchangeably. In addition, for Mr. Docks, with whom one associates, is also a marker of identity whether is a Black identity or a “Spanish” identity. Moreover, this excerpt also indexes Mr. Docks’ capacity for self-reflection on the racial assignment that he imposed on the student.

In a different instance, I was talking informally with Mrs. Ashton, an English teacher who is in her late fifties and a MGUS born Black while she had her class in the media center. This led to an interview a few days afterwards. We talked during Hispanic heritage month and she had her class working on reports about prominent Hispanics.

They were not allowed to use athletes. I asked her if any of her students were doing reports on Afro-Latinos and she just gave me a blank stare and after a while of thinking about it she said “I never even thought of that”. Later in the interview, I was surprised by the level of anger and prejudice she revealed. She immediately shared that she had a problem with all of the Hispanic students coming in and trying to “take over”, refusing to speak English and being in gangs. The vehemence behind her words during this conversation expressed a level of Black xenophobia which only serve to impede ethnic and cultural ties with other African descendents and other students of color. This teacher sees no connection, even with the Hispanic students of African descent. This also indicates a resistance to share a place marked and understood as Black revealing Black and brown tensions, even on the adult level.

Therefore, educators as well as students are grappling with their own experiences and it shows up in the classrooms. Almost every single staff person I interviewed and surveyed indicated that they have never received any formal, dedicated training on cultural diversity, multiculturalism, or on issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions. One of these teachers has been in the county and at this school almost 30 years and has never been afforded the opportunity for formal training on any of these issues. All indicate that they draw on their own experiences when dealing with issues of race and ethnicity and lack knowledge about different groups that are new to the school and believe training is important because it would help them do their jobs better and help them diffuse conflict before it gets started.

In a focus group, three teachers navigate through racial identification processes differently. Two are MGUS born Black teachers in their 30s, one with brown skin and one with extremely light skin and freckles (In the transcripts, Ms. Jackson designated by MJ and Mrs. Reeds designated by MR). One is a White teacher in her early 40s who has short spiked hair, dresses as the students would say, “young” or “Black”, and has several ear piercings. I describe her appearance because many of the students questioned her whiteness based on her hair style, choice of clothes, and ear piercings. In her self-description of herself, she initially insists on color-blindness (Mrs. McDermott, designated by MM).

A: How do you racially and ethnically identify?

MJ: Umm, African-American. Yeah.

A: Ok...What are you wondering?

MJ: No I was...I was....Well, I wasn't sure how to answer that question.

A: Well honestly... quite honestly.... I like to give everyone an opportunity to self-identify. We can look at people and think they're one thing and they might have a very complex way of identifying. And some people use.... especially people of African descent, some people will say they are Black, they're African-American...

MJ: -That's why I said that...I think that's why I was thinking...because usually I say Black but on paper I'd write African American. But I consider myself Black, because I think African-American means you were from Africa...

MR: I say Black.

This exchange marks the varying ways and considerations that in which MGUS born Blacks identify. One of the two teachers was adamant about the pain that the legacy of slavery marks on MGUS born Black people for not being able to or have the freedom to identify with ancestry as other groups. She feels that is has been stolen.

MM: Since I moved here I've been told I'm White. And I'm White. If I marked on a paper I'd say Caucasian. But I didn't grow up knowing the difference, everybody was just everybody...we were not assigned a race or color.

A: Wow... In West Virginia?

MM: Unbelievably, yes.

A: Well was it, um... very diverse in this area or...was it mainly because it wasn't very diverse so people didn't have to identify because everyone was the same?

MM: It was a mixed community, probably 30/70-, it was a coal-mining community where everyone was on an equal level, that's why...when I moved here it was so strange, so strange...my kids had a very hard time fitting into school here. They didn't fit with any groups...and when I moved here it was the same for me too in the schools...because being a white teacher...they put you in a certain area usually...you are assigned.

A: Do you know your ethnic background?

MM: Native American. Caucasian.

A: Okay. So but like...Irish....

MM: Yes.

A: Do you know your Native American affiliation?

MM: Yes...It starts with an S...no it doesn't. Cherall (sp?) Cherall...North Carolina.

Two things that strike me with this excerpt is how Mrs. McDermott uses color-blindness but is able to identify her home community as being mixed. She conflates race and class and transmits the idea that the occupation of coal mining levels out racial tensions and is a symbol for equality. What else I find interesting here is that Mrs. McDermott acknowledges mixed Native American ancestry but can not see the luxury she has of identifying as white, whereas Mrs. Reeds in spite of her light skin, must identify as Black.

A: Okay. Do you know any of your ethnic background as a Black person?

MR: Nope... I know we have traced our ancestry back to umm Mariah who came from West Africa who came on the slave ships...But I couldn't tell you exactly where....

A: Okay.

MJ: But quite obviously there's some white somewhere... (all laughing)

The teachers joke with Mrs. Reeds because she has red hair and extremely light

skin.

A: And are you...are you...let me just come full circle...do you know any of your....

MR:...the only thing I know....no...that's why I always say Black...the earliest I know ..it was a slave owner and a slave got together and had a kid and that was my great great grandmother...thats as far back as I know....my last name I think is Irish...but my father, unfortunately doesn't know his father's side as well as he wants to so he has no idea where that comes from...so I feel like I am just an American....ethnically and racially I am American Black.... Its hard for me to say American Black.

A: So do you hear the students talking about...well, let me go back...the student's getting upset when they're misidentified by other students or by adults...

MM: What I see a lot is...not them getting upset from being misidentified...they all tease each other about their ethnicity...like you know when they are calling each other names its not oh stupid oh ugly or whatever...its always African, you Asian...that is the butt of all insults is each other's ethnicities or racial backgrounds...but they don't get upset....They all they just go back and forth...they are a few who take it personally...its usually like the seventh graders who do this.

These excerpts show the conundrum that race, specifically Blackness and Whiteness presents for people. Race is used in a variety of ways and is messy. There is overlap of histories and always contestation. In addition to having a discussion that allows people to self-reflect on interpretations about race, issues with students are revealed. Again, there is no real strategy that educators employ to make middle school conflicts among students as teachable moments about race. Often times, race is used as a weapon against others when slurs and other derogatory remarks are ignited. Again, racial identification and misidentification is reduced to teasing without much inquiry.

Gangs

Gangs are a growing problem in both Prince George's and neighboring Montgomery Counties. It appears that Latinos hold the majority of gang membership (Cloud and Nawojczyk 2005; Farmer 2007). I believe this is in response to the social and class

positioning in these counties and because educational systems do not teach about their heritage and do not help make the transition for those who are recent immigrants or who are marginalized easy. These gang affiliations begin at the middle school level when students are trying to learn about themselves and others and are also looking to fit in. Although Black gangs exist, the word “gangs” immediately is viewed as a raced activity. It conjures up images of Latino boys from Mexico and Central America for most that I interviewed. James, a fifteen year old boy turning sixteen this year who is in the eighth grade was born in the Dominican Republic. He has been in the United States for seven years and still has a prominent Spanish accent. He speaks in a low tone to disguise his lack of proficiency of the English language. Lighter than many other Dominicans, but still phenotypically different from many of the Central Americans in the building James is known to be involved in a Black gang. He has been seen skipping class and hanging out with mainly other kids from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. During this interview, he seems shy as he talks quietly with his head down. He never outright admits to being into a gang but he talks about gangs at the school.

A: How are your friends here?

J: Some are very, very Dominican and the others are good.

James immediately polarizes being a particular kind of Dominican and ‘being good’.

A: So how would you describe yourself? Like if I didn’t know you or your friends didn’t know you, how would you describe yourself?

J: I would say I’m fifteen years old. I am from the Dominican Republic.

A: So do people ever misidentify you? Do they ever think you’re from somewhere else? Or ask about where you’re from?

J: Yeah.

A: So what do they say? And what do you say?

J: They usually say...they be thinking that I'm from Puerto Rico or from El Salvador.
A: So what does that mean to you? Do you just correct them?
J: Yeah.
A: Why do they think you're from those countries?
J: They say I look like them.
A: They don't think you look like you're from the Dominican Republic?
J: Yeah. Some they know when they hear me talk but it depends. But then when I'm just quiet they think I'm from somewhere else.
A: I'm going to come back to that. What kind of music do you like to listen to?
J: Rap and reggaeton.
A: Are all your friends also from the Dominican Republic?
J: One is Mexican and one is from El Salvador.[inaudible]
A: I like your braids. Who does your braids?
J: This woman.
A: And she goes here to school? And she does it at school?
J: She did it at school.
A: Do your parents like that you have braids?
J: *He shrugs and then nods.*
A: So what do you think about...do all the kids at this school get along or do you find that kids kind of hang around in groups?
J: Does everyone get along here? No.
J: They're always fighting. If it's not about girls, it's about gangs. He will say that he don't like me because I said something about him.

