CONSTRUCTING DIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY OF A DEMOGRAPHICALLY DIVERSE SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

MICHELLE PALMA

(Under the Direction of Steve Holloway)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines cross-racial interactions among students in a demographically diverse high school located in a suburb of Atlanta, GA. Because diversity is often conflated with the number of racially different bodies in a space, I examine students' lived experiences to understand their cross-racial interactions. I examine how the mutual construction of space and identity, as well as the institutional structures of the school, shape cross-racial interaction. The construction of racialized identities by students often results in behaviors that deepen racial divisions. Furthermore, the negotiation of mixed-raced identities illustrates the rigid yet permeable boundaries surrounding race. The microgeogrpahies that are constructed within the school enhance cross-racial interaction in some settings and inhibit interaction in other settings. The process of ability tracking racially isolates students and inhibits cross-racial interaction. Overall, cross-racial interaction occurred at this high school suggesting that students have a better chance of cross-racial interaction within spaces of diversity.

INDEX WORDS: Diversity, Identity, Cross-racial Interaction, Integration, Ability Tracking

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the Clarkston High School class of 1996 and the faculty and staff who were there.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. is becoming more diverse than ever before as "near record numbers of legal immigrants" continue to enter the country each year (Farley 1999, xi). Immigrants and their children account for one-fifth of the total U.S. population (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999). While social scientists debate the causes of immigration (see Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999 for a review), the research presented in this thesis focuses on the diversity that immigration produces. Engaging in a long-standing debate over the implications of immigration, Portes (1999) argues that we can no longer evaluate current trends in immigration with the same assimilationist theories that we used to describe the 20th century immigration which portrayed American society as a melting pot. In any discussion of immigration, the issue of race is always present. Omi and Winnat (1994) explain that "[e]veryone 'knows' what race is, though everyone has a different opinion as to how many racial groups there are, what they are called, and who belongs in what specific racial categories" (3). Therefore, as immigration increases race and diversity become more complicated. Omi and Winnant (1994) argue that "[i]nstead of exploring how groups become racially identified, how racial identities and meanings changed over time, or how racial conflicts shape American polity and society, 'mainstream' approaches consider race as a problem of policy, of social engineering , of state management"(3).

While the U.S. becomes more racially/ethnically diverse, gender and class also lend to the diversity of the public sphere. In 2006, women accounted for 46% of the U.S. labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). Class differences are indicated in the U.S. simply by looking at the variety of income distributions (though class is more complicated than income alone). Therefore, as society becomes more and more diverse, issues of equality continue to rise. These issues are most evident within spaces of diversity.

Today diversity is found in many social spaces such as businesses, schools, sports franchises, neighborhoods, even entire cities. These diverse arenas provide spaces of possibility, and are often seen as spaces of promise. There is optimism in the ideology of diversity that equates it with equality for all individuals no matter their differences. There is also an assumption that diversity will lead to a more tolerant and understanding society. Unfortunately, these promises are often unfulfilled. This is currently evident in corporations that must maintain quotas for diversity. While corporations recognize that they are not achieving diversity in the "broader sense", they continue to use top down methods for their diversity training and programs (Kubicek 2005). Lacking in these programs is an understanding of the lived experiences of employees who contribute to diversity. Atlanta, Georgia, a place recognized for its diversity and claiming to be the 'the city too busy to hate', in reality, is highly segregated residentially, socially, and academically (Bayor 1996, Brookings Inst. 2000, Ruthieser, 1996).

Furthermore, the notion of diversity has been commodified by capitalist neo-liberal structures (Smith 2005, Melamed 2006). In a recent article, Neil Smith expresses trepidation that notions such as diversity have been watered down. He writes:

> In academia, the interconnected political aspirations of 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' came on the scene as very powerful and effective critiques of the social location from which hegemonic cultures and ideologies sculpted the world…. The very power of these challenges made them a target, however, and through a long process of acceptance, generalization and erosion, their power diminished. Notions of diversity and multiculturalism have long since been ground into the corporate language and images of CNN and MacDonalds and become favourite fodder for George Bush's and Tony Blair's speech writers".

Thus, there is a mismatch between the ideology of diversity and the realities of diverse spaces that can be attributed to a limited conception of socio-spatial relationships, as well as a how diversity and its outcomes are measured. This chapter examines these factors, as well as, introduces the purpose of this thesis.

First, there is an ecological assumption that a spatial relationship correlates with a social relationship; however, this is not always the case. Problematically, space is seen as an empty container within which diversity is understood to occur and from which it is measured. Paulding and Harris (2005) illustrate this when they reflect on the reasons why law firms have failed to diversify. One reason is that firms have a "one size fits all" mentality in that although they hire minorities, they provide only token efforts to change the atmosphere of the workplace. Because the workplace is still dominated by a hegemonic culture, minorities are challenged to assimilate into spaces that were not established for them. Therefore, space is not a neutral zone, it is an exclusive social construction (Sibley, 1995).

Furthermore, there is a simplistic assumption that bodies of difference sharing space represent the ideological notion of "diversity." Diversity is often expressed by statistics and quotas that show the distribution of a particular race or gender in a certain place. However, such techniques can mask the actual lived experience of diversity. Numbers and the practice of counting are now confounded with an ideology, indicating a limited conception of the complexities of diversity. Numerical data can be a useful tool in gauging presence of a diverse population, yet numbers alone cannot show the complexity of social relationships within that place. The qualitative method of research that highlights lived experience (Prus 1996, Van Menen 1990, Burch 1990) can provide a deeper understanding of how diversity works. Coming from the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology and symbolic interactionsism, this approach captures more than just experiences; it makes sense of experiences and helps us understand the meanings behind experiences, rather than simply the superficial dimensions of experiences (Prus 1996). According to Van Manen (1990), "[r]eflecting on lived experience then becomes reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of that experience" (78). The lived experience is the dominating method I use in this thesis.

There are many avenues that can lead us to a better understanding of how diversity works. The site of the school is one place that continues to confront issues of diversity as we seek an equal education for all children. In the U.S., schools became more diverse after the 1954 case Brown v. Board of Education, in which the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregated schools inherently unequal and therefore, unconstitutional. After several decades of desegregation efforts, public schools were integrated with black and white children. At the same time, due to immigration and

shifting residential patterns, schools became even more racially and ethnically mixed. More recently, schools are becoming more segregated as a result of white flight, and residential segregation (Orfield et al. 1996).

With Brown v. Board still a shadow, and the current ideology surrounding diversity, the social outcomes of diverse schools have become a central research focus among social scientists. There is a goal that racially and ethnically diverse schools will "generate cooperative, equal-status contact across racial lines and increase interracial friendship.... and in the long run contribute to a more integrated and equal society" (Quillian and Campbell 2003, 540). Thus, schools represent spaces of promise upholding the ideology of diversity. However, within these spaces there is still segregation and inequality. hooks (1994) recognizes this in the following quote as she reflects on how social class is ignored in the classroom, "we are all encouraged to cross the threshold of the classroom believing we are entering a democratic space – a free zone where the desire to study and learn makes us all equal" (177). Therefore, in my thesis I look at the school space to get a better understanding of how diversity works.

In this thesis, I refer to the school as a "space of possibility" because cross-racial interactions would not be possible in segregated schools such as those prior to Brown v. Board of Education, 1954. However, significant segregation remains within these diverse spaces. Thus, I use the term "spaces of possibility" to mean that there is a potential for cross-racial interaction. I then examine to what degree that potential is or is not met.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the social relationships among people in a demographically diverse setting. Specifically, I examine the spatiality of identity construction as well as institutional structures as a way to understand cross-racial social

interaction between students. The following chapter is a manuscript that examines the socio-spatial interaction between students from the class of 1996 who attended a demographically diverse high school, located in the city of Clarkston, a suburb of Atlanta, Ga. This school was diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and academic placement. An added dimension to this case study is that I too was a student in the class of 1996 at Clarkston High School. My high school experience influenced my interest in diversity, though now I look back on that experience through the lens of academic researcher and geographer. I am still able to recognize the uniqueness of this incredibly diverse space.