He implicates himself by saying "me".

A: When you say gangs, what kind of gangs?
J: [inaudible]
A: So what do you have to do to be in a gang? Do you have to be from a certain place? Do you have to look a certain way?
J: The gang MS, they're from El Salvador.
A: So if you wanted to be in it, you couldn't be in it?
J: No, I don't want to. The gang Mercy they're Mexican.is both. The Bloods the only people that I know that has got in it that's Spanish is Dominican. There are some. They let a Black kid in it.
A: So do you separate Blacks and Dominicans? Or can they be both? Like do you consider yourself Black and Dominican?
J: The vice principal said that Dominicans are mixed.
A: Why did he tell you that? What were you talking about?
J: Because this girl she was like you have Black. And I said no. And she said no Dominicans are mixed.

This goes back to the lack of history.

A: So what does it mean to be Black? Like when you say you're Dominican you're saying you're from a particular country. But that doesn't say anything about your skin color or your race, it just says you're from a different country. Did you know that was the first place that the slaves came from Africa they came to the Dominican Republic. That's why most of the people are dark. That's what he means when he says by you have African ancestry even though you might not....you look like it. You might not say that you're Black, that's what he meant when he said you.....

A: So you like rap and you listen to Reggaeton. Why did you decide to wear your hair in braids?

J: I don't know.

A: You just like it?

He hesitates and has a blank stare. He finally nods before he responds.

J: All my cousins, like all my cousins have plaits. There's only a few that are straight.

A: A lot of kids from El Salvador and Mexico how do they wear their hair? They don't wear their hair in braids? Why do you think that is?

J: Their hair is too soft. It might come out.

A: What do you watch on tv?

J: A lot of things?

A: Like what?

J: I watch that show called. The Chappelle show.

A: Are you supposed to be watching that?

J: I watch Seinfeld, Family Guy.

A: What do you want to be when you grow up?

J: I want to box.

A: You going to go to school too? Box and go to school too?

J: He nods.

A: That's good.

Some of James' choices are made in response to being able to do things such as speak Spanish and hang out with other Spanish speakers; other things are impacted by his positioning of phenotype; wearing his hair in braids or plaits and being a member of a Black gang. Hair style and group membership exposes political allegiances and statements that say something about social constructions. In this instance, it says something about experience Blackness from the periphery of a dominant Black identity.

Mr. Ponce

Mr. Ponce, a Panamanian teaching assistant who is in his early 60s. He was integral in infiltrating Latino gangs in the school because most people do think he is Latino. His fluency in Spanish allowed him to overhear students who consider his skin color as a marker of speaking English only and being non-Latino.

A: So how do you self-identify?

MP: Well I identify conveniently when it's going to work in my favor as Hispanic. Anyone who knows languages knows Hispanic is not a race. It comes from Spanish. It has to do with the peninsula. So when it is convenient to me it's Hispanic. If I sense the environment is hostile it's not Hispanic.

Mr. Ponce expresses a clear understanding of his background and the complexities in which individuals grapple. Although he acknowledges being able to be and use his Blackness and his Hispanic heritage to his advantage, he sees multiple terms that add Black or Afro to the moniker as a way to divide. Root argues that “the process of identity change may reflect a shift from a passive acceptance of the identity that society expects one to accept to a proactive exploration and declaration of who one believes oneself to be and this may include identifying differently in different situations (2000:125).

A: What about Latino?

MP: Latino is not a race, it is based on language. Latina comes from the word Latin. It is the root of the French and Portuguese. You speak the language that is derived from Latin—so Spanish. I will say I'm Hispanic. But when they know that you come from one of those countries and speak Spanish. But basically I'm Black. My parents were Black. They were from the West Indies. That's where they brought the slaves. My grandparents were Jamaican. So my grandparents were from there and Barbados. So when I look at my roots I realize my grandparents are African descendants. So my grandmother was Black, her father was Black, all of that family was Black so I'm Black.

A: So do you ever play with the words Afro-Latino or Latino-Negro?

MP: No I don't play games. All of those things are an attempt to divide.

A: So it's very difficult because people don't come with the same experience?

MP: It's very difficult because people don't come with the same experience, one. Secondly they aren't willing to try and understand people from different cultures.... If anything they have to understand me. Those that are coming are already wearing this as a bandage already it is hard for them to deal with newcomers they don't know anything about this background. It is hard for them to deal with them that are coming from other backgrounds There must be a middle ground that the person who is here already who is established regardless of what ethnic background they are coming from should try to extend themselves to understand others. By understanding others that remembering when they came they wore that as a bandage so when they come here the plan is to reach out to others. Most people don't wanna do that. They're comfortable in their own little corners. They are like hey I worked hard, I paid my dues those that are coming now they just have to adjust so that it makes it harder for everyone that comes.

Mr. Ponce is aware of the historical implications that impact African descendent people of Spanish descent and the present day tensions this causes. He also shares his view that people are comfortable where they are with their own belief systems and are not interested in solidarity that might infringe on their space or comfort level.

MP: At that time it was everyone considered as one you were Black from the Caribbean, Black from Cuba, you were Black from Latin America- you were Black and the treatment was the same across the board. But now we have overcome that initial oppression and now we have some type of freedom, so we have overcome the struggle. So now it is we are passed that now it's all about me and my people. That unity has been broken because apparently we have overcome that initial segregation, discrimination and all that type of stuff. I don't have to be united with no one, it's all about me.

Mr. Ponce gives great attention to how individualism and notions of self-determination influence the immigrant experience once in the United States. He discusses how tragedy can briefly bring different people together, but ultimately "go back to what is normal", meaning isolating themselves in racial/ethnic categories. In the following excerpt, Mr. Ponce talks about his impression on how ethnic groups operate once in the United States.

MP: I think that different ethnic groups and different cultures... they come to America with different goals. Some come to work and to better themselves financially because in

their country they don't have that. Others come for education, to better themselves, higher education. So there is a big division. Now people are respected and accepted and treated based on the level where they are and whatever level they are they remain at that level and those in the higher level they don't really cater or try to help those at a lower level. They are like I educated myself, why can't he do the same. Because not everyone can come to educate, they come to work. So right away you have discrimination, segregation in the purpose why people are coming and they remain at those levels. Now if something dramatic does happen then now they are forced to come together. Then now they have an enemy that is common to us so they must come together. When that oppression exists they remain together because they're "helping" one another. But when the problem is overcome then they will go back to themselves. But I don't mean to go over because we solve this problem, but we go back to what we initially came here for. So it is unfortunate to say because it is true. That problems, challenges, disadvantages pull us together. But when those challenges and disadvantages are overcome we tend to separate and I think that is the American experience. Each one of these ethnic groups are concerned they stick to their groups until something like 9/11 occurred until they became one in this country- Black, White, everyone because we felt the common threat of terrorism. But as time went by, it's like well we can go back. Everyone is like we can go back to what is normal.

Mr. Ponce details the multi-faceted reasons that people emigrate, but does not seem optimistic about people truly coming together. In the following transcript, he shares what his experience was like as a Black man, not as Latino, living in Germany with his family.

A: So how long have you been living in Prince George's County?

MP: Since 1992 to 1994. Then I went to Germany, and then came back in 1999. I decided to work in the school system in 2000.

A: Were you in the military?

MP: My wife was in the military. She's a nurse. So the family went to Germany. Spent time there. Five good years.

A: Do you speak German?

MP: No we lived on base. The military has a certain type of discrimination. The Black folks would live on base, and the Caucasians would be giving out orders off base. Special houses and other different benefits. As a matter of fact, unfortunately they inspired the Germans not to trust anything of this color. When my wife was in Bosnia, she had an experience where she and some other workers were joking around in the restroom. And the other Bosnian women who were there were surprised and were like oh you are not so bad as we were told. She said "what do you mean as bad as you were told?" And she said they told us not to associate with you guys.

This is a good example of how Blackness is placed at the social bottom globally. Stereotypes persist and are readily accepted by people throughout the world.

MP: It's an attempt to divide. They look at you see you're Black there is no question. But if you don't sound Black then you explain. There are some benefits that they attach to them to make you feel better or worse than other groups. They don't hear the Africans they hear the Latino. These categories are placed there to separate us. Latino to them is like Europe. By the way this whole thing about Caribbean or West Indian being American- they are another type of American. This whole process they try to dilute more. They say okay maybe they will have a better feeling than the Jamaican. It's meant to divide us all.

A: Well how do you see the different Latino groups interacting here?

MP: They have all these five countries of Central America- Guatemala, Honduras; I don't know there are five. They all got their independence at the same time. They wanted Panama to join them but Panama said no. So Panama got theirs later. So right away they have a lot in common and they don't accept us. Second, they have a lot of unity among them because of color. They look alike. There are some racial differences but they look alike. We don't have them.

Mr. Ponce understands some Latino unity is based on skin color and other similar phenotypic features that often leaves African descended Latinos outside of the solidarity. He posits that national history also plays a part in how the development of national identities incorporates or segregates against pan-ethnic identities for everyone. Because of the phenotypic differences, dovetailed with the fact that these processes are taking place within the Black space of Prince George's County, the level of exclusion from Afro-Latinos are higher.

MP: I don't see that very often. Well there is this one girl here who you can tell but you can tell she has some Black. But you wouldn't even call it Black anymore because the group that is Black mostly lives on the Atlantic side. So you don't really see them except when you come to cities. Now this student for some reason they are assimilated. They don't treat them any different. In this country for some reason they love the dark shade.

A: Do they get upset if they get misidentified as Black or African?

MP: They don't believe they are Black. They believe they're Hispanic.

A: But they know they aren't White because Hispanic is not a race so what do they think?

MP: But the average person doesn't realize that. They just know that they aren't White. You are a mixture of Indian and Spanish. But you are neither. You are a mixture of Black and indigenous. This girl believed all her life she was White. But we said listen you're not White.

A: How did it come up?

MP: The teacher was a mix of different ethnicities and she was very proactive about teaching the kids about their ethnicities. So she was explaining how the Spanish came to Latin American and they raped the Indian women. And this girl got really upset. She went home and told her mother. She said my mother said it was true but I don't want to hear it. I said if your mother said it then it's true. Accept it.

A: What country was she from again?

MP: The mother. El Salvador.

Mr. Ponce rejects the notion of multiple terms being used to describe people and feels as if the main purpose is to stratify people. He believes that some Latinos attempt to ignore their Black heritage and tries to educate students when he can. He interprets that for many, there is a distinct line between Black and Hispanic and most do not see the two blending together or individuals as being both (Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005). Peery writes that,

Before migrants and immigrants learn the Pledge of Allegiance they learn that the African American is at the bottom of the social and economic ladder in the United States. If they wanted to become an American and not join in the oppression of Blacks (2005:305).

Ms. Tengbe

Ms. Tengbe is a language arts teacher in her mid thirties, originally from Liberia. One side of her family is descendants of African Americans who settled in and founded Liberia, so she has family in the United States. She has been in the United States since 1991, escaping the civil war. She not only brings up issues that African students are facing but also concerns of being an African teacher who tried to address topics on

culturally sensitive education who is not being heard and respected as an educator with a different perspective.

A: So what is it like in the school in terms of the kids? You've been here three years so I'm sure you've seen the demographics change.

T: Since I've been here there have been a lot of Hispanics and lots of kids from Africa.

A: So how do they kids from Africa adjusting to being here?

MT: They don't identify...a lot of them are losing their identity. They don't want...they're even dropping African names. Because it's not cool to be from an African country.

A: Let's speak a little bit more on that. That is a question that I've been asking everyone. But first I let everyone identify, so how do you personally, racially, and ethnically identify in the U.S. and here in Prince George's County?

T: I identify myself as an African.

A: Is that different from identifying as Black or if you have children who are born here is it different than identifying as African American?

T: I consider myself Black. I'm a Black African.

A: Do you feel...Is there a connection among the African students here? Do they feel a connection among each other?

T: There is a lot of divide. In my class I try to make that connection, for a lot of kids who don't want to use their African names now they are starting to use them. I try to incorporate that dialect and make them use language in my class. But then when they go to other teachers they put that down so it's a conflict.

A: Adults or students?

T: Both adults and students.

A: Well what do their parents say? Do their parents encourage them to drop their African name?

T: A lot of the parents, well one kid from last year... I forgot her name. Her parents came to me before I even met the kid, and said she prefers to be called this name which is her Christian name. That's for a lot of the kids. If they don't have a Christian name, they will shorten it to make it more American.

A: I remember that from when I was teaching. So keep in mind this is Prince George's County....do you think for students it's more important be African or more so to be American or more so to be African American?

T: I think with a lot of them it's just not to appear not to have an identity. Even with the African American kids they are still searching for here. They've completely lost themselves. So I think with the kids themselves it's just to be accepted into this group. Whether they have an identity or not.

A: Can you speak a little more on the African Americans who are searching for their identity? Why do you think this and how can you tell?

T: Well sometimes they will go along with the Hispanic kids whatever is happening with the Hispanic kids they're there but they will never identify with the Africans. It's so many little things, it's hard to pinpoint exactly. It's so many little things.

A: Why do they have to identify with the Hispanic kids if they're the dominate group here?

T: I don't know. Even some of the Hispanic kids are dropping it as well. I'm not sure what's happening. I'm not sure what is going on. But there is this total loss of identity, I'm not sure if it's not cool to have some type of heritage or strong culture. I don't know what it is.

A: What about the Afro-Hispanic or Afro-Latino kids? If they're Hispanic but of African descent? Like if they're Dominican...like I know there are some kids here who are Puerto Rico, that are from the Dominican Republic?

T: Most of my kids are Mexicans and El Salvadorian.

Ms. Tengbe alludes to students forming identities that are absent of markers that set them apart, especially for African students. She sees divisions between Africans and African Americans, yet the alteration of identity is dispersed on the African side. African students and parents shed their African names, accents, and language while African American students seem to be able to better blend into the American fabric. Ms. Tengbe views African Americans as already having a lost identity, while Africans are in the process of trying to loose their identities.

A: A lot of the kids I talked to about gangs or kids sticking in their own groups. And most of these groups are racial or national groups. Do you know anything about that?

T: Not here. I don't see anything here. The other day there was a fight that they're saying was gang-related. I'm not seeing anything here...maybe it's with the 8th grade. I'm not seeing it here. We even have a couple of Caucasian kids. They all intermingle. I'm not seeing any divisions.

A: So what do you hear, going back to how the African kids are treated and how they shed their identity what kind of comments do you hear? In what kinds of ways do you notice...?

T: We have many oral traditions. One of the kids she was born in Nigeria. Her parents were born in Nigeria, and she was born here. She's like I'm not born there, my parents are from there.

A: Why are they so embarrassed because some of the kids are very proud to be like I'm Jamaican or to be from Mexico? They wear the bands that say they're from those places. Why are the African kids ashamed?

T: I think because we are of very very strong pride. I'm from Liberia. A lot of the kids... they see what's on television. The Black Americans they see a lot of negative things on television [about Africans] and they don't want to be associated with that, it's negative. They're laughed at and they don't want to identify with that. I was speaking to this one

kid and his mom, very very smart kid but he knows absolutely nothing. I was speaking to this one kid and his mom was thinking about sending him back to Nigeria and he was like I'm not going back there. I think they have that image because their friends have that negative image so they put them down.

A: Do you see a lot of tension among the different African countries? What about the ones from Ethiopia and Eritrea?

T: I have a couple in some of my classes. Some of them their parents are from one and the parent is from the other.

Ms. Tengbe shows concern for how media and social images assist in crafting identities and divisions among African descendant students. She sees students disassociating themselves with anything African because of the negative stereotypes in which they are connected. This is yet another way that specific forms of Blackness get constructed. Hierarchies within Blackness become created because the strategies of social distancing from Africa or anything African are employed. For students who are not phenotypically or racially ambiguous or can not alter their appearance in ways that allow them to blend with other students to where their heritage is not as prominently questioned or discussed, creating a rift between their Blackness and an imagined African Blackness is the approach that many take.

A: So do you think teachers....well I know you said that some of the adults make these kinds of comments...has there ever been any type of training or diversity training?