While my research emphasizes cross-racial interaction, whenever possible, I also illuminate other identity differences that play a role in interaction, such as gender and class. Therefore, I offer a qualitative empirical study of diversity to illuminate the lived experience that is absent from most mainstream discussions of diversity. While my research is a case study that looks at diversity in education, it can apply to broader issues of diversity as well, such as affirmative action, and residential segregation.

The following manuscript begins with an introduction on school integration. I describe the dimensions of integration that researchers have focused on in the past and present. For many years the goal of racial integration was academic achievement for minorities, more recently, there is an effort to promote social benefits such as racial equality through school integration (Wells and Crane 1994 and Quillian and Campbell 2003). I then discuss the theoretical framework that shapes my research. This involves how the mutual construction of space and identity influences cross-racial interaction. After a description of the demographic diversity in the city of Clarkston, Georgia, I reveal

my case study. I provide excerpts from my interviews which illustrate the students' lived experiences. I also look at how the structures of the school influence student interaction. These structures include the practice of tracking students into different classes based on their perceived academic ability. Other structures of the school that influence interaction include spaces such as the class room, hallways, and the soccer field. Following the manuscript, I provide a concluding chapter in which I reflect on the accomplishments and limitations of my thesis, as well as possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY: CLARKSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

A story recently published by CNN (Keck 2007) reported that a South Georgia high school held its first integrated prom in the spring of 2007. The school is 55 percent black and 43 percent white. One student, when asked why some of her friends were not allowed to go to the integrated prom said, “I've asked, 'Why can't you come?' and they're like, 'My mommy and daddy -- they don't agree with being with the colored people,' which I think is crazy” (Keck 2007). As black and white couples posed together for pictures outside, many people were skeptical of the meaning behind such actions, as well as the integrated prom altogether. One woman said “That is so fake. There is nothing real about that. … That's just like you're cooking a half-baked cake, putting the icing on it, and when you cut the cake, the cake ain't no good. That's how this prom is” (Keck 2007). Another woman asked “why was there a prom last week for the white, when they are supposed to be united for tonight?” (Keck 2007).

This story draws into question the nature and degree of social interaction within diverse schools. In recent years, discussions of integration and diversity in education have started to focus on cross-racial interaction among students. According to Goldsmith (2004), the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board*, 1954, which found racially segregated schools to be unconstitutional, “triggered a shift in the perception of schools; schools came to be regarded as institutions with potential to improve racial and ethnic group relations by diversifying students’ social networks and thereby reducing racism and prejudice. To provide these benefits, however, schools must provide conditions that facilitate positive interracial experiences” (587). While integration does not always lead to interracial social networks or reduced racism and prejudice, the story of the integrated

prom demonstrates that diverse spaces are indeed spaces of possibility. Within these spaces of diversity there is a chance for cross-racial interaction. Even so, achieving and evaluating this goal is much more complicated than simply bringing different people together under one roof.

The microgeographies of the school tell the story of student interaction across lines of racial and ethnic difference. Geographers assert that social interactions emerge as functions of the social construction of identity and space (Massey 1994, Gilbert 1997, Soja 1998). Therefore, we must examine these mutually constituting constructs as a way of understanding cross-racial interaction. Adding more nuance to discussions of interaction is the fact that over the last fifty years, the racial/ethnic composition of schools have become more varied with an increase in immigration, so that diversity is more than just black and white (Goldsmith 2004).

My purpose in this paper is to examine the social relationships among people in a demographically diverse setting. What happens in these spaces of possibility? I address this question by using a case study of Clarkston High School in the mid-1990s, a demographically diverse high school located in a suburb of Atlanta, GA. This particular school was diverse due to the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of the community in which it was located, as well as its inclusion in a court-mandated school integration program. I specifically examine how students interact and relate across multiple axes of difference, including race, class, nationality, and tracking (academic placement) through the construction of space and identity. Therefore, my main research question is: how does the mutual constitution of space and identity in a demographically diverse high school affect cross-racial student interactions? What kinds of interactions are produced

and do they result in positive meaningful relationships? How does the structure of the school influence cross-racial student interaction? Based on the analysis presented here, I argue that cross-racial interaction occurs, which would be impossible without this diverse space. Yet, the outcomes associated with diversity are weakened by a combination of structural processes within the school as well as isolating behaviors that students create through the construction of space and identity. The structural processes include isolating students based on ability tracking, which internalizes a priori divisions between students based on race, class, and nationality, and leaves little time and space for social interaction. Students' isolating behaviors are demonstrated by avoidance and creating and policing boundaries around differences which are normalized and reinscribed by identity construction.

I begin this paper with a discussion on school integration followed by a geographical conceptual framework in which to situate this study. Next, I provide a description of my case study and methodology. I then turn to an analysis of participant narratives and conclude with some final thoughts and possibilities for future research on diversity.

The Goals of School Integration

Gauging equality by achievement

While it has been over fifty years since the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, contention remains on just how far we have come, for it is well documented that schools are increasingly more and more segregated in terms of race and ethnicity (Orefield and Eaton 1996). The goal of integration as articulated in *Brown v Board*, 1954, as well as contemporary arguments for integration, is equality for minority

students. Even so, many see this as an illusive goal that has yet to be fulfilled (Orfield and Eaton 1996, Moran, 2005, Hess 2005, Rumberger and Palardy 2005, Fennimore 2005). Hess (2005) states that "[i]f the goal of *Brown* was to create educational opportunities for students of color through desegregation, then even a cursory analysis of the current educational landscape in the United States provides evidence that that goal remains unmet" (2050).

Most empirical research on racial equality in education has examined the factors that influence student achievement. There has been a good deal of research on "peer effects" on academic achievement in schools. Most notably, the Coleman report (1966), a highly influential national study on student achievement, made the claim that students' achievement has more to do with the overall socioeconomic status of the student body rather than their own background (Wells and Crain 1994). According to Wells and Crain (1994), "[a]fter the Coleman report of 1966, desegregation was given an additional social-psychological rationale: placing low-income black students in schools and classrooms with middleclass white students would enhance their educational achievement by exposing them to better prepared and more motivated peers" (532). Such an analysis broadened the research on school diversity to focus on other social-psychological effects of diverse schools, in particular, the effects of interracial interaction among students.

Interaction, the new hope

Discussions in the education literature have shifted recently from academic achievement to the social outcomes of diversity. Wells and Crain (1994) explain that "[b]ecause educational achievement alone does not solve the problem of economic inequality, school desegregation must do more than raise black students' test scores; it

must also break the cycle of racial segregation that leaves blacks and whites worlds apart" (533). Thus, studies have started to focus on interactions across races as important to the development of racial equality. Quillian and Campbell (2003) explain that "the increase in cross-race interaction and friendships resulting from desegregation will improve confidence in interracial interaction, reduce stereotypes, and in the long run, contribute to a more integrated and equal society" (540). Based on these assumptions studies have focused on interracial friendships (Joyner and Kao 2000, Quillian and Campbell 2003) as well as interracial conflict (Goldsmith 2004).

Many studies of interaction have relied upon Macrostructural theory (Blau 1977) and Contact theory (Goldsmith 2004; Pettigrew 1998). According to Goldsmith (2004), macrostructural theory posits that a greater degree of heterogeneity increases the likelihood for cross-racial interaction, but that cross-racial contact is limited by segregation within schools, which is most often a result of ability tracking. Social contact theory posits that contact alone does not advance cross-racial relations. Contact theory stipulates four conditions that support positive intergroup contact: equal status, common goals, support from authority, and cooperation (Goldsmith 2004; Pettigrew 1998). Therefore Goldsmith (2004) suggests that macrostructural theory "regards racial relations as the outcome of many interracial ties that occur in a given place" (588) whereas contact theory "explains how school's organizational characteristics shape interracial contact" (588). These theories both offer insight into the nature of cross-racial relations within schools.

While these studies have been influential in understanding cross-racial interaction, they are largely based on essentialist notions of space and identity. They tend to talk about the school as a whole unit. I argue, instead, that cross-racial interaction is related to microgeographies within the school. These interactions are also a function of relational identities of student bodies. Furthermore, existing research is often based on statistical analysis of data that attempt to measure friendships and interaction. Methodologically, I offer the lived experience as a way to bring to these discussions richness, depth, and insight that can only be captured by personal experience. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical perspectives that inform my own research and situate this study within the realm of geography.

Theoretical framework

This paper centers on the complex nexus between the construction of racialized spaces and racialized identities, which ultimately influences cross-racial interaction and meaningful relationships. Space constitutes and is constitutive of our every day practices (deCerteau 1998) as well as broader processes that influence our social relations (Lefebvre 1991, Sibley 1995, Soja 1998). Geographers recognize that identity and space are mutually constituting social constructions (Kieth and Pile 1993, Massey 1994, Kobayashi 1994, Sibley 1995, Dwyer and Jones 2000, Pratt and Hanson 1994). Studies on identity have come to assert that identities are not essential categories (Pratt and Hanson 1994, Kobayashi 1994, Gilbert 1997), rather they are highly complicated both in their construction and function. Geographers also regularly examine the interplay between space and identity as a way of understanding difference (Massey 1994, Keith and Pile 1993, Pratt and Hanson 1994). Pratt and Hanson (1994) argue that "the

constitution of difference is not only a social but also a spatial process and varying systems of difference operate in different places; this forces the recognition that differences are constructed" (5). Moreover, the social construction of space and identity implies the construction of boundaries as well. Pratt (1998) argues that "borders in space and place are tied up with social boundaries (the formation of identity and its complement, the production of difference) but that there are multiple grids of difference and complex and varied links between place and identity formation" (27).

Few geographers have used these concepts to look at how the space of the school is a site for identity construction and cross-racial interaction. Thomas (2004) is one exception. In Mary Thomas' (2004) article on the racial segregation of a US high school in South Carolina, through narratives, she examines how girls' every day practices reinscribe racial difference. Drawing from Judith Butler's model of performativity, she suggests that race and gender are performances, constructions, rather than essential characteristics: "[g]irls encounter powerful racialized space and internalize its divisions; they come to accept, repeat, and embody racialization by invoking normative racial identities and recreating racial symbolism" (1246). Acknowledging that race is made through spatial processes, she suggests that "racial identities develop through girls' labeling and policing of white and black in and through space" (Thomas 2004, 1246). In the school that she studied, the racial divisions were exclusively 'white' and 'black'. A look at a more culturally diverse school can offer a different perspective to the spatiality of race.

Finally, geographers are starting to examine mixed-race identities. In particular, when bodies are multicultural and/or multiracial, discussions of race become more

complicated (Omi and Winant 1994; Mahtani 2003; Wright et al 2003; Houston et al 2005). The more we start to understand how these identities are spatially constructed, we begin to understand how race works. Mahtani (2002), employs the notion of performativity (Butler 1993) to look at how mixed-race women "not only contest, but also produce, their own racialized and gendered locations, challenging racialized readings of their bodies" (425). In a review of the places where mixed-race interaction and partnering is possible, Houston et al (2005) outline four 'everyday geographies' that provide contexts for mixed-race encounters. One of these four places is in educational settings. Though they acknowledge school as a site of possibility, they leave it unexamined, instead calling "for investigating the possibility for everyday [mixed-race] interactions within educational environments" (Houston et al 2005, 710). In the same paper, the authors, recognizing that much mixed-race research focuses on racial separation, redirect their focus to places of possibility as a way to examine "how and where racialization might adopt new and diverse forms, such as in the subversion of dominant racial paradigms" (Houston et al 2005, 710). They further suggest that "[s]hifting from thinking about spaces of impossibility to spaces of possibility is more than just a discursive trick; it delineates a research agenda that stresses the mutual constitution of race and place" (701). Therefore, I argue that while the school is a site of segregation, it is also a space of possibilities for cross-racial interaction.

Furthermore, In Pratt's discussion of multicultural spaces, cities in particular, she is cautious of Young's (1990) ideal "nonoppressive city" in which heterogeneous groups of people live among each other celebrating and enjoying difference. Pratt emphasizes that "we should be cautious of the freedoms and diversity of actual cities, based on an

awareness that boundaries are drawn and redrawn at very fine spatial scales" (41). Pratt illustrates this with empirical research from Williams (1988) that demonstrates the material realities of a gentrified racially integrated neighborhood block. While the new white middle-class residents were drawn to the area due to its heterogeneity and an "ideal of multiculturalism", they ended up structurally and socially segregated from the rest of the residents. The white residents owned houses on one side of the street, while black residents rented apartments right across the street. None of the residents visited their neighbors across the street. Hence, the representation of different groups does not mean said groups are engaging with each other.

I examine in this paper how the social construction of space and identity produces cross-racial relations. In the context of the school, the construction of space and identity results in the formation of boundaries accompanied by processes of territorialization and policing. These processes dictate the degree of interaction between students.

However, the mutual constitution of space and identity make it challenging to discuss. In addition, the multifaceted complexities of identity make specific identity characteristics problematic. Given the complexities and nuances of my subject matter, I do not strive to present a sanitized or over-simplified narrative in this paper. Rather, I attempt to discuss specific spaces and identities keeping in mind the multiple relations at stake.

Clarkston High School – Diversity in Action

Figure 1: Photo of Clarkston High School (http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/clarkston/about.html)

Clarkston High School (CHS) (featured above in figure 1), a co-educational public school located in the city of Clarkston in Dekalb County, Georgia is a useful case study due to its demographic diversity. According to Ruthieser (1996), "Dekalb was one of the primary beneficiaries of white flight from the city of Atlanta in the late 1960s and 1970s. Since 1985, however, the county has lost more whites than all but one county in the nation and gained more African-Americans than all but one county in the South. The result has been a deeply racialized and class stratified landscape." (106). South Dekalb county is now the site of an emerging black middle class. According to Rutheiser (1996), many of the commercial developments of the 1950s and 1960s have "experienced disinvestment and 'downmarketing'. These shifts in the commercial sector paralleled changes in the region's racial and class demographics. Owing largely to the efforts of refugee resettlement agencies, approximately 20 percent of the city's residents are either Asian-, African-, or European –born" (107).

Clarkston High School's diversity can be attributed to three main events. One event is a result of school integration policies that came into practice as a result of the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954. This case brought about the long and still ongoing process of school desegregation and integration. Dekalb County was initially slow to react to the civil rights laws in education, but by 1969 the county was forced to integrate schools as a result of a lawsuit charging the school system with maintaining school segregation. Federal court supervision lasted for nearly 30 years while Dekalb County attempted to integrate its schools. In 1976, the Majority to Minority (M to M) program was implemented to increase racial integration. The M to M program bussed children from schools in which they were the majority to schools where they would be a minority. The program was mostly one sided, in that only black children coming from all-black schools were being bussed into all white schools. In 1989 the Dekalb County Board of Education felt that it had achieved integration as best as it could, yet the Appellate Court disagreed, and insisted that the county continue to strive to be unitary, meaning it has "repaired the damage caused by generations of segregation and overt discrimination" (Orfield 1996, 3). In 1969 the racial balance was 94.13% white and 5.57% black with no other racial data, by 1999 the racial balance was 11.94% white, 76.59% black, 3.94% Asian, 5.39% Hispanic, and 2.14% Other (DCSS 2005). Finally, in 1999, after years of federal court supervision, the M to M program was phased out. According to Clarkston High School Guidance Department records, the racial composition of CHS in 1996 was 10% White, 73% Black and 17% Other.

The other two processes affecting diversity reflect demographic shifts in residential patterns. The first relates to government subsidized housing within the city of

Clarkston. This increased the concentration of low- and moderate-income families; 48% of Clarkston students qualified for free or reduced lunches between the years of 1991 and 1996 (DCSS 2005). The other process was an increasing immigrant population. The mid 90s brought many refugees from countries such as Bosnia, Vietnam, and Somalia. Asians and East Asians also settled in this section of Dekalb County (AJC 1997). In 1994, the student population of CHS was a mix of over 40 different nationalities.