T: No that's what really bothers me because we have such a diverse population. They use the term all the time but they don't really know what it is. No they use the term all the time and it really bothers me because there is just so much you can learn from these different populations. A lot of the teachers complain that the parents don't want to come into the school, they don't want to do this, they aren't supportive. And I try to explain to them from my background, a lot of the parents feel like that's their job. That's the schools' job they're not supposed to interfere. They're supposed to do what they can outside of school. I'm not involved. To them that's their support...

A: That's them being respectful....

T: Exactly...

T: But for a lot of teachers they don't understand that. And I get put down for saying those things. For some of the parents they had a negative experience in school and they're not comfortable coming here. So why can't we do something to bridge that gap? I just started a program last August we do a family night. We don't really do academics we do relationship building. Next year, we're going to build it up every year. But the parents that have been coming whenever we need them they're here. We can call them on the phone and be like we're having problems no problem And some of these were parents that we were having serious problems with at the beginning of the year. But the problem is getting teachers involved. I have three teachers that support me, one who is active in the planning and everything. But everyone else it is a battle and they're the ones who are complaining that the parents aren't doing it.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Blackness is constructed based on people's perceptions about beliefs, behaviors, and value systems. Ms. Tengbe reveals how ignorance about culture posits African parents as parents who do not care, are unapproachable, and unresponsive. This is often positioned on MGUS born Blacks and well as other students of color. Ms Tengbe also highlights how diversity is discussed in PG County without a true interrogation or understanding of what that means to be diverse racially, ethnically, and culturally and how a transformative plan to address these multiple layers can be implemented.

A: So do people ever misidentify you?

T: A lot of times before I start to speak a lot of people think I'm African American. I'm not saying that's there anything wrong with African-American, it's just I'm quick to say I'm this.

A: And so are these mainly students or adults?

T: I guess in general it's anybody in the class.

A: What about your kids who are from the Caribbean? Have you noticed any kind of connection if kids whose parents were born there or who were born there like Jamaica or Trinidad themselves...do they have a stronger connection or...?

T: There is one kid who was born in Guyana but she has been here from most other life. She says I'm from Guyana. Another kid her father is from St. Martins or one of those islands and her mom is from DC and she said that first she did not say I'm from DC. She said my dad is from here and my mom is from here. So it's mostly the African kids that I'm seeing that have low self-images...

A: What do you think about...are there any class issues, like middle class? About what people have or don't have?

T: It's something major because a lot of the kids don't have. But they do the regular silly stuff. It's not in a negative way it's more silly stuff like look at...picking on each other.

A: Do you hear kids or even adults still talking about skin color or hair texture?

T: Yeah the kids do.

A: Across the board or just Black kids?

T: Actually I'm not sure about the adults. But, yeah a lot of the Black kids.

A: Regardless of where they're from?

T: Yeah.

A: What do you think that is about?

T: I don't know. All I can say is that it may be something passed down...

A: Yeah.

A: Do you see differences between genders? Like boys acting one way and girls acting another?

T: Of course I see differences. And then now we see a lot of the kids are identifying as bisexual.

Consistent with most interviews and participant observation, skin color and hair texture is persistent in how Blackness is construction. Less mentioned are issues of sexuality. Ms. Tengbe's tone with her assessment of "now we see a lot of the kids are identifying as bisexual" was not excessively judgmental, but a fact that she mentions with apprehension during our discussion of Blackness. I suspect that Ms Tengbe is uncomfortable with this topic but she admits that she is limited in how to work with students if the topic of homosexuality arises.

A: I guess it would be helpful to understand how sexuality and how sexual orientation is viewed in other countries. To understand what support are the kids getting from home to understand themselves in this context. Also, how as an educator are you supposed to address these issues?

T: Yeah but I don't know how to address these issues. I've never...I don't even know how to approach this child. Sometimes the kids come wanting to talk but there are all these laws. And you don't know what to say or what to do.

The dialectical relationship between educating within the confines of what is deemed acceptable behavior and discourse and being able to address real life issues in which

students grapple, such as sexuality, make the jobs of teachers extremely difficult. In her discussion of the new racism, Collins asserts,

...without serious attention to contemporary Black sexual politics, African Americans may uncritically circulate ideas about race, class, gender, and sexuality that bear striking resemblance to those long advanced by white elites...An antiracist politics that does not reframe the consensus issue of race in terms of class, gender, sexuality, and age will remain incapable of responding to the complexities of the new racism (2005).

Collins categorizes how leaving important issues unattended is just as detrimental to fighting for equity. I further her argument by enlisting that by ignoring these issues and not training educators on how to integrate these topics into learning, transformative pedagogy will not be attained.

A: Do they [students] come wanting to talk about race and ethnicity type stuff?

T: Yeah we have discussions in class and sometimes if there's something going on...Like sometimes there's this particular kid Jennifer she is just so mature... ahead of the kids. She will do her work no matter what is around her. She will read three books in one week and the kids make fun of her. She is from Cameron she has a very heavy accent. She is doing fine she just needs someone to vent. She's the one that talks. But a lot of them they come every once in awhile.

A: What attracts immigrants particularly of African descent to Prince George's County?

T: A lot of the people I know like Liberians from Silver Spring and this area. You have a lot of people who have family and you'll have one family member that comes and they will send for the other family. So they just building and people get used to a certain area and they stay there.

A: But how come not Richmond or Baltimore...why Prince George's?

T: Because the first person came here. I have a lot of family in Minnesota. He came first to the states and everyone is there.

A: I wonder. I've never been to Minnesota, but it is predominately White. I wonder what it's like to be an African immigrant in a predominately white area versus an African immigrant in a predominately Black area.

T: That's very interesting. A very interesting study for you to do. There are some areas where they are more mixed communities. My male cousins complain a lot about the police following them and those types of things. I had a cousin who was with his friends who stole a car, they were all white and he was the only one arrested for it. He was seventeen at the time and he went to jail. He was arrested and the rest of them were let go. There was a lot of that. But people go where their family is and they get used to that and they stay there from my experience anyway.

Ms. Tengbe's description of her cousin's experience is a good example of how skin color in many cases, trumps a national or ethnic identity, especially in spaces of authority. In this situation and in other instances of racial profiling, Blackness and criminality is essentialized through both gender and race. Blackness and maleness embody social relations that continuously position males of African descent as dangerous (Lopez 2003).

T: For me last week it was teacher education. There are a lot of kids who don't like walking in line. I was explaining to them there are a lot of kids from war-torn countries who don't like walking in line because people are pulled out of line and people are executed right in front of them I know that because I experienced it. Some of them will rebel. They come straight from these countries; we aren't even talking to them to find out what happened. These teachers are wide-eyed they had no idea. They had no idea these things had happened because we don't talk about it. We have a lot of kids who are hurt, their parents are emotionally disturbed. There was one kid last year who was sent to the alternative school...he was arrested at some point. He was from Liberia. His parents themselves are here working, stressed.

A: Well they are uprooted from their family. They are in a different place, their family is scattered. That's a lot.

T: A lot of people don't understand. People think I am complaining. But there is a lot of things going on that we aren't addressing. How can we expect these kids to perform if we don't address these needs? There has to be some type of dialogue because they're just thrown in. And then it's like a control factor. You're trying to control me and I've been controlled all this time and you're not going to control me, I'm going to rebel. There needs to be some type of dialogue and the parents need to be involved as well

A: Here is one of my struggles. One of the reasons I'm doing this research is because Prince George's County is very diverse. They look like they're all Black and brown kids. But they're very diverse, all kinds of experiences and we're not capturing that because they aren't asking about specific demographics.

T: African-American that's the only word.

A: I asked a group of kids how many kids in here speak more than two or three languages and like five hands went up. And language is so key in how we talk and how we communicate. The process- a single word or phrase might hold a different weight or value in a different value.

T: That's an issue I have a lot. But I'm decoding a lot even though I speak English. Even though I'm sitting and listening, it appears that I understand but those words can mean something completely different to me.

There is also a construction of Blackness that privileges MGUS born or more Americanized Blacks over others and that advantages certain bodies of knowledge over others. Little to no care or consideration is taken into how immigrant students, particularly African students transition into the school. Ms. Tengbe's concerns and experiences are ignored and her pedagogy is dismissed as complaints. Perhaps because of her status as an African teacher among the majority of MGUS staff her ideas are slighted. It is also a possibility that because of outdated and un-interrogated, unchallenged policies and practices that allow the treatment and instruction of students to be status quo pedagogy, these issues continue to go unaddressed. The majority of the tension that Ms. Tengbe receives is from MGUS born Black teachers and administrators. There needs to be a dialogue about the tensions and pre-conceived notions among African descended people, particularly staff. There appears to be a fine line between superiority and the assumption that all children must conform to a single standard that does not factor in language and other cultural cues and experiences. These data have huge implications for strengthening pedagogy and school climate by examining different cultural, national, and ethnic experiences.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION



When we position people of African descent in PG County within a framework of Blackness, we are able to study and nuance what appears to be and what is often propositioned as a monolithic, mono-cultural, acontextual, African American experience. The result is the opportunity to re-conceptualize the experiences of Black people in the United States. The participants in the research have proven this to be true.