In addition to race, class, ethnicity, and nationality, ability tracking also contributed to a level of diversity among students. Ability tracking is a system that divides students into different classes based on their academic ability (Goodland 1985). Some of the different tracks are called advanced, general, or survey.

While CHS was diverse in several ways, as mentioned above, it was most recognized for its racial and ethnic diversity. This is evident by looking at the pages of a yearbook from 1994. There is a two-page section titled "World Party" with photos (see figure 2) of the International club, the caption reads:

> Clarkston is becoming quite well known for its cultural diversity. Students at Clarkston come from all over the world. In fact, in our student body of 1300, there are students from over forty countries. Their presence was one of the reasons Clarkston was named 'Dekalb County School of Excellence - 1992-93.' Our understanding soccer team has been given the title of 'Mini-United Nations' because of its diversity (Powella and Williams 1994: 14).

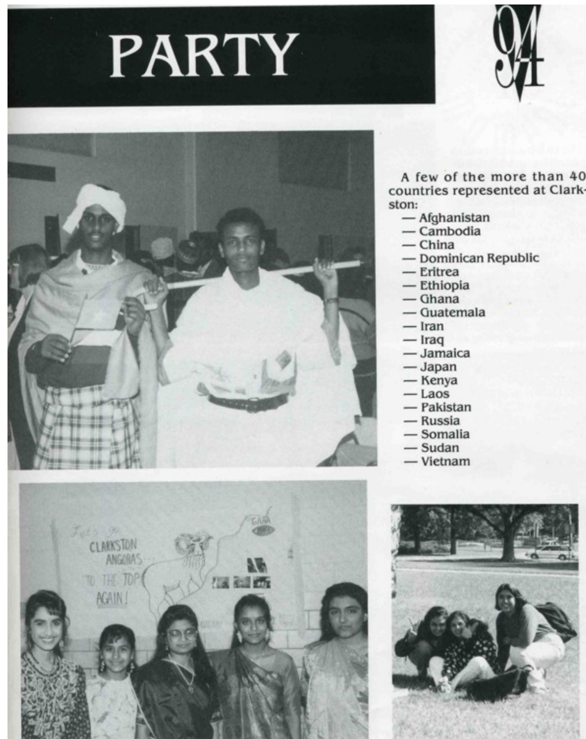

Figure 2: "World Party," photos from CHS yearbook 1994

Clarkston attempted to celebrate its diversity by hosting International celebrations. Hung from the ceiling of the cafeteria were the flags of all the nations that were represented at CHS. Thus, from an outsider perspective, CHS very well could be interpreted as a space of possibilities and promise. Based on an insider perspective, this space left a promise unfulfilled. I contribute to this insider perspective since I attended Clarkston High School and was in the graduating class of 1996.

Methodology

I am using a case study of Clarkston High School to examine cross-racial interaction within a diverse space. According to Stake (1995), "[c]ase study is the study of particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (xi). This is an "instrumental case study" (Stake 1995) meant to facilitate our understanding of cross-racial interaction within spaces of diversity. While, I do not attempt to make broad generalizations about all spaces of diversity, I do

hope to complicate how we view these spaces. I also hope to add to a growing body of literature (Khmelkov and Hallinan 1999; Joyner and Kao 2000; Moody 2001, that looks at these issues and promote further research in this area.

Participants

I interviewed a total of twenty–three people; twenty former students from the class of 1996, and three teachers. The recruitment process for this research was informal. I gained contact with several former classmates in preparation for our high school reunion. I discussed my research with them and expressed my interest in interviewing classmates. Individual classmates contacted me offering to take part in my research. From those individuals, I selected a diverse group of participants. The former students were comprised of seven males and thirteen females with diverse backgrounds in terms of race, class, nationality, and former tracking (see Table 1).

Table 1: Basic Demographic Characteristics of Students Interviewed.

	Male	Female
Non-Immigrant Families		
White	2	6
Black	2	3
Asian		
Hispanic		
Mixed-Race		
Immigrant Families		
White		
Black	3	1
Asian		1
Hispanic		
Mixed-Race		2
Total	7	13

Note: I define Immigrant Families as those where the students or their parents were not born in the U.S.

I personally contacted five teachers at Clarkston via email expressing my interest in interviewing them for my research. Three of the five responded, each of whom I

interviewed. My history with the participants is varied in that I socialized frequently with some and not at all with others. I currently do not socialize with any of the particpants, as it has been ten years since I have seen or heard from most of them.

Interviews

The participants chose the location of the interview (Elwood and Martin 2000), which lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes. Most of the interviews took place in the participant's home. Five interviews took place over the phone either at the request of the particpant or because they lived out of state. The interviews were semistructured. I began by asking the participants some background information about where they were from, where they went to elementary school, where they lived while at Clarkston, the structure of their family (i.e., married or divorced parents, siblings). I then asked about their friends, where they hung out before, during, and after school, and what classes they were in. I asked the participants to reflect on issues of racialized and classed identities and about their awareness of the school's diversity and how that affected them. I also asked them how their experience at Clarkston affected their lives since graduating.

Interviews with the teachers took place at Clarkston High School. I asked them open-ended questions about their perspective on cross-racial interaction among students. I also asked them to talk about the differences between general and advanced classes, and their overall perspective of the school's diversity. The teachers witnessed the interaction between students and offered a different perspective, more generalized, about the student population, diversity and interaction during the mid 90's. They were also able to discuss the many changes that this school has undergone over the years. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I chose pseudonyms for all the participants.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I inititally went through the transcripts by hand and identified major/common themes that emerged from the interviews such as multicultural and racialized identity, intersecting identities (i.e., race, class, gender), boundaries, and significant spaces where cross-racial interaction did or did not occur. I later used Envivo, a qualitative data analysis computer program that helped me organize participant quotes according to the themes that I previously identified.

Positionality

This research project is of particular interest to me because I attended the case study school. This paper is not, however, an autoethnography of my own experience (Ellis and Bochner 2000). My personal knowledge and experience of CHS serves to enhance my research, it is not meant to be the subject of my research. My insider perspective is limited to that of being a student at Clarkston, for in many ways I was an outsider when it came to the microgeographies of the school. While at Clarkston, I was in a mix of general and advanced classes. Outside of classes, I socialized mostly with white, American teenagers, with some exceptions. I lived in a house with my mother and two older siblings in a mostly white neighborhood. I am a white middle-class woman pursuing a Master's degree which influences my perspective of Clarkston, but also the nature of my interviews, particularly with students who do not share with me these same basic characteristics. According to England (1994), [w]e need to locate ourselves, in our location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research, and how we write our research" (87).

Identity, Space, and Cross-racial Interactions

Identity Crisis

Identity, includes the projection of self-identification as well as the imposition of a priori social identities. Identity is paramount in terms of how students relate to each other. Students construct boundaries that are permeable, evident in the way some students are able to cross borders, but also rigid and policed which is realized when space and identity are contested. At Clarkston, students took care to place people and themselves into categories. Omi and Winant (1994) explain that "[w]e utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is. This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot convieniently racially categorize – someone who is, for example, racially 'mixed' or of an ethnic/racial group we are not familiar with. Such an encounter becomes a source of discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning" (59). These processes are demonstrated in the following student experiences.

Growing up in Texas, Sandra, who is half Korean and half Mexican, struggled with acceptance from her peers about her multiculturalality. She was not accepted by Mexicans and at the same time, those recognizing her as Asian presumed she was Chinese. Below, she recalls a discussion about her own identity with other students once she was in high school.

> "by the time you get to high school its like where do you belong
> because you don't belong with the international students because
> they're immigrants, they just immigrated here. And the American kids,
> I actually got in an argument with these kids cause they were telling me
> I wasn't Korean and I wasn't Mexican. They said 'you're Korean so

> you're white' and some guy said 'you're Mexican so you're black cause there's nothing else except black or white'. They were like, yeah you're not Korean or Mexican you're white cause of this or you're black cause of that."