As I leave the field, I am more convinced than ever, there is more research to be done. I cannot and will not be the spokesperson or hailed scholar who is the expert on PG County, a place that is complex, diverse, and ever changing. There is such a need and so much room for ongoing ethnographic scholarship. I hope this research opens up a dialogue about shifting demographics and the experiences of members of the African diaspora who are here in the United States sharing space with culturally and ethnically diverse people who may or may not look alike. I will continue to do research, promote strategies to apply knowledge in schools and encourage the fact that learning is a life long process and a process of being open to change for students and for teachers.

Presented here are some striking data that reveal possible clues to answers to a number of questions such as how diverse people of African descent as well as individuals who are not of African descent experience their subject positions in PG County PS. What the data say about Blackness is revealed through multiple forms of discourse that points to how this construction is employed and engaged. Cultural cues are informed and sustained by the status quo which still uses racialized terms, phenotype, class, and understandings of values and behavior as guides for measuring types of Blackness. This is communicated through everyday discourse and often goes uninterrogated and unchallenged.

This research aims to answer two main questions. The first is how do youth of African descent, including MGUS born Blacks, children of immigrants, and those with a Spanish ethno-linguistic heritage, in PG County Public Schools, construct or deconstruct a Black identity in a particular United States context? The research shows several tactics employed, yet informed under the direction of parents, educators, peers, and media. Black identities and others are almost always initially determined by phenotype, language, group association and activity, and ideologies about class and behavior. Diverse youth in this study incorporate dominant notions of a Black identity in the United States by deferring to physical descriptions and monolingual English language ability as predominant markers of Blackness. Subsequently, issues of place have huge implications; being from the United States compared to being from somewhere else, contrasted against and depending on where that somewhere is, is either exocitized or denigrated and

Blackened. In short, the construction of Blackness is transmitted by ideas heavily impacted by notions of place and homeland. These are ideas of what people look like, what language(s) they speak, what their behavior and values represent, who they associate with, and class position.

For most, matters of class, principally conceptions of “middle-classness” in the largest predominantly Black middle class county in the United States, differentiates Blackness. Middle-classness for many MGUS born Blacks distinguishes hard work and personal and family values apart from assumptions about ethics that working class Blacks lack. Students from working class backgrounds employ strategies of purchasing commodities that allow them to blend in with little inquiry to class position. Immigrants may choose to hold on to transnational identities that set them apart from other African descendents and relinquish some of the focus on their Blackness, depending on where they are from and if it benefits them. This is also seen if the individuals can create solidarity with other students in similar situations and from similar backgrounds. In instances where it is positive to assimilate with the “acceptable” dominant culture in PG County, which is the MGUS born Black middle class, students will not bring attention to their differences or will purposefully do things, such as downplay country of origin, accents, native language, and incorporate hair styles and clothing to be accepted.

Transnational identities are always being constructed or negotiated in this ‘Black space’. Although this is not always the case for students from Africa, many students are comfortable with sharing information about their family and experiences. I observed this

most when the environment was supportive of the student exploring their identities. This is especially true for students who still have family in other countries, who speak their native languages at home and to some extent at school, and who travel back to their country of origin.

Transnational identities are also negotiated when there is a threat of being positioned in a negative light. Whether it is the comparison of Africans and Caribbeans to MGUS born Blacks or specific Latino groups to others or to MGUS born Blacks, preconceived notions about behavior, values, and morals are established as key differentiating factors. Like with middle-class positions, how one acts or how one is raised is classed, raced, and ethnicized and serves to obscure similarities of African descent, ultimately being the explanation for why groups of people are different.

Language, peer groups, and popular culture shape the way in which a Black identity is constructed by students at DMS. The ability to speak only English is not just a marker of American-ness, but is an indelible symbol of Blackness. Many students and educators are unable to reconcile that people both outside and inside of the United States who identify as Black can be both Black and multilingual. We have already established that many Africans are placed in a particular realm of Blackness in which names, language, dialect, and antiquated stereotypes about what it means to be African are firmly segregated from other Black people. Outside of this sphere, students who phenotypically look as what people consider as Black or who identify as Black and who speak Spanish (and French, Portuguese, etc) contour the way authentic Blackness is perceived and

created. This also highlights the fact that both students and educators lack knowledge in the historical significance and present day implications of the African diaspora.

The second broad area of inquiry asks “how are educators influencing social constructions of Blackness”? Rooted in this question are inquiries of, how do educators (teachers, administrators, counselors, librarians, and support staff) perceive and understand racial and cultural dynamics? How is this awareness integrated into planning, teaching, counseling etc.? There is little space, not just in this particular school in PG County but throughout education as a whole to go deeper on these issues. People, both adults and students want to have a space to talk about and learn about what they do not know. Because there is no priority placed on teaching about diversity and no support for educators, it appears that the school board must assume that because the majority of the teachers reflect what their classroom look like, training is unnecessary. Quite the contrary, as teachers often sum up conflict in the classroom as teasing students do and reduce racial epithets and other disparaging remarks to something students can resolve themselves. On the other hand, many of the interviews I conducted as well as evidenced on the written staff survey, the majority of staff feel research and training are about race, about diversity, and about Blackness, are important and can positively impact pedagogy and overall school climate. Many of the teachers across racial/ethnic lines, class, gender, and age were very honest about their limitations on this topic and their ability to enhance their teaching of diverse and shifting demographics in the school.

The research also reveals some undertone of negativity toward immigrants even though this is not a major theme. I observed during participant observation as well as recorded in interviews that some staff exert incipient privilege of their particular social position by 1) asserting their own limited understandings of race and what it means to be Black on to students, 2) making insulting and insensitive comments and statements about groups of people, names of children, and individuals' origins of birth, both publicly and privately, 3) refusing to learn students' names and correct pronunciations; mimicking accents; and 4) not infusing cultural sensitivity in the curriculum. I observed this with MGUS born Black educators who I consider to be among the privileged in this space, I relate this to a construction of Blackness that allows for a kind of Black xenophobia that rejects the notion of equity and Black solidarity throughout the diaspora population at the school.

On a more positive note, there are educators who are making tremendous efforts to teach about diversity and positive awareness of different cultures as well as debunking myths and stereotypes in their classrooms. There are teachers who take risks about talking about uncomfortable topics and also seek out innovative ways to reach children across difference and teach about commonalities. There are also teachers who are incredibly self-reflective about how their own perceptions and experiences get transmitted on to their students. My observations of these classrooms and interviews with students reveal that students are benefiting from these efforts. Students like and respect teachers who implement these techniques in their classroom. I also observe that students

in these classes have meaningful friendships and positive encounters with people across difference and are more poised in having these discussions at their age.

Significance and Impact

The significance of this study lies in its advancement of discussing topics in education that are not emblematic of traditional studies of Black children and other children of African descent related to achievement gaps and behavior. This study lifts up important ideas about diversity within groups, is ethnographic, and is another innovative facet of diaspora studies. This type of research is cross cutting and cross disciplinary. There are implications for applied and public anthropology, other social science fields, and implications for pedagogy and teacher (educator) training and preparedness.

There is also meaning in placing the discussion of people of color at the center of analysis and building theory by drawing on the works predominately by scholars of color. Many themes in both anthropology and education continue to center whiteness at the core of the study and how people of color fare in response to whiteness at the dominant culture. This is important data, however; my research is different in that the dominant culture that I am most interested and in which little research has been done on are MGUS born Blacks and other African descents in PG County. White supremacy is a legacy that all people are facing and whiteness impacts the existence of all people in the United States; nonetheless, it is not the main unit of analysis. I am looking at the interaction and experiences of people who are most impacted by it.

Many academics legitimate their research by grounding their theory in the works of white men who were the forefathers of our disciplines, but following the tradition of Black Feminist Anthropology, I choose to draw on contemporary scholars of color and who are women as often as I can.

Further Areas for Exploration

During the seventeen months that I was in the field, additional questions were raised and hopefully as these questions are answered by other research, I can come back to my initial research questions and expand on the findings from this dissertation. One question that continues to live unanswered is: Why is race and Blackness still constructed with such vigor around issues of phenotype and behavior in schools by both teachers and students when research has stated that race is a social construct? Race, specifically Blackness, is still biologized and behaviorized. This occurrence is almost steeped into the fabric of United States' society and is fundamentally engrained in our ideology, I am not sure how much the answer will change, but remain hopeful.

Other questions are as follows:

- Why is PG County still not recognized as being diverse? Why is Blackness not recognized as being diverse and how might this be problematic to continue to support these notions in public discourses on PG County?
- Why are classroom and school climates, along with teacher engagement with students not used as an indicator as are test scores?
- Why is diversity training and multiculturalism for teachers/educators not implemented especially considering the rapidly changing demographics? Why have so many teachers not have training on these issues?

- Without training, how can we make large impact, how can we learn, how can we teach others, especially when there are so many other responsibilities, stressors and tensions?

Implications for future research

This project offers multiple possibilities for upcoming research. I believe that given extended time and funding, there is room to expand this research to engage more participants and to have more focus groups. This research can also be taken to other schools within PG County and of varying grade levels. This in turn will allow for more voices to be heard and for more data to be collected in support of teacher training and curriculum development. I am interested in continuing this research by developing a cohort of teachers that are taken through diversity awareness and on how to impact curriculum, classroom climate, inter and intra personal relationships to see how this will impact the teaching of their subject matter and aid in positive learning experiences for both educators and students.

I am also interested in researching and working with students who are taken through diversity awareness. I would like to study how diversity awareness can be integrated in curriculum to impact the thinking and capacity of students to rise above the confines of U.S. racism and inequality. With the impending presidential elections this is a timely discussion to do other kinds of research in schools with students, teachers, and other staff to see how we can revolutionize change, work with true diversity, and impact the future society.

In closing, cross cultural contact within the Diaspora within the United States in educational settings that focus on Blackness and class can potentially add to the world of Diaspora studies. Examining the social construction of Blackness can impact and change the way we view and create subjectivities throughout Black experiences.

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Document for Research Participation at Diversity Middle School - Students

This study involves Anthropological and Educational research that explores how ideas of cultural backgrounds, race, and identity impact and shape individual perceptions of students and educators in Prince George's County Public Schools. The goal of this study is to examine the factors, processes, and communication that impact identity.

I will be conducting classroom observations and administering short surveys. Your child may be asked to be a part of a focus group to answer open-ended interview questions concerning his or her ideas and experiences about culture, race, identity, and school climate. The participation of your child will not affect his/her classroom learning, nor will it take from class time without the consent of the teacher and the opportunity to make up any missed work. Audio recording may be used.

These interviews will offer insight into how understandings of racial and cultural identity affect the learning environment, both on the part of students and educators. In addition, the research will raise awareness of diversity in Prince George's County Public Schools.

When reporting my findings I will present the ideas and opinions of the students (your child) that are discussed and/or recorded. However, to protect the identity of your child, I will always refer to him /her using a pseudonym, as well as a pseudonym for the name of the school. In focus groups with other students I will constantly remind students about privacy and not to discuss their participation or others' outside of the group. Any data I collect will be locked in a file cabinet and/or entered in my personal computer that is password protected.

The participation and cooperation of you and your child is completely voluntary. There is no monetary compensation involved. At any time, he or she as a participant or you as a parent or guardian may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the participation. This withdrawal will not affect his/her academic work nor have any other repercussions.

If you have any questions, either prior to or during the research, please do not hesitate to contact at arvenita.washington@american.edu or at the school at (301) 918-8640, by contacting my advisor, Dr. Sabiyha Prince at sprince956@aol.com or at (202) 885-1830, or [Conrad Hohenlohe](#), Compliance Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs at chohenl@american.edu. This research has been approved by my dissertation committee at American University, Department of Anthropology, Prince George's County Public Schools Department of Research and Evaluation, and by Charles Carroll Middle School Principal, Mr. Eric Wood.

Approved by XXX, Principal _____

Your signature indicates that you have decided to allow your child to participate in the study and that you both understand the information presented in this document.

Name of Student (Print) _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print) _____

Date _____

Signature _____

APPENDIX B

El Documento informado del Consentimiento para Investigar Participación en la escuela de Charles Carroll

Este estudio implica una investigación Antropológica y Educativa que explora cómo ideas de fondos culturales, de raza, el impacto de la identidad forma las percepciones individuales de estudiantes y educadores en el sistema escolar del condado de Prince George. La meta de este estudio es de examinar los factores, los procesos, y comunicación que impresiona la identidad.

Estaré realizando las observaciones durante las clases y administrando inspecciones cortas. Hay una posibilidad que su niño será escogido para participar en un grupo de foco. Estos participantes tendrán que contestar las preguntas abiertas de entrevista con respecto a sus ideas y experiencias acerca de la cultura, raza, identidad, y acerca del clima de la escuela. La participación de su niño no afectará la clase donde aprende, ni tomara tiempo de la clase sin el consentimiento del maestro y la oportunidad de hacer algún trabajo perdido. La grabación en audio quizás puede ser utilizada.

Estas entrevistas ofrecerán la penetración en cómo comprensiones de la identidad racial y cultural afectan el ambiente en cual aprenden, en la parte de estudiantes y educadores. Además, la investigación levantará el conocimiento de la diversidad en el sistema escolar del Condado de Prince George.

Al informar mis conclusiones yo presentaré las ideas y opiniones de los estudiantes (su niño) que han discutido. Sin embargo; para proteger la identidad de su niño, siempre usare un seudónimo, así como un seudónimo para el nombre de la escuela. En los grupos enfocados yo le recordaré constantemente a los estudiantes acerca de la intimidad y no discutir su participación ni los otros' fuera del grupo. Cualquier dato que reúno será encerrado un archivador y/o entrado en mi computadora personal cual es protegida por una contraseña.

La participación y cooperación de usted y su niño son completamente voluntarias. No hay compensación monetaria implicada. En tiempo, él o ella como un participante o usted como un padre o guardián pueden negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta o retirar de la participación. Esta retirada no afectará su trabajo académico ni tendrá cualquier otra repercusión.

Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta, antes de o durante la investigación, por favor no puede conseguirme por correo electrónico a arvenita.washington@american.edu o en la escuela donde puede llamar al (301) 918-8640, contactando a mi consejera, Dr. Sabiyha Prince a sprince956@aol.com ni en (202) 885-1830, ni Conrad Hohenlohe, Administrador de Conformidad, la Oficina de Programas Patrocinados a chohenl@american.edu. Esta investigación ha sido aprobada por mi comité de la disertación en la Universidad Americana, el Departamento de la Antropología, el Público de Condado de Príncipe George Educa el Departamento de Investigación y Evaluación, y por el Director de la escuela de Charles Carroll, Sr. Eric Wood.

Aprobado por Eric L. Wood, Director _____

Su firma indica que usted ha decidido permitir su niño tomar parte en el estudio y que usted ambos entienden la información presentada en este documento.

El nombre de Estudiante (la Impresión) _____

El nombre de Cría/Guardián (la Impresión)

Fecha _____

Firma _____

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Document for Research Participation at Diversity Middle School - Educators

This study involves Anthropological and Educational research that explores how ideas of cultural background, race, and identity affect individual perceptions of students and educators in Prince George's County Public Schools.

You may be asked to be a part of a focus group, as well as answer open-ended interview questions concerning ideas and experiences about culture, race, identity, and school climate. I will also be conducting classroom observations as well as administering short surveys. Audio recording may be used.

The analysis of this data will offer insight as to how understandings of racial and cultural identity affect the learning environment, both on the part of students and educators. In addition, the research will raise awareness of diversity in Prince George's County Public Schools.

When reporting my findings I will present the ideas and opinions of the students and educators that are discussed and/or recorded. However; to protect the participants' identity, I will always make reference using a pseudonym, as well as a pseudonym for the name of the school. In focus groups with others, I will constantly remind participants about privacy and not to discuss their participation or others' outside of the group. Any data I collect will be locked in a file cabinet and/or entered in my personal computer that is password protected.

Your participation and cooperation in this research is completely voluntary. There is no monetary compensation involved. At any time, you may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from participation without repercussions.