Because of the dominance of a black-white racial structure, it mattered to the other students that Sandra was either white or black because that would determine where she could be accepted. This is important because we use race as an indicator of social difference (Omi and Winant 1994) which informs our choices of interaction. Of course such divisions don't guarantee acceptance. The comments from the other students about her identity were perhaps more about them asserting power by claiming the superiority of black and white races over other ethnicities. Furthermore, it demonstrates the fluidity of race and ethnicity, in that it is debatable as to "what" Sandra is. Thus, while students attempt to solidify the boundaries around race and ethnicity, we also recognize the constructions and fluidity of race and ethnicity.

Another case in point, mixed-race students who are clearly racialized by their skin color, face a dilemma of what Portes and Zhou (1992) call segmented assimilation. Zhou (1999) explains that second generations students in the inner city are confronted with a "forced-choice dilemma. If they strive to meet their parents' expectations for academic achievement, they are likely to be ostracized as 'uncool,' 'nerdy,' or 'acting white' by their American peers in schools. If they submit to peer pressure and attempt to become 'American,' on the other hand, they are likely to adopt the cultural ways, including the language and behavior, of the inner city" (204). Although Clarkston was a suburb of Atlanta, not the inner city, in the following narrative, Ben illustrates this

dilemma of segmented assimilation. Ben, who is black, came to America from Jamaica when he was ten years old and struggled with his identity while in high school and says:

> "I could fit in Internationally, I could fit in black American, I could fit in 'other'. But when people look at you, they automatically assume one, it happens to all of us. Whenever I tell people I'm from Jamaica they could never have guessed it 'cause I learned to mask it so well… but because I would have been labeled as an African American that was the group I was trying to [fit in with]."

Ben talks about the fluidity of his ethnoracial identity which gave him somewhat of a choice as to the group of people with whom he wanted to be associated. In the space of the general classroom, Ben uses the opportunity to seek attention that he felt he wasn't receiving at home from his parents who devoted most of their time to earning and saving money for his family. Ben said:

> "I was looking for that acceptance to fit in at school in that popular crowd and my grades suffered because of it, so I was intentionally not doing homework, to be a quote-unquote "bad" kid that I wanted to fit in that crowd."

Another student, Lydia, who is half white-American and half Dominican, acknowledged that she too, could fit in with several groups. Though she is not black, some of the black students at Clarkston saw 'Hispanic' as a hybrid of black, as we saw in Sandra's narrative.

> "I was white to white kids and Hispanic to blacks. In high school that's how it was…. I had all kinds of friends; I wasn't all white or all Black, if black people had a clique, I was friends with that clique, same with

> the rednecks and the preps and the snobs, and dorks or whatever, I was just a swinger. I didn't put myself in a circle and be done with it."

However, this was not always the case. Racial boundaries can sometimes be quite rigid even for Lydia who considers herself multicultural. Below, Lydia talks about a confrontation that was a result of her being good friends with Kiki, a black girl who was from Jamaica. Lydia and Kiki became close friends in large part due to their similar experiences of being born in the Islands, and now living in the US.

> "Kechaa got really mad cause Kiki wouldn't tell her what it was. While we were changing classes Kechaa came up to me and pushed me and said something like white people and black people shouldn't be friends…it was this huge racial issue where she didn't like the fact that her 'sista' was confiding in me instead of her"

Kechaa (a black American girl), in this case, was policing racial boundaries. The spatiality of this confrontation is particularly important. It occurred in a heavily populated hallway during a class change, thus reinforcing this boundary to all who witnessed or heard about this altercation. To complicate identity further, Lydia, also polices boundaries. In the following dialogue she expresses her disapproval of a white teacher associating with black students more than white students. Lydia's disapproval with this teacher's apparent transgression reflects a tension that binds bodies to their appropriate racialized identity.

> "she was married to the black guy and she was white. She felt, I think, more comfortable around the African American race, then she did around her own, within her own skin. I mean really, she adapted everything of African American

> culture and totally, to me, ignored her own. And I don't know how or what that's supposed to mean… I feel like she could have a conversation with a black person easier than she could with me… I felt out of place even though she was white. And that kind of aggravated the hell out of me."

Thus, students are constantly aware of the boundaries as well as the ability to transgress. Policing, in the form of judgment or potential violence weakens the possibility for students to cross those boundaries. But then, how do students acquire ethnoracial identities? For many students it boils down to consumption.

In addition to identifiable skin color, several of the participants talked about racial differences in terms of fashion and taste in music which then become modes of locating racial identity. Consumption also served as sites where students could transgress or cross boundaries. Pratt (1998) explains that "cultural representations of race reproduce material divisions" (43). Kellner (1995) argues that 'media culture' which includes music, film, television, shopping, etc… all influence identity (2). According to Davis (1992) "[d]ress then comes easily to serve as a kinda visual metaphor for identity" (26). Often, students were identified racially by the clothes they wore, and that in many ways determined what group students belonged to. Sandra (the Mexican-Korean girl) for example, had mostly white friends and chose to wear more preppy clothes which she associated with white people. In the following passage, Lydia (1/2 white, ½ Dominican) describes the specific types of clothing associated with different ethnoracial groups.

> "The preps always wore gap, the black people always used to wear Phat Pharm, you know what I mean it was all clothes that separated their cultures. You could tell. Do you remember the ones that used to wear the veils and stuff from Eritrea?

> They never matched; they were straight up goodwill…. Like Timberland shoes, if you wore your Tims and your baggy gap jeans, and you were white you were considered a "wigger". You know, but then I would have my baggy gap jeans and my timberlands, and my striped gap shirt and I would still be able to hang out with preps."

Therefore, Lydia constructs her fluid multicultural identity by the clothes she wears. She can wear clothes that are identified as "black" but also fit in with the white kids because of her multicultural identity. In Lydia's description of clothes, she shows how race, class, and ethnicity intersect. In particular, immigrant or refugee students were not only identified as being an "other" but also being poor. Chandana, a girl from India who came to the U.S. and Clarkston in the 8th, grade explained that it was easier to make friends with boys because they didn't care about how she dressed. She didn't feel like she had anything in common with the girls because she didn't dress like them.

Chandana's experience introduces another layer to cross-racial interaction in the school. There are many barriers that prevent the cross-racial/ethnic interaction between immigrant and Americna students. According to contact theory, status inequality makes meaningful social interaction difficult: the students did not share each other's language, many of the immigrant and refugee students came from lower-income homes, and the International students often took ESL (English as a Second Language) classes at another school. The students who were not raised American or were not distinctly black or white were lumped into a category that the American students referred to as "the others," and though they represented over 30 or 40 nations, they were clumped into one ambiguous group. Their national/ethnic identity wasn't even recognized by many students. Some

American students, when asked about their interaction with International students, recalled that they "smelled" and had "poor hygiene." For the most part, the International students were misunderstood and stereotyped. Two of the students that I spoke to moved to the US while in high school knowing almost no English. Below, I look at their interaction with American students and each other.

Amin a refugee from Ethiopia, who is black, recalls a confrontation he had in the cafeteria when his friend, Ali, also from Ethiopia, refused to be treated poorly by American students:

> "One time we were in the lunch line at the cafeteria, [and] like three [black] Americans, like they were football players, they were big, think they can do whatever, kept pushing in line like 'get out the way, damn Africans.' So we got in to it. I was trying to break it up, but I got hit from behind. They started it, they weren't treating us right. I'd let it go, but he [Ali] would always get in a fight when they treat him bad."

In this situation, the football players saw the space of the cafeteria as their territory. They tried to dominate the space with their size and reputation demonstrating this by pushing through the lunch line. Ali's contesting of this space resulted in conflict. But Ali was not only contesting the space of the football players, he was contesting the American conception of his own identity. Although Amin and Ali were black and from Africa, they were not easily accepted by black-Americans. While immigrant and refugee students were usually pretty quiet around Americans and avoided confrontation, Ali did not act this way, which was also a source of conflict.

Language acts as a barrier to interaction. Chandana (a new immigrant from India) explained that she and several of the students who knew very little English were reluctant to speak to American students because they felt uncomfortable not knowing the language very well. Chandana explained that for International students, acquiring English was the most important thing in terms of having relationships with American students. She was advised by one Indian student who had been in America for several years to watch TV to help her pick up the language faster.

While there was a lack of interaction between the American and International students because of language, the opposite occurred among International students, who developed strong bonds with each other. Because most of the International students spent most of the day together traveling to another school for ESL classes they practiced speaking English to each other. They established friendships and learned about each other's lives. Chandana talks about this below:

> "I talk to a girl you know her family was like hiding and there was always gun fire, and you know there was a guy who like they didn't have any food a lot of times, like he would go days with out food. So you start to learn that from people about what is going on in the rest of the world."

Unfortunately, many of the American students at Clarkson never got to know the International students on this level, let alone learn about what was going on in the rest of the world. This is illustrated by one misinformed American student when she claims that there was a "Bosnian Exchange Program" at Clarkston. The Bosnians were refugees, not exchange students. Another American student, when asked about her relationship with

the International students, went on to explain her participation in the coat drives and food drives for them. Thus the nature of her relationship was more in a patronizing way then any genuine friendship or interaction.

However, there were also American (black and white) students who took the opportunity to engage with International students. In the passage below, Annie (a white American girl) talks about an experience in which she realized her limited perception of a girl from the Middle East in her Sociology class, which was an elective as opposed to a required class. The class is important because the teacher often led the students in discussions on race and ethnicity, which fostered cross-racial interaction among students. According to contract theory, this qualifies as support from authority which aids in cross-racial interaction.

> "I remember, one of the Middle Eastern girls, I believe she was Muslim or Hindu; she had an arranged marriage, and I thought how sad that she's just gonna go off and be a mother, and then I caught myself, and I was like you know that's a lot of what my religion [Mormon] believes -- that family is the center and the mom is like the heart of the home and I want that. So I was like how can you think that of this girl, you're not that far from it. I just thought it was so sad that she wasn't going to college. It was the way I perceived her, and yet I didn't realize our similarities, it's like, I'm a big hypocrite."

Annie's construction of someone else's identity enabled her to reflect on her own identity.

Many of the interactions described in the passages in this section were constructed through space. For example, Lydia's conflict with Kechaa was in the hallway while classes were changing. Amin's fight was in the cafeteria. Annie's recognition of the similarities between her religion and that of another girl's took place in a Sociology class where students were encouraged to discuss identity. These interactions take place in spaces that have meaning and are constructed. In the next section, I emphasize some more of the microgeographies that play an important role in student interaction.

Spaces of possibility

The first place to look at how students relate to each other is by looking at the dynamics of academic placement, or tracking. In their research on gender and work, Pratt and Hanson (1994) recognize that "segregation is often strongly reinforced in the micro-geography of work within the workplace, not only are women and men, and women with different class and racial characteristics, employed in different occupations; they spend their work days in spatial isolation from each other, thereby circumscribing their lived experience" (7). Segregation within the school occurs in much the same way as a result of ability tracking. Ability tracking is the "practice of dividing students into instructional groups on the criterion of assumed similarity in ability or attainment" (Goodlad 1985, ix). Many researchers find tracking to have an overall negative affect on student interaction. Baddock and Slavin (1995) found that "[o]ne of the most consistent impacts of ability grouping is to create classes that have disproportionate numbers of students from certain races or social classes (11). Furthermore, Hallinan and Williams (1989) explain that "a tracking system that is based solely on the distributions of achievement across a grade usually results in a disproportionated number of whites in the

academic track and of blacks in the general or vocational track. When this occurs, opportunities for interracial interaction within track [sic] are seriously limited" (77). Based on this trend, Goldsmith refers to tracking as "racial tracking." Goldsmith (2004) found that "racial tracking" decreases cross-racial friendliness and increases racial conflict (608). Therefore, according to both Macrostructual and Contact theory, tracking reduces cross-racial interaction.

The racialized trend in ability tracking is resulting in broader sociopolitical implications. Fennimore (2005) argues that "new discriminatory stratifications," such as ability tracking, were a conscious effort to avoid the intentions of Brown (1907). According to Rothstein (2005), children from higher SES status tend to do better because of the parental influence of adults whose lifestyle is reflected in US education, whereas, lower income children do not benefit from the same kind of social capital in their homes, leaving them at a disadvantage to compete with the kids from higher SES backgrounds. Fennimore (2005), building off of Manning (1992), explains that gifted programs and ability tracking are a way that "educational policy ultimately designed to perpetuate economic inequality by preserving differences in class and race within the social order" (1925). Therefore, not only does tracking segregate students, but on a more political agenda, it perpetuates inequality.

This was a structure of the school system that played a serious role in segregating students along multiple axis of difference. At this time, students had been taking tests called the IOWA skills test each year since their early elementary school days. Based on these tests, students were placed in classes that taught the same subject, but at different

levels. Furthermore, students in higher grades would often have to repeat courses with a younger bunch of students, but usually this occurred in general classes.

During this period Clarkston had done away with survey (below average) level classes so that students who tested at that level would attend the general level classes. At the same time, there were some students whose academic potential was not represented in the tests and therefore were placed in general classes even though they might have actually been more advanced. The result was “chaos” according to Melena Johnson, a black American teacher who has been at Clarkston since 1976. She explains that while some students were able to grasp the material in the general classes quickly, others were not getting it at all. The more advanced students would complete their assignments and start talking and at the same time, students who were slower or having trouble gave up because they didn’t want to look like they having a hard time.

Disciplinary problems were often an issue in the general classes in part because of what Ms. Johnson described, but also relating to teachers who seemed to lack control over the class. In these classes, students would cheat (often making no attempt to hide it); there was excessive talking, gambling, and sleeping going on in class. Thus, it was a social atmosphere in that students were socializing rather than working. Briana, a black American student who took all general classes, explained that by the time you finally got into doing the lesson the bell would ring and it was off to the next class. Unfortunately this became such a pattern that many of the students who had the misfortune of being in these classes missed out on crucial basic skills. Students who were in general classes had to take remedial classes once in college, or didn't go to college at all.

These classes were majority black, immigrant, and contained few whites. Furthermore, many of these students came from low-income families. The dynamic between students is a response to this space. Because of the elevated socializing atmosphere in the general classes there was more of an opportunity to express ones identity(s). We saw this in Ben's narrative about 'acting bad' to fit in with the cool kids in his class. Just as students created this space, this space then led to the relationships between them as identities were constructed.

Shilling (1991) draws on research showing that "sexual harassment is an every day part of life for many girls in school. Drawing on widely prevalent patriarchal rules, boys feel they have a right to comment on, touch, and even attack girls bodies" (34). This was prevalent in the more social atmosphere of the general classes. Chandana explains that one boy would constantly harass her in class.

> "This guy kept bugging me and he would ask me like do you sleep around and he would always ask if I was a virgin."

At the time, Chandana was in the 8th grade and had just moved to the US.
She didn't know what many of the words he was saying meant, "virgin" for example, and she did not know how to explain her problem to the teacher, so she just had to endure the harassment.

Another female student, Melissa (white American), remembers feeling very uncomfortable being in a general sophomore class that had several senior boys in it. These were popular football players who would often try to get her to meet them outside of school, which she did not want to do.

While the advanced classes were not necessarily majority white, the majority of the white kids at Clarkston were in the advanced classes, therefore, many students considered advanced classes to be “white” classes. This shows how microgeographies are racialized even within diverse contexts. Because most white kids were in advanced classes, other white kids as well as those who “acted white” were assumed to be smart. Thus the tracking of students reinforces the notion that white kids achieve better at school than black students. This adds to unequal status among students which inhibits social interaction according to social contact model (Goldsmith 2004).