If you have any questions, either prior to or during the research, please do not hesitate to contact at arvenita.washington@american.edu or at the school at (301)918-8640, by contacting my advisor, Dr. Sabiyha Prince at sprince956@aol.com or at (202) 885-1830, or [Conrad Hohenlohe](#), Compliance Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs at chohenl@american.edu. This research has been approved by my dissertation committee at American University, Department of Anthropology, Prince George's County Public Schools Department of Research and Evaluation, and by Charles Carroll Middle School Principal, Mr. Eric Wood.

Approved by Eric L. Wood, Principal _____

Your signature indicates that you have decided to participate in the research and understand the information presented in this document.

Name of Adult (Print) _____ Date _____

Signature _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

I will explore these issues by asking these specific questions to students:

- How do you self-identify?
- How do you describe yourself racially/ethnically?
- Where were you born? Where were your parents and grandparents born?
- How do you describe your school?
- How do you describe your school racially?
- What is race?
- What is the most important aspect of your identity?
- How are you ever identified differently by others and how does that make you feel?
- How do you identify others? What terms are commonly used?
- How important is it that your friends are like you in the way that you identify?
- What does it mean to be Black?
- How do your parents want you to identify?
- Do you talk to other students about race? If so, how often? Do teachers about race?

I will explore these issues by asking these specific questions to educators:

- How do you self-identify?
- How do you self-identify racially/ethnically?
- Where were you born? Where were your parents and grandparents born? How do you describe your school?
- How long have you worked in the county and in this capacity? What do you teach and how long have you taught/been an administrator/guidance counselor etc?
- Where were you educated?
- How cultural and ethnically diverse do you perceive your classes/the school to be?
- What is race?
- What is class?
- What class do you think the students fall under and why?
- How do you describe your school?
- How do you describe your school racially?
- What does it mean to be Black? In Prince George's County?
- How is this engaged in your curriculum?
- Have you noticed racial/cultural tension and what was done to address it?

- How do you see students responding to being perceived as Black? Do you see a connection with other students across ethnicities?
- What training or professional development has taken place in the school system to prepare you for the diversity in your classroom?
- Do you think it's important to talk about race? If so why?
- Do you talk to students about race?
- Do you talk to other staff members about race?

APPENDIX E

ALL STAFF SURVEY 06/12/07

Circle – Male or Female

1. Position: Teacher Support Staff Administrative or other Supervisory Other

2. Age: 18-24 25-30 31-36 37-41 42-47 47-52 53-58 59-63 64+

3. Highest Level of Education: High School Trade School Some College
Associate's Degree Bachelor's Degree Graduate or Professional School Degree Other
- Explain:

4. Number of Years in Education: _____

5. Number of Years in Education in Prince George's County and in what capacities:

6. Number of Years at Charles Carroll Middle School: _____

7. Please describe your race and ethnicity. For example, Asian – Chinese; Black – Jamaican, White – German, Black – Hispanic/Latino – Cuban; Black and White – African American and French. Please consider at least 2 generations of your family.

8. How important is your ethnic identity versus your racial identity?

**9. Have people (students or adults) misidentified you either racially or ethnically?
Yes/No Explain.**

10. Do you see the school as diverse? Yes/No Explain. How culturally and ethnically diverse do you perceive your classes/the school to be?

11. Have you misidentified students either racially or ethnically and if so, what was their response? Yes/No Explain.

12. As an educator or as someone who works with students, how important do you think it is to recognize diversity in the school?

13. How do you think recognizing diversity (or not) will impact your interaction with students?

14. Do you think recognizing diversity is important to the students? In what ways?

15. Have you noticed racial/cultural tensions in the school/school system and what was done to address it?

16. How do you see students responding to being perceived/identified as Black?

17. Do you see a connection with students across ethnicities?

18. What role does the media play in informing your understandings of Blackness/Black culture/Black people?

19. What is class? Define middle class.

20. What class do you see your students in and which class do you see yourself apart of and why?

21. What training or professional development has taken place in the school system to prepare you on issues of diversity and multiculturalism?

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX F

ALL STAFF SURVEY RESPONSE *Highlighting Select Questions*

7. Please describe your race and ethnicity. For example, Asian – Chinese; Black – Jamaican, White – German, Black – Hispanic/Latino – Cuban; Black and White – African American and French. Please consider at least 2 generations of your family.

42. Black – Trinidadian father
43. Black with some Native American and White several generations ago
44. Black and White
45. Black Creole
46. White-German
47. Asian and White
48. Chinese and Black
49. Black
50. White – European
51. African American
52. White – German, Irish, Scotch, Dutch, Indian
53. Black
54. Black and Black ☺ Native American, 3 generations ago
55. Black and White
56. Black
57. Black
58. Black
59. Asian – Indian
60. Black – American
61. African American
62. African
63. Black – African
64. White – Irish
65. Black African – Nigerian American
66. White
67. Black and White
68. Asian- Filipino. My grandfather on mother's side is Chinese; My grandmother on mother's side is Filipino; My grandfather on father's side is Spanish/Irish; My grandmother on father's side is Spanish-Filipino.
69. Black – Hispanic/Latino
70. Black – American
71. African American/Black

72. African American
73. Black and White
74. African American
75. Black – African American
76. African American and White
77. Black/African American
78. White - German/French/Czech
79. Black – African – Liberian Kru
80. African – West Indian born in a Hispanic country. My family is from Jamaica, Barbados, St. Vincent, and established in Panama. No known intermarriage with other ethnic group is recorded.
81. Black
82. Black African American

8. How important is your ethnic identity versus your racial identity?

1. I don't think the color of your skin matters. A person makes their own identity statement
2. My ethnic identity is extremely important because with it bringing a lot of roots in traditions, beliefs, morals and unchanged values.

9. Have people (students or adults) misidentified you either racially or ethnically?

Yes/No Explain.

1. They are not aware that in the Black race there are many different nationalities.

10. Do you see the school as diverse? Yes/No Explain. How culturally and ethnically diverse to you perceive your classes/the school to be?

1. Yes and no. The School is predominantly Black/Latino. But teaching Honor's courses this year I have experienced a more diverse student body (Black, Latino, White and Asian), religious diversity
2. High population of Hispanics and Blacks
3. The school as a whole is not diverse
4. White teacher – Yes we have children of all backgrounds. My classes/children are all the same to me. I don't see the color or ethnicity.
5. Very culturally and ethnically diverse within African and American and Latino cultures.
6. Not really, mostly Hispanic and Black
7. Yes and No. Black/Latino not much else
8. Yes, pretty diverse
9. Yes, students are from all over the world. Although students are labeled as Black or Latino they are from different countries and cultural backgrounds.
10. We are a Black, Latino, and African school

11. Somewhat. African, Hispanic, Asian, and African American
12. I think we have become increasing diverse, the Latino population have made us more aware of the ethnic and cultural diversity among the “Black” population.
13. Somewhat. within the last few years, there has been a steady increase in the Hispanic populations
14. Starting to be. Hispanic and African increase in population
15. Yes, there are a variety of students as well as staff that are multicultural. My classes have a variety of multicultural students
16. The school is very diverse and students are given a change to express or show their culture
17. Asian - No, it is not very diverse
18. No majority Black
19. In terms of staff, somewhat. In terms of students, not as much. It is a reflection of PC County
20. Yes. African American, Latinos, Asian, and African.
21. Yes, almost all nationalities are represented.
22. Yes
23. Two competing cultures – Black American vs. Latino
24. No. majority Black
25. No, there is a majority of Black students so therefore culture cannot be explored
26. Yes! The school is diverse. We have many cultures represented on the faculty and student population. The classes are very diverse; 40% of population is of Hispanic descent.
27. Yes, we have a variety of races and cultures. Very diverse.
28. Yes, even though it is majority African American or Hispanic, there are a lot of other ethnicities.
29. Yes, Black, Hispanic, African, White and some Asian
30. Yes and no. It seems as if there are many cultures, but people of those cultures stay together.
31. I think the students and the staff population is extremely diverse culturally and ethnically. Students and staff come from all corners of the globe.
32. Yes, the school is diverse because the staff and the students are diverse from other countries and cultures. Most of the students are Hispanic, transforming the school.
33. Yes, Hispanic, Black, White, Asian. Yes, my classes are diverse.

11. Have you misidentified students either racially or ethnically and if so, what was their response? Yes/No Explain.

1. Yes, I mistakenly called a student Puerto Rican and she said I am Mexican
2. White – No I always ask students where they are from and what race are they

12. As an educator or as someone who works with students, how important do you think it is to recognize diversity in the school?

1. White – I don't think it will
2. Asian It is important as we have to understand the students and behaviors are link to their culture

13. How do you think recognizing diversity (or not) will impact your interaction with students?

1. If I recognize their ethnicity, they are more engaged in my class
2. I don't; $8 \times 8 = 64$ regardless of ethnicity

14. Do you think recognizing diversity is important to the students? In what ways?

1. Students want to be recognized for their cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
2. Yes because they are immature.

15. Have you noticed racial/cultural tensions in the school/school system and what was done to address it?

1. The only challenge may be when Latino students are speaking Spanish and other students (Black) don't know the language.
2. Yes, there are often high tensions and not much was done to address it.
3. The students here seem to be in competition racially. There is definitely tension and nothing has been done.
4. Yes. Not enough was done. It is usually between Black/Spanish, but it dies out eventually.
5. Yes we have a lot of African American/Hispanic tension and I don't know what has been done
6. Yes, peer mediation
7. Yes, not recently but resulted in a stabbing
8. Some. Mediation techniques
9. Yes, there are tensions between "Black" and Latino students and between different Latino groups. Latino gangs also seem to be an issue.
10. I don't see any
11. Yes, there were announcements, meetings, and mandates set to help alleviate the tension.
12. A little. Not much

13. No
14. no
15. yes between Blacks and Hispanics
16. The school is predominantly Black and Hispanic with a little white and Asian so yes kind of diverse
17. Two major cultural groups: African American and Hispanic
18. support staff – I think that the peer mediation and code of conduct assemblies address the issues
19. Yes! My Latino students are very territorial and have found country ties. We address the tension by having seminars on violence and behavior modifications.
20. I haven't seen tensions myself, but I do notice that students tend to gravitate towards other students of the same race/culture
21. Yes, and there hasn't been a lot done other than talk about why we should work together.
22. Yes at my other school students and parents (mostly Blacks) would not trust white teachers, thinking they are prejudice.
23. I have noticed some; I really didn't see it addressed
24. Not necessarily racial or cultural tension, but when people can't get their way, which jeopardize the fairness of others they cry discrimination
25. Nope

16. How do you see students responding to being perceived/identified as Black?

1. Some are fine with it; others would rather be identified by where they are from
2. They have pride but think they are the only ones that exist
3. It depends on whether they are considered African or not. African student appear to be more ashamed
4. Some students will correct you and tell you where they are from
5. Black Americans identify themselves as Black but have no concept of history
6. I don't think they care
7. Sometimes its positive, sometimes its negative
8. In negative ways
9. They are proud to be Black, probably because the majority here are Black
10. I see this with Africans who don't want to be identified as Black Americans
11. I don't know since I teach primarily Hispanics.
12. I think the students respond positive to being Black or Afro-American
13. They respond appropriately
14. They try to fill stereotypes
15. Many don't know they are mixed with Black, making them Black
16. Students from the continent of Africa do not like this

17. Do you see a connection with students across ethnicities?

1. Many. Developmentally, they are beginning to define who they are. Religious beliefs seem to be a major connection.
2. When you show them where one is
3. Not so much, they segregate themselves.
4. No. Each groups mainly is in to itself and rarely joins or hangs with another
5. Yes, Black and Hispanics
6. Not really. Usually see Blacks with Blacks, Hispanics with Hispanics. The white and Asians do mingle but are mostly with Blacks.
7. Yes, but most of the Blacks, Hispanics, and Africans, tend to group with their respective racial groups.
8. Yes they have similarities with economics and culture
9. Yes, physical attraction and musical interests. Also, many who try to reject Blacks are actually secretly jealous because they aren't.

18. What role does the media play in informing your understandings of Blackness/Black culture/Black people?

1. Major role. Transformations of hip-hop has opened many doors but I am concerned about the perception other get about Blacks from these images.
2. The media represents Blackness and Black culture in a very negative light: oversexed, over-drugged, and money!
3. media doesn't do enough positive media on Black people
4. The media is not very helpful in molding our children into becoming positive citizens
5. The perception to the media of the negative side (crime, drugs, sports, violence) helps to fuel these negative stereotypes.
6. A big role. The media misrepresents Blacks.

19. What is class? Define middle class.

32. Financial/social status that may be related to level of education
33. A societal reference we use to identify financial status. The middle class is the average American's financial status.
34. Class is where your family is in the money category. Middle class is in between rich and poor.
35. Average people of average means
36. Class is the level you are at in society. Middle class is the people that work all the time and don't have extra money.
37. Working class, generally college educated
38. Class is a social placement designed to separate people. Middle class is just more money
39. Most of the students are middle class but wants to be lower class to fit in with peers

40. A group of people, not rich, not poor just right
41. Where we place people, middle class is where the majority of the populations is
42. Middle class is an economic class that allows the family to save money and buy a few luxury items
43. two incomes
44. Class is a description of social-economic groupings. These people of families that make an average median income based on the national average.
45. Class is a distinction among people. Middle class are people with average jobs/living
46. Educational/financial levels; college degree – suburban life – not struggling
47. A social distinction stratifying people according to income, race, religion, and ethnicity
48. The classification of different people into different categories in regard to their economic and education etc. status
49. Financially able to meet monthly needs
50. Classification based on income
51. Class is an artificial separation based on wealth and position in the community
52. Class – grouping based on socioeconomic status. Middle class is white collar job; house in the burbs
53. A group in which determines where you stand economically and socially. Successful business people.
54. middle class is the folks/families that live in nice non crime ridden areas who don't struggle for food, living paycheck to paycheck
55. A certain standard or category to judge a certain group
56. Class is based on socio-economic status! Middle class is 3 tiered: Low, middle and high. The Great Middle Class is the U.S.A.
57. I see class as the combination of socio economic status and attitude about education, government, etc.
58. How you behave and handle yourself in certain matters. Not poverty stricken.
59. Societal status, Middle class to me is not rich and above the poverty line.
60. Economic standing. Middle class means you are not rich but definitely not poor.
61. Middle class – enough money to pay all of your bills and still have fun sometimes.
62. Money fact. Middle class is \$50,000 or college degree.

20. What class do you see your students in and which class do you see yourself apart of and why?

31. The majority of the students are middle class
32. Lower- middle to middle class

33. My students range from low to middle class because they are from the surrounding areas.
34. I think most kids fall into middle class even though they want to be “low”
35. My kids are in the lower working class
36. Lower middle class due to their families financial situation
37. Middle to low middle
38. Middle to low class because we have a large population on free and reduced lunch
39. Middle class
40. Middle class
41. Middle. I think a lot of the parents here make at or above the national median income
42. Not poor, not rich.
43. I do not see my students as a class. I do not discriminate among different races/ethnicities
44. Most of them are from working class families just like me
45. Students are mostly lower middle.
46. lower to lower middle class
47. Most of the kids are low income
48. I see students being on the bottom level of the pyramid
49. Middle class
50. Children can achieve at any class status
51. lower socioeconomic class
52. I see most of the students as lower middle class
53. Students as middle and lower class. Myself middle because of the behavior and beliefs.
54. Lower class. Me middle because I did not grow up wanting for food or housing
55. Low middle class and middle, middle class
56. Economically, lower middle class, but “attitudinally” lower class with a ghetto mentality. Economically, I’m the same but my attitude, values education among other things, more.
57. Some students are middle class, others are the lower to lower middle.
58. low to middle.
59. Middle class
60. We have extreme from welfare to middle class

21. What training or professional development has taken place in the school system to prepare you on issues of diversity and multiculturalism?

1. Very little. In PG County it seems to be assumed that you’ll know what to do.
2. Very few

3. I haven't seen any
4. Not really, but occasionally we do have diversity workshops about once a year
5. Nothing I can think of
6. None
7. None that I know of
8. None
9. N/A
10. None
11. None
12. None
13. None
14. None
15. None
16. We have had professional development from the ESOL office
17. Only technology training
18. N/A
19. I have taken personally taken a lot of professional courses to help me
20. none
21. I have participated in workshops outside of school but not through PG County PS
22. None
23. None that I've been exposed to
24. N/A
25. N/A
26. My hands on interaction with students and staff on a daily basis
27. Nothing for me
28. Low and middle
29. There have been some but not a lot.
30. None, just conversations amongst each other.
31. Not a lot
32. A workshop on diversity.

Additional Comments:

1. The removal of the magnet program was ridiculous. It gave students the opportunity to leave their neighborhoods and diversify schools. I enjoyed this survey

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