In contrast to the general classes, the advanced classes were far more structured, due in large part to the fact that the students in these classes were all on the same academic skill level. Students who had experienced both advanced and general classes described the advanced classes in stark contrast from the general. In the advanced classes, there was no fooling around, it was quiet, everyone was there to learn, and you got work done. There was far less socializing.

Furthermore, the students in the advanced classes took nearly all the same classes together; therefore, they were for the most part, entirely isolated from the rest of the students at Clarkston. They became their own group, often characterized as being in a “little bubble”. Many of these students avoided spaces where they would be outside of their comfort zone. For example, some students avoided the cafeteria entirely by spending their lunch period in classrooms hanging out with their favorite teachers, usually in elective classes like the art room, chorus room, or yearbook room. They also avoided hallways that might lead to confrontations

The hallways were often segregated by race and gender. White and female students adjusted their routes to classes, avoiding certain spaces that were geographically more logical to walk in order to avoid possible confrontations with students that they perceived as threatening. At the same time, the black students that many white kids avoided had established territories that they did not want crossed. These students used power in numbers to keep outsiders from coming into their space. The end result was a regulating of space by those who had the most power; in this case it was the black students who had the most power. The borders around these spaces became evident when they were contested, as seen in Shanda's (a white American girl) situation described below:

> "In that doorway there was a large group of black males and females. And there was one particularly large girl… and I was trying to get through to go to my class. And a lot of times they [black students] wouldn't let you through and they'd be rude and I had people tell me to turn around and go another way, and I never did that… they were like "no you can't get through white girl" or whatever. So, something like that happened, and I was like, 'man I need to get through to my class, my class is right there', and she put her hands back and was like 'hold me back! I'm gonna get her!' and I'm like 'no! I'm goin' to my class'. But nothing happened it was just a threat, and I went and my mom checked me out [of school]."

Here, we see how boundaries are created and verbally regulated. By not allowing the white girl to pass through the black students reinforced the racial boundaries.

Other spaces were avoided as well for reasons other then race. Jess and Gillian (both white American girls who were interviewed together) talk about a stairwell where guys, mostly black, would hang out, that they always avoided.

Jess: "I would never walk down the back staircase to the art room. I would avoid that area at all costs, and I mean our lockers were on that side of the building for god sakes, and I wouldn't walk down the stairwell at all!

Gillian: "It wasn't just black people, it would be guys and you would be groped. That back hallway one time when I was going down the hall way by myself, someone was coming up the stairs, he shoved my face against the wall, it was this really random violent act."

Jess: "I remember being like fondled or groped in the hall way."

Gillian: "And it would happen more to black girls, I think we were a little off limits or we seemed off limits or something.

The hallway and the stairway are spaces that were unregulated, less surveyed led by teachers and staff, allowing for "random violent acts." Many times the stairwells were very crowded and males could be aggressive without getting called on it.

Despite the minimal interaction among students due to ability tracking and avoidance of spaces, the classroom atmosphere did provide a space more conducive to interacting across boundaries (that are much more policed in crowded, open spaces), as we saw in Annie's experience in her Sociology class. Below, Jess talks about this:

> "we were friends in small groups. Definitely, there was times when you said hi and you were friendly but you wouldn't talk to them or

> communicate the way you would if it was a small group of people, then like the mobs in the hall way."

One final space that was significant in terms of interaction across axes of difference was on the soccer field. In some ways this was the most unifying space for students of different race, ethnicities, cultures, and genders. Being that soccer is the number one sport for most of the world, it is no surprise that the international students chose to participate; recall that Clarkston's soccer team had the nickname of "mini-United Nations." In the passage below, Carrie (a white American girl) talks about how soccer gave her the opportunity to establish relationships with people she normally wouldn't talk to at school. At the same time, these relationships were often reserved for the soccer field, and interaction in the more populated areas of the school was less likely.

> "like me and Sharita [a black American girl], cause we played soccer together for so long… that always tied us as friends. I don't think it was so obvious, like everyone [on the soccer team] had good friends [on the soccer team] that didn't really hang out with you at school or you didn't go to their house and spend the night or whatever, but the relationships were still meaningful. I think if you played sports with people, it was easier to be friends with them cause you didn't have to, not that you didn't have to talk to them at school, but you didn't want anyone to make fun of you cause it was high school. But it was easier for you to be friends with them outside of school, like practice and games."

Amin (a black Ethiopian boy) met good friends and developed valuable relationships with both American and International students on the soccer field as well.

Below, Amin explains how one American boy in particular helped him get by at Clarkston.

> "If I had a problem, I would go to him, even if he didn't know what I was saying, he could just feel it."

But the soccer field was not completely absent of racial boundaries. Sharita (a black American girl), feels that soccer really shaped who she was. Soccer was racialized as a predominantly white sport. Her presence as a talented black female contested the racialized space of the soccer field. In the passage below, she talks about this process:

> "You know I think soccer really shaped how I was as a person, 'cause I was constantly having to justify why I was a black girl playing soccer… You know the first time I was ever called a nigger was on the soccer field. I was out in Rockdale County and black people knew you didn't go out there, especially not by yourself, and that was the one game my mother didn't go to. They [the other team] were totally trying to get me off the game, so it was kinda like they were blowing kisses and 'oh what are you looking at you little monkey' and you know you got people in the crowd: 'yeah, yeah, yeah get that nigger kick her ass.' And it got me totally off the game I just totally started going after this one girl and she was like doing all this different stuff to me and I would like tell the coach and he was like 'I'm not going to do anything about it if you keep it up I'm gonna suspend you from this game.' So afterwards we had to shake hands and some of the kids had spit on their hands and then their coach he was at the end of the line, he was like 'you got what you

> fuckin' deserved.' So I ran over to the bench, I totally thought I was immune to the word nigger, and after all that had happened I went and grabbed a rock and had to have my team hurl me to the ground so I wouldn't do nothing… . It was like that was to foreshadow every you know, I went to a soccer camp in California and I had people just kinda like 'why are you out here', 'aren't you just out here to beat up white girls', you know 'black people don't play soccer.' You know dealing with the same thing at every single level."

In this passage, we see how difference illustrates how identity is constructed through space as well as how space is constructed by identity.

Conclusion

In this analysis, I have examined the lived experience of students in order to understand the spatiality of identity construction and how that influences cross-racial interaction. As students navigate through the microgeographies of the school constructing boundaries and difference they isolate themselves as well as exclude others. However, students also have the opportunity to engage in cross-racial relationships. Thus, Clarkston as a space of diversity *was* a space of possibilities where cross-racial interaction happens, be it in the form of friendship or conflict. Structured spaces of the classroom and soccer field lent to more interaction among diverse students, more often resulting in positive relationships. The more open and student populated spaces seemed to inhibit interactions among diverse students. Additionally, the tracking of students had a very negative impact on the overall interaction among students and played a major role in the segregation of students.

Almost unanimously, the students I interviewed appreciated going to a diverse school and still find utility in that experience in their lives today in terms of dealing with people unlike themselves. Most of them, however, would not send their kids to Clarkston the way it was ten years ago, for although the diversity was appreciated, the school itself was not a place that many parents would feel comfortable sending their kids. This tells us that representation of difference alone is not enough to produce the ideal outcomes of diversity.

The narratives in this study reveal that discussions of cross-racial interaction are complicated due to the malleability of race and the contingency of space. Race can be performed, contested, transgressed, and policed. These complexities do not mean that we should not continue to examine race and cross-racial interactions, but it does require us to carefully consider (include) the process of racialization in our discussions.

Quite recently, the controversy over 'No Child Left Behind' (President Bush's answer to equal education), has revived discussions of school integration since students are more successful at majority white schools then majority black or minority schools (Rothstein). If we are to consider new policies on integration, it is imperative that we take the time to evaluate how diversity works. I argue that the structure of school spaces also be carefully critiqued before implementing policies that may actually perpetuate inequality. A greater understanding of the spaces in which students benefit from diversity should be the starting focal point of integration programs.

Because there has been little work that critiques the microgeographies of diversity, this project meant to offer an interpretive analysis. I wanted to get a sense of what is really going on in these spaces of diversity or "possibility". A better

understanding of this can then lead us to examination of the underlying relations of power in discourses of diversity -- how it masks inequalities, and keeps people oppressed. Thus, this project meant to scratch the surface of a very broad issue, to offer support for critical research projects on the hegemonic discourse of diversity in the future. A more nuanced understanding of diversity will lead us to reconsider the kind of policies and programs we implement to promote diversity and equality.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I discuss what I accomplished through this thesis, consider possibilities for further research on diversity in schools, and then relate this research to broader issues of diversity.

Through this thesis I illustrated the need to critique ideological problematic notions of diversity. By looking at a case study of a highly diverse school space, I was able to show that the ideology of diversity is better understood through the lens of lived experience than a simple numerical representation. I argued that the mere counting of bodies tells us very little about the interaction between those bodies. This was certainly the case at Clarkston High School, which counts as a racially diverse space. The real story of diversity, however, occurred in the microgeographies of the school. While the racial demography of the school demonstrated that there was a possibility for cross-racial interaction, it did not tell us anything about how, where, and when that interaction occurred. It is not sufficient to assume that the ideals of diversity occur in all spaces of diversity without looking closely into those spaces. Therefore, I use the lived experiences of students as my empirical data (Van Manen 1990) as a way to understand what it really means to go to a diverse school. According to Burch (1990), "lived experience amounts to something distinctive, a class of significant or memorable events, whose true meaning is something we come to recognize in retrospect" (3).

Furthermore, I argued that research on diversity required a deeper look into the spaces of diversity. I did this by examining how identities become constructed and practiced, for therein lies the source of social interaction. I also argued that the institutional structures of the school influenced cross-racial interaction. In this particular school, it was mostly left up to the students to take the initiative to interact across racial boundaries. Formal and informal structures of the school acted both as a conduit and barrier for cross-racial interaction. Therefore, if it is the intention of institutions to foster the ideals of diversity, they must examine institutional structures that promote or inhibit social interaction.

One of the unanticipated themes that emerged from this research was the prevalence of mixed-race students. I did not anticipate this theme largely because I was unaware that many of my participants were mixed-race. For example, when I was interviewing Lydia, and she was telling me about the people who recognized her as Hispanic, I said, “I always thought of you as white.” In response she said “yeah, because *you’re* white.” The emergence of this theme helped to illuminate the complexities of racialized identities. Mixed-race bodies complicate notions of race. We racialize bodies based on their social practices which can sometimes override skin color. The ways in which mixed-race individuals choose to identify themselves also demonstrates the fluidity of race. It is in the construction of these complicated identities that we see how race affects social interaction.

Moreover, leading into this research, I had an a priori sense that class and gender would be dominant themes that influenced cross-racial interaction. However, my data did not substantiate, in part do to my positionality as a classmate of my participants.

Because I personally knew my participants, I was more reluctant to probe issues of class. I received several reactions from respondents in early interviews that suggested a high level of discomfort surrounding issues of family income and class. Rather than jeopardize discussions about race, I decided not to probe class.

Furthermore, class itself is a highly complex concept that I had not fully contemplated prior to my interviews. Wright (2005) explains that the various theoretical perspectives on class are best understood by understanding the questions they seek to answer. For example, a common question that Bourdieu, Marx, and Weber address refers to "life chances" (Wright 2005, 180). Wright frames this question as follows: "What explains inequalities in life chances and material standards of living?" (180). According to Wright, Bourdieu's answer would include ordinary capital (financial assets), skills, knowledge, and cultural capital. Marx's answer would include only capital (financial assets) and labor power (Wright 2005). Weber's answer would be somewhere in between Marx's and Bourdieu's (Wright 2005). My own answer would probably fall closer to Bourdieu's. However, during the time of the interviews, I had not fully developed my theoretical perspective on class and therefore lacked a framework for questions on class.

In my interviews, the questions that received most resistance were about family employment, housing, and education. Students seemed to have fixed opinions about other people's class, but had a more difficult time identifying their own class. Students often commented on material representations of class such as clothing, hair styles, car ownership, and residence of other students. Therefore, I allowed these kinds of responses on class to determine how class played a role in interaction, rather than analyzing the students' own individual class.

I also had limited engagement with gender in this thesis. There is a myopia surrounding integration that focuses on race. While I was sensitive to this fact, I fell into that same myopia. My participants did as well. I believe that because my participants knew we would be discussing diversity, they came into the interviews with an a priori notion that we would be discussing race. I became more and more compelled by the stories that emphasized race and consequently spent less time discussing gender in my interviews.

I still believe that gender plays a major role in cross-racial interaction within the school, though I was unable to demonstrate this with my data. Future research could take into account cross-racial dating, which was relatively prevalent at Clarkston. It would be interesting to talk to some of those students to see what kind of experiences they had as an interracial couple. Another aspect in which gender and race/ethnicity intersect is the difference in gender norms in the different countries that were represented at Clarkston. Annie's experience with a girl who had an arranged marriage is one example of how gender roles are looked at differently in other cultures. These different gender norms can affect cross-racial interaction as well.

Future research would benefit from devoting more attention to the role that class and gender play in identity formation and social interaction. Ideally, research would look at intersectionality. Grant and Sleeter (1986) explain that race, class, and gender are "inextricably related…failure to understand their interrelatedness ultimately weakens the power of these struggles to effect social change" (196).

Finally, broader political issues highlighted by my research look at how the school structures perpetuate inequality. Sibley (1995) suggests that "to get beyond the

myths which secure capitalist hegemony, to expose oppressive practices, it is necessary to examine the assumptions about inclusion and exclusion which are implicitly in the design of spaces and places" (p. x). Sibley also suggests that human geographers should be particularly concerned with "raising consciousness of the domination of space" as they critique hegemonic culture (p. x). Public schools are institutions designed to accommodate a certain kind of student. We live in a society that forces parents to work under conditions that are not suitable for their children to succeed competitively at school. Many of the students I interviewed (including me) lived with single working mothers, some of whom worked multiple jobs. These students inevitably had a very different experience from the kids who had a parent waiting at home for them when they got home from school. Students who come from families that are struggling financially often fare worse in terms of grades. This is not due to bad parenting, as some might conclude, but has to do with the fact that the school operates under the assumption that every child goes home to a stable family atmosphere, and has limited responsibilities enabling him/her to concentrate on academics and extra curricular activities. This is not the reality. Therefore, we need to question the ideology of diversity as well as the institutions that promote this ideology.

Other avenues of research on diversity might examine how diversity works in the workplace. Are corporations promoting diversity to reach a broader consumer base? What is the lived experience of diversity in the work place? Does it mean attending diversity work shops/training every so often? Are employees segregated by difference (i.e. gender or race)? Do inequalities go away by the mere presence of minorities? For example, what is the experience of being a woman working in a male dominated office?

We could look at the microgeographies of this space to understand the interaction between men and women and how that relates to equal opportunities and desirable working conditions within the workplace. Social interaction in the workplace is important in many jobs as it relates to promotions, pay increases, and more responsibility. Networking is also an aspect of many jobs. How does being a minority influence the ability to successfully network? We could also look at how diversity works when there are fewer differences among people, for example similar class backgrounds. As I mentioned earlier, there are many avenues that lead to fruitful discussions of diversity. We now have even more reason to shift our attention to diversity.

Diversity is a term that has been poached by the mainstream and commodified to keep the capitalist structure moving (Smith 2005). Smith (2005) explains that "[t]he first rule of the market is to make every customer or client feel special, valued, and sufficiently appreciated that they will fork over their money, and the language of diversity and multiculturalism has become an ideal means for this quest" (891). As the U.S. continues to become more diverse, it is vital that we prevent powerful social projects from becoming diluted mechanisms used to sell a product. Diversity and the recognition of difference is an important, and arguably inherent, aspect of social justice (Young 1990, Fraser 1997). As bodies of difference continue to share space not only in the U.S. but globally, it is important that we continue to complicate the notion of diversity as well as spaces of diversity so that we do not blindly allow the perpetuation of social inequality.

